

Building Communication Skills, Strength, and Confidence

Like many 3-year-olds, Ira Conrad likes to call the shots. In hippotherapy, he likes telling his therapy horse what to do.

Ira comes to Exceptional Equestrians for hippotherapy because he was born with bilateral profound hearing loss, and he has communication delays and gross motor delays.

Being deaf and non-verbal impairs Ira's ability to successfully communicate with others, which can lead to confusion, frustration, and withdrawal.

For Ira's mother, Andrea Houston, what happened when Ira started hippotherapy six months ago was unexpected. She gets emotional when she describes her son during a hippotherapy session.

"He's a different kid when he's riding," she said. "To see him building a relationship, forming



an attachment, giving great effort to work on communication.

"When he rides, he's much calmer, more centered and regulated. Not as impulsive and emotional. It relaxes him. It's a comfort for him," Andrea explained.

"I really like his team. The routine, regulation, interpersonal dynamic. Sam has been great at addressing his goals while keeping it fun and not like work. Sam uses sign and spoken word, multi-layer input," said Andrea, referring to clinician Sam Berger,

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Hippotherapy and Communication

The ability to communicate wants, needs, thoughts, and emotions is essential to all of us. It is our means of connecting with each other. Although oral communication (speech) is the primary method of communication for most of us, it is not the only way we can express ourselves. The diagram below shows the different types of communication.

In the hippotherapy and therapeutic riding programs at Exceptional Equestrians, our riders often use alternative methods of communication. These might include facial expression, gestures, sign language, picture symbols, or communication devices (technology). Behavior can also be viewed as a form of non-verbal communication. Crying, tantrum, aggression, and other behaviors may be the non-verbal child trying to let us know the task is too difficult, or they are tired, or frustrated. It is important to be aware of non-verbal communication and respect what each person is trying to share.

Equine therapies such as

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Olympic Moments

Self-confidence prevailed during Olympics Week in the barn. Pictured at right, Roman Nelson shows off his gold medal while he rides Oakie with volunteers Liz McDonald and Alyssa Gromowski. Pictured far right, Bryce Young passes the Olympic Torch to Justin Green.



Hippotherapy *continued from page 1*

hippotherapy support the acquisition of the pre-requisite skills that support speech and language development. Some examples include:

Physical: The movement of the horse assists in strengthening the core/postural muscles which in turn support improved respiratory function and the ability for sound production.

Cognitive: The 'walk on' cue, which can be a verbal cue, gesture, or combination of both teaches the cause-effect relationship between an action and resulting consequence. The rider taps the horse or says 'walk on,' and the horse moves forward. The repetition of this command throughout each session and the motivation provided by the outcome is strong reinforcement.

Social/Emotional: By paying attention to all forms of

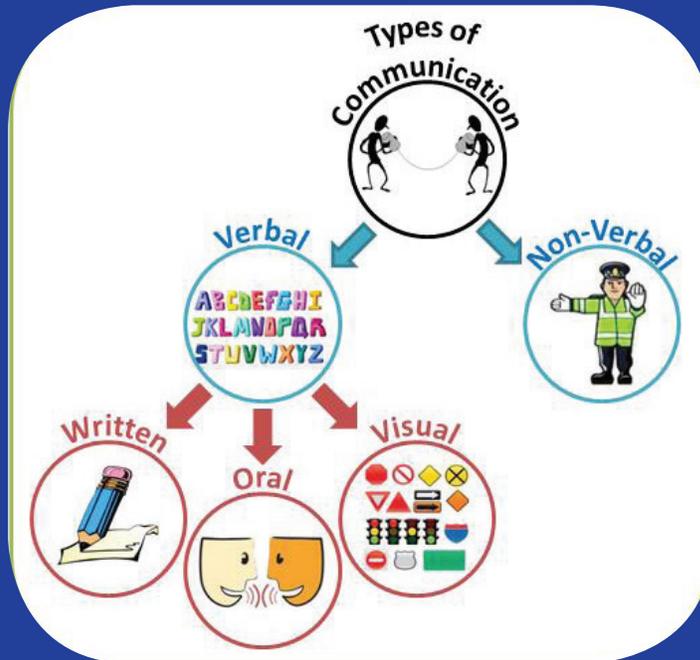
communication, each rider is given an opportunity for self-expression and to develop connections with peers, therapists, volunteers, and perhaps most importantly, the horse.

Horses are great non-verbal communicators. They pin their ears back to let us know they are unhappy, angry, or scared. They lean in when we pet them to let us know they are connected to us.

Horses are also great 'listeners' and readers of non-verbal communication. The body language, arousal level, and emotions of the rider impact the reaction of the horse.

Horses have an innate sense that goes beyond scientific explanation. They seem to understand that our riders need them in a way different than other humans and they respond accordingly. They listen to what each rider is telling them, which is maybe the most important component of communication.

Lisa Kafka, OTR, HPCS



Ira *continued from page 1*

COTA. "Ira learned 'walk on' right away."

'Walk on' is the verbal cue paired with a tap on the horse's neck that tells the horse to start walking. Each hippotherapy session has several stops and starts, each an opportunity to practice the 'walk on' cue. People are empowered to learn they can make a 1,200-pound animal do something.

"It's helping him build expressive language. It effects everything—emotional language, communication, language outputs," said Andrea.

