

# HORSIN' AROUND



## Horses Help

By Bridget Grobosky Photos Horses Help

For those involved with horses, it is not hard to imagine how individuals with special needs can benefit from working with horses. Founded in 1987, *Horses Help* is a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International accredited facility that serves those with special needs through therapeutic and recreational horseback riding, groundwork, and horsemanship.

*Horses Help* offers adaptive riding and horsemanship programs, hippotherapy (therapy using horses), equine assisted learning, and a horse handling program for military, police, and fire personnel, called Operation Unbridled. The organization serves at least 120 individuals per week, with that number fluctuating depending on the season.

Program Director Saebra Pipoly, got involved with *Horses Help* while volunteering and completing an internship with the organization through Arizona State University. She told **PDM** that the largest section of their program is adaptive riding and horsemanship. "Our angle is riding skills, and then we adapt how we teach and how we implement things depending on what the person needs."

Those needs vary depending on what disability a participant has. "The largest number of disabilities we serve are on the autism spectrum, which is a very wide range," Pipoly said. "Then comes a mixture of sensory processing learning disabilities. Cerebral palsy is the next most common, and then we have a lot of traumatic brain injury and a lot of multiple sclerosis, since many people with health conditions move to Arizona because of the nice weather."



Most ages can ride

other categories of benefits: emotional and cognitive. Even though students may come with just one of these areas in mind, they often see improvement in all three.

"With physical goals, core strength is probably the most common one, since your core is engaged the whole time," Pipoly said. "Other goals are balance and overall sensory processing. Feedback we get tells us that people notice their children are more grounded and relaxed when they're done with their lessons, and able to focus better."

Many students at *Horses Help* benefit from horsemanship, or grooming, tacking up, and working the horse from the ground, not in the saddle, known as groundwork. With riding, Pipoly explained, *Horses Help* teaches a classical seat, a balanced riding style that focuses on proper body mechanics which can be applied to English or Western disciplines, and which allows them to accommodate different special needs.

"We emphasize body mechanics because when we have the foundation of good body mechanics on horseback, if someone who is super tight in their legs needs to sit in more of a chair position outside the ranch, their improved core strength makes a big difference. It's a really good foundation." Pipoly happily emphasized.



Group Games

Recreational riding classes are split into three main formats. Adaptive riding is strictly recreational and works on horseback riding skills. *Horses Help* also offers a show team for individuals who are more independent in their riding and have a desire to compete. The organization hosts one to two shows per year and has traveled to able-bodied shows. Finally, a games-based adaptive riding class pairs up learning riding skills with fun games.

*Horses Help* is able to work with in-need populations in Phoenix, with help from the local community, using its herd of donated or leased horses and a wide range of volunteers.

New volunteers with *Horses Help* must be at least 16 years old. Volunteer positions at *Horses Help* cover a spectrum from horse handling to marketing to the Garden Gnomes, who assist with the *Horses Help* garden.

"The biggest need is for volunteers who can come out and help in our classes, whether that's walking next to our riders as a side walker, or coaching, or if anyone has horse experience prior to coming in here. We really need some strong horse handlers, or horse leaders for classes," Pipoly said.



Volunteers are needed

To learn more about *Horses Help*, to donate, or learn how to become a volunteer, visit [www.horseshelp.org](http://www.horseshelp.org).