



**Triple H Equitherapy Center**  
WHERE HORSE POWER HEALS

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# About Triple H Equitherapy...

## Equitherapy at Triple H

At Triple H, “equitherapy” uses the unique qualities of the horse to meet the unique needs of individuals with physical and mental challenges.

## Therapeutic Services

- therapeutic horseback riding
- therapeutic horsemanship consisting of ground (dismounted) activities
- equine-facilitated learning activities, and
- horse-assisted psychotherapy

Equitherapy, as an adjunct to primary health care, offers distinctive experiences that traditional physical therapy and mental health counseling do not. Through the relationship with their horses, people experience healing on many levels—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

Elizabeth Lawrence, DVM, PhD beautifully describes the healing power of the horse and the special dynamic that makes equitherapy so successful:

“In some remarkable way, whatever quality an individual may lack, whether it is confidence, serenity, courage, or coordination, or whether it is health of mind or body, the horse willingly helps to evoke that quality so that it becomes the person’s own quality. It is this complementarity that so endears the horse to human beings and cements the bond between them.”

Horse-powered therapy improves the lives of children and adults who have a wide array of special needs. Even a severe physical, cognitive, or emotional disability does not limit a person from interacting with horses. In fact, such interactions can prove highly rewarding.

## Clients

- children as young as 3-years of age with an array of special needs
- at-risk youth with behavioral and mental health issues
- adults who have physical and mental disabilities
- seniors with no upper age limit
- wounded war veterans of all eras

## Core Programs

### Horse Power for Children includes the following three programs:

1. *Hooves, Hearts & Heroes* (HHH), in collaboration with area independent school districts, benefits students enrolled in special education classes. These children have cognitive, emotional, and/or physical disabilities. In addition to therapeutic horseback riding, equine-facilitated learning activities complement the academic objectives set up by their special education teachers.
2. *Riding to Independence* (RTI) serves children who struggle with a wide variety of physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges. They work on individual therapeutic goals, and some learn how to ride independently.
3. *From Fear to Responsibility* (FTR) provides horse-assisted psychotherapy for children ages 6 to 17 whose corrosive life experiences have triggered behavioral and mental disorders, often requiring residential placement or judicial intervention. The therapeutic team includes a licensed psychotherapist who helps young people learn to relate to themselves and the world around them in healthy ways.

### Horse Power for Veterans:

This program addresses the growing need for non-traditional mental health services for Texas veterans in San Antonio and surrounding rural areas. This non-traditional psychotherapy program empowers veterans to overcome the debilitating effects of war related mental health issues. Designed for veterans of all eras, most program clients have PTSD, traumatic brain injury, or dementia and have not found adequate support from traditional, clinical treatment methods.

### Horse Power for Seniors:

This program offers an equine-assisted curriculum consisting of ground (dismounted) activities. Matching therapy horses with senior humans improves their health and gives new meaning to their lives. Seniors of any age or health condition can participate.

### Wheels of Freedom:

This program teaches therapeutic cart and carriage driving. Children, youth, and adults who have mental or physical disabilities that prevent them from riding a horse can enjoy the same therapeutic benefits by learning to drive a horse-drawn cart or carriage. Clients enjoy the rewards of interaction and control of a horse while driving from a carriage seat or in their own wheelchair in a carriage modified to accommodate their wheelchair.

## Effectiveness of Equitherapy

Horse-powered programs at Triple H offer distinctive experiences that traditional therapy does not. Clients often respond more quickly to equitherapy than to traditional methods of treatment. Frequently, intractable cases respond to the human-horse relationship when all else has failed. The significant impact of equitherapy results from distinctive characteristics such as these:

- Program activities take place outdoors—the healing benefits of nature nourish spirits while clients enjoy beautiful Hill Country scenery, the sky, and fresh air.
- There is no clinical setting. Triple H therapists (horses) live in the barn. Clients interact with their horses in the barn, in the outdoor arena, and on scenic riding trails. They see pastures and trees and enjoy the unassuming ambiance of the 210-acre ranch.

- Interacting with horses engages the mind, the body, the senses, and the emotions at the same time. These holistic benefits promote healing, health, and wholeness.
- Equitherapy focuses on strengths—what a child or adult can do vs. focusing on and rehabilitating a defective part.
- In an atmosphere of unconditional love, relationships develop between the client, the horse, the volunteers, and staff. This “agape” environment promotes respect, self-esteem, and confidence. As individuals become empowered, their spirits soar.
- In mental health programs, the therapist can give feedback to clients in real time, not like ordinary therapy in which something is discussed in one session, practiced between sessions, and discussed in the next session.
- Equitherapy is fun—it’s therapy but doesn’t feel like therapy. It feels like play. And, as Dr. Stuart Brown, contemporary American psychiatrist, noted: “Play energizes us and enlivens us. It eases our burdens. It renews our natural sense of optimism and opens us up to new possibilities.”

## Volunteers

Volunteers are the life-blood of Triple H. The ratio of trained volunteers to program clients is at least two to one. Often, physically fragile clients need three volunteers to help them ride—a horse handler to lead the horse and two side-walkers to help the rider mount, dismount, and remain safe at all times. During 2016, a dedicated core of 131 volunteers provided 5,000 hours of service.

## Premier Accreditation

Triple H is the only nonprofit, “premier” therapeutic horsemanship center in the San Antonio and adjacent Hill Country area that is fully accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH, Int’l). As such, Triple H is nationally recognized as exceeding industry standards for safety and professionalism.

## History

When Triple H founders, Kent and Kathy Harbaugh, moved to Pipe Creek, Texas in 1994, there were no equine-assisted therapy services for people with disabilities in Bexar County or surrounding rural Hill Country counties. They envisioned a unique therapeutic horsemanship center at which all children and adults with disabilities could thrive. Turning their vision into reality, they established Horses Helping the Handicapped, Inc. The nonprofit organization was incorporated in Texas in 1995, received nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status from the IRS in 1996, and began doing business as the Triple H Equitherapy Center (Triple H).

## A SUCCESS STORY

During 2016, one of the most poignant success stories is that of terminally ill Parker Robertson, a six-year-old Kindergarten student at Curington Elementary in Boerne. In October 2015, Parker was diagnosed with adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD), a rare and deadly neurological disease that destroys myelin and progresses to loss of muscle control, blindness, deafness, dementia, and death within two to five years of diagnosis. This spring, when Parker joined Triple-H’s equine therapy class, *Hooves, Hearts & Heroes*, the disease had robbed him of his sight and hearing.

Parker's family hoped to create as many wonderful memories as possible. Parker's beloved older brother, years earlier, had ridden as Paul Revere in a colonial re-enactment at Boerne Middle School. And doing the same became a lifelong dream of Parker's. Parker's family enlisted the help of Triple H to prepare Parker to ride in the 2016 event while he was still somewhat physically able.

As things developed, the 2016 event was dedicated to Parker and to raising ALD awareness. It was viewed by thousands and covered on all major San Antonio TV stations.

To help prepare Parker, in addition to the usual equine therapy activities in *Hooves,*

*Hearts & Heroes*, Triple H staff worked with Parker and his older brother, Tanner, to prepare him for his starring role in the colonial reenactment of Paul Revere's famous ride. His trusty steed, Van, is Triple H's founding therapy horse and goodwill ambassador.

Though blind and deaf, Parker's joy and engagement in the therapeutic experience was obvious. Everyone could see Parker was benefiting in every moment.

Parker's ride was a huge success thanks to those pictured here: his brother, Tanner, who served as a side walker, Triple H Equine Director Kathy Harbaugh, and Triple H Program Director Laura Berlin.