"It gives him pride and confidence in his abilities," she added. "Emotionally he's really benefitted. He understands routine, expectations, which translates at home. He's more trusting in his relationships. He's willing to try when it comes to new people and new experiences.

"Initially, we brought him to Exceptional Equestrians for his motor needs," Andrea recalled. "We wanted him to work on balance skills, locomotion skills, strengthening his muscle tone and ability.

Hippotherapy has definitely improved his balance and coordination," she said.

"Hippotherapy is one of those things that you have to see to fully understand," explained Andrea. "You can read about it and learn all the ways it can help, but you have to actually see it to fully comprehend its powerful impact."



Pictured on page 1, hippotherapy clinician Sam Berger, COTA, challenges Ira to reach for a ring.

Pictured above, Volunteer Connie VonArx smiles as Ira tells Tia to 'walk on.'

Volunteers Honored

Exceptional Equestrians volunteers received well-deserved recognition for their service.



Rod Leadley on stage at the WPS Volunteer Awards with Tom Zalaski and Erin Davison of WFRV, and Eric Sponholtz of the Volunteer Center of Brown County.

WPS Volunteer Awards

Exceptional Equestrians was well represented at the 30th Annual WPS Volunteer Awards at the KI Center in April, with two of our volunteers being among the 12 that were selected.

Rod Leadley was selected as runner up for the Lifetime Achievement Award. Rod has served 700 hours in 15 years at Exceptional Equestrians. The honor includes a cash award of \$500 for Rod's favorite charity.

Andi Krawczyk was honored as the runner up for the Youth Volunteer Award which includes a \$500 scholarship. Andi has served over 200 hours in three years and was named the 2017 Exceptional Equestrians Youth Volunteer of the Year for her outstanding service and initiative.

Seven Exceptional Equestrians volunteers were nominated for the annual awards hosted by the Volunteer Center of Brown County.

Exceptional Equestrians Volunteer Banquet and Service Awards

Exceptional Equestrians celebrated 4,400 hours of service by 205 volunteers in 2017 at its annual Volunteer Banquet and Service Awards in January.

"Volunteers are an instrumental part of the progress, joy, and success of the people we serve," said Nancy Williquette, director of marketing and development. "Our volunteers' commitment to service makes the work we do at Exceptional Equestrians possible."

The following volunteers who reached milestones in their service to Exceptional Equestrians received special recognition and awards:

900 hours
Birgit Dierberg

500 hours
Nicole Curran
Susan Endries

300 hours
Ellen Gourley

150 hours
Gail Brittnacher
Chris Peterson
Andi Krawczyk

100 hours
Jenna Dais
Doris Hobaugh
Olivia Gibbons
Liz McDonald
Kelly Schmieder
Connie Von Arx
Mike Williquette



Jenna Dais, Susan Endries, Andi Krawczyk, Rod Leadley, Nancy Williquette, and Deanne Beaumier at the WPS Volunteer Awards.



Volunteers in Action. Pictured from left, volunteer Ellen Gourley leads Tia with Kristen Albers in the saddle; Volunteers Ellen Wright, Jean Rottier, and Jenna Dais with Micaela Diedrick riding Maverick; and volunteers Cathy Rottier, Mike Williquette, and Susan Endries with Betsy Hassler riding Levi.

Spring Pledge Drive Raises \$7,205

Our 2nd annual Spring Pledge Drive raised \$7,205 for hippotherapy, therapeutic riding, and equine assisted learning programs. Clients, families, volunteers, and staff reached out to the community for support.



Kindergarten classrooms held penny wars, NBC26 did a feature story, and families spread the word to help raise funds to help bridge the gap between program revenue and the actual cost of services.

"We, as parents and clients, are Exceptional Equestrians' strongest advocates when we share our stories of how Exceptional Equestrians has

made a difference in the lives of our families," said organizer Amy Murphy.

The pledge drive reached 72% of its goal to raise \$10,000. To contribute, send a donation to Spring Pledge Drive, Exceptional Equestrians, 1130 Orlando Drive, De Pere, WI 54115 or visit www.exceptionalequestrians.org/give/donate/.

Pictured at left, Board member Amy Murphy with her daughter Dotty. Amy co-chaired the pledge drive with Emily Larson.



Pictured above, pledge drive drawing winners the Nelson family, Roman, Rhea, and Stefanie Nelson, in front of the pledge drive tree.



EXCEPTIONAL EQUESTRIANS

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www.exceptionalequestrians.org

Exceptional Equestrians is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

Our mission is to better the lives of people of all abilities through the healing power of horses.

Immediate Needs

Item	Cost
Round pen	\$1,320
Western work saddle	\$1,000
Therapeutic bareback pad	\$600
Office computer	\$600
Arena games & toys	\$10-\$250
Troxel riding helmet	\$60

Visit www.exceptionalequestrians.org to donate today.

Volunteers Needed

We are in need of people with horsemanship experience. Visit www.exceptionalequestrians.org to learn more.



Christmas in the Barn brought families and friends together to enjoy horseback rides, visit with Santa, and share holiday treats. *Pictured from left, Mia Melotte rides Maverick with Sam Berger; Abigail Lider demonstrates her skills riding Josh with Alyssa Gromowski and Susan Endries; and Brooke Herron is all smiles atop Dakota.*