

# Central Illinois Riding Therapy (CIRT)



## MISSION STATEMENT

To promote the well-being of persons with disabilities through the provisions of horseback riding and other related activities within a safe and enjoyable atmosphere designed by professionals and implemented primarily by volunteers.

## PURPOSE

Central Illinois Riding Therapy (CIRT) is a non-profit organization serving children, youth, adults and veterans with mental, physical, emotional and behavioral disabilities from Tazewell and surrounding counties, in a comprehensive recreational and therapeutic horseback riding program.

Early in 1983, a large group of people from Peoria and Tazewell counties met for the first time to discuss the possibility of starting a handicapped riding program for the area. In October that year, CIRT began its first classes funded by seed money provided by 4-H. CIRT operates under the 4-H not-for-profit 501C3 charter and in accordance with the guidelines established by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA), now known as Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.). CIRT moved to various places throughout the Peoria and Tazewell County area until a permanent location was found in the spring of 1988. This was provided through an agreement with the Fondulac Park District, at our present location in Neumann Park at, 305 Neumann Drive in East Peoria, IL (off Route 150).

We are committed to the principle that persons with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities and rights as their non disabled peers. Our program provides activities that enhance physical and mental skills, aids in mobilization, promotes socialization and communication; and builds independence and self-confidence.

Skills developed lead to integration into typical community riding programs, as well as transfer to other activities of daily living. Enriching the quality of life of our participants while offering a unique experience is our mission.

## BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

Horseback riding is strongly motivating for the person with disabilities. Participants are required to reach their fullest capabilities through a non-traditional environment which promotes therapy and fun. The program is open to any person with a disability whose doctor has determined that horseback riding could provide beneficial therapy. We serve individuals with a variety of physical, emotional, behavioral and mental disabilities including Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Autism, visual and hearing impairments, Wounded Warriors, learning disabilities and many others.

The bond between horse and participant is unmatched. The horse's smooth rhythmical three-dimensional rolling movement which promotes patterns paired with the warmth generated from the horse may help normalize muscle tone, strengthen muscles, promote good posture and facilitate normal movement patterns necessary for the development of gross and fine motor skills.

By using the horse as a therapeutic modality, increased range of motion in the pelvis, spine and hip joints, development of head and trunk control, increased balance and righting responses, improved upper extremity function, relaxation and muscle re-education may occur. Confidence is built as each participant develops skills that demonstrate control over their horse. Responsibility is reinforced as each participant learns to care for a living animal.

Communication increases as participants are challenged to give directions to their horse and independence develops as participants become confident and transfer their skills into other activities of daily living. Participants improve socialization skills by interacting as part of a group with their peers and volunteer assistants. Riding is fun and affords each individual a leisure time pursuit which can be shared with other family members and friends.