

4STEPS MIRROR 2025

Therapy Education Sport and Recreation for Individuals with Special Needs

4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program 5367 60 Foot Rd, Parsonsburg MD

21849410-835-8814 giddyup4steps@aol.com www.4stepstrp.org

4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program is a 501c3 charitable organization

FEBRUARY 2025

MEETING OUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS



The name 4STEPS implies that the 4-steps or rhythmic hoof beats of a horse can produce physical and emotional healing for a variety of people with special needs. For 20+ years special programs have been created at 4STEPS to meet those needs and to address the challenges they present. As awareness has grown about life's stresses, such as illness, accidents, abuse, grief and loss, aging, poverty and military combat and trauma, the therapeutic riding and equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT)

community stepped up in response to the maladies. 4STEPS pioneers programs and expands offerings, such as *Operation Charlie Horse*, which was created to address the needs of active military, Veterans, and first responders in our community. 4STEPS inclusiveness has meant reaching out to minorities, rural communities, families with children with special needs, those in group homes and residential communities—to anyone who may be out of the mainstream.

Volunteers will tell you that working with exceptional participants, who courageously face ongoing physical, emotional, social and/or cognitive challenges, enriches their own lives. *Horse Power* program develops youth to be respectful and comfortable working alongside peers with differences and diverse abilities and teaches to appreciate them as valuable, vital community members. In turn, youth with special needs develop leadership skills and build authentic community connections while developing their horsemanship skills. *It's a win-win!* Our mission includes creating innovative programs to meet the needs in our community. It might mean tweaking an existing program, drawing in a unique group or introducing a new organization to an already existing program.

Sandy Winter, Executive Director

MISS KITTY



Small in stature but wide as a table, this 25+ year old Haflinger is an unforgettable mount who carries many precious riders. As one rider's mother says "Who thought that her son's most important friend would be a horse named 'Kitty'" "Kitty is a constant in our weekly routine. My son talks more and is learning to express his feelings. He has learned to regulate his physical experiences as well, such as communicating when he has to use the restroom! Through horseback riding, he continues to accomplish goals we set for him. Kitty has many

amazing talents including knocking things over and getting into mischief around the farm. She makes my son laugh especially when she's misbehaving and acting SILLY!"

SCIENCE and SPIRIT BEHIND EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPIES

The brain is always assessing its surroundings, making adjustments and compensating. Sometimes through injury or illness pathways are impaired creating a disability. Pathways need to be strengthened and rehabilitated. EAAT is a viable activity that works to do just that.

The movement of the horse at a simple walk gives a participant balance, coordination and self-confidence. The movement and unique walking gait of a horse most closely resembles that of a human. When a person is riding a horse, the rhythm and motion is therapeutic, the body gains strength through its adjustment to the horse's gait. A rider telling his horse to, "Giddyup" or "Whoa!" is considered therapy for an individual with speech challenges. Benefits of riding have psychosocial and emotional value as well. Individuals who work with horses uncover fears, anxiety or mistrust and can begin to address their way to healing.

Horses have the power to change lives. Heartbeats synchronize, spirits soar and lives transform as the gentle rhythm of hoofbeats and the profound connection between human and horse converge in the remarkable world of therapeutic horseback riding. It's a dance of trust, a symphony of healing and a journey of self-discovery that has been captivating hearts and minds for decades. But what exactly is this magical fusion of equine power and human potential?

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF MOVEMENT - Rupert Isaacson

The Horse Boy Recently our instructional staff attended a weekend seminar with Rupert Isaacson, author and developer of the Horse Boy and Movement Methods, his autistic son Rowan and renowned author, autist, mentor and professor Dr. Temple Grandin. Rupert studied and revealed how horse riding helps autistic children and others with neurological impairment, and how he discovered this when his own son Rowan's autism improved by contact with horses. Through his work, it is well understood and demonstrated that the rhythmic movement of the horse stimulates the rider's nervous system, potentially rewiring neural pathways and promoting brain plasticity. The program is aimed at teaching self-regulation, social skills, life skills and academics with an emphasis on autism but which works for any kid. To understand the Movement Method you need to understand how two hormones, oxytocin and cortisol, affect an autistic child's ability to learn.



Cortisol is the stress hormone involved in the flight or fight response. It is partly responsible for allowing us to escape from, or fight a threat, and stay safe. However, it has both a short and long term effect on ability to learn. Short term, cortisol narrows focus so that attention can be directed towards escaping from, or fighting, the perceived danger. Long term, chronic levels of cortisol actively corrode learning connections within our brains empowering CELL DANGER RESPONSE.

In contrast oxytocin is the feel-good or pleasure hormone. It has been shown to counteract the corrosive effect of cortisol in the brain. Activities that promote the production of oxytocin include horse riding, hugging, swinging and laughing. Oxytocin allows us to feel safe and when we feel safe more attention is available to focus on new concepts and learn. It is well-established that children with autism have increased cortisol production, many times because of neurological

sensory processing issues. It is essential to decrease cortisol production and increase oxytocin production before learning can be achieved. The vicious cycle most children on the spectrum experience creates tantrums, sensory chaos, developmental delays. The right movement activates not only increased production of oxytocin, which helps with social skills, it activates reasoning and emotional regulation, long term learning and attention, and creates neuroplasticity, the ability to create new brain cells, effectively increasing IQ.

Practitioners put a child in a certain balance on the horse so as to cause the production of oxytocin and switch off the CELL DANGER RESPONSE that blocks learning. On the other hand, when the child experiences 'bad' sensory triggers, cortisol is produced and meltdowns occur. The Movement Method teaches program practitioners about triggers and stresses in the individual's environment. 4STEPS program horses are managed to be in balance so as to produce the oxytocin needed for this work.

Horse Boy programs teach to go as much as possible out of the arena and into nature because that is where communication with the outside world is to be found. Rule based games, academics, theory of mind and self-advocacy are all taught through Horse Boy and Movement Method. As family-centric, parents and siblings are offered services and empowered as consultants in the process.



WALKIE TALKIES A Gift of Security, Therapy and Fun

4STEPS received a gift of portable walkie talkies from Delmarva Two-Way Radio to address the security needs and safety of our instructors, volunteers and participants while on the trail and in the arena. We did a test to see if the equipment would work on the trails. Two of our youth riders and their support staff were sent out on different trails. It was amazing how fast they learned to use the equipment. They worked! They talked with each other, laughed and sang to each other kindling a friendship over the radios. Not only are the radios practical for security but for kids with challenges, it is a fun way to break the barrier of communication.



MOBIE-MAT Providing Mobility and Independence

Take a walk on the beach in OC or Assateague and you will find wheelchair access mats. So, if you've been to 4STEPS you would find the footing to be the same as what you would experience on the beach. It is difficult for people in wheelchairs to get around. Not anymore! Thanks to the donations from the local American Legions we were able to purchase a Mobi Mat to provide accessibility and more independence for those who have been mobility limited. It is another amazing gift and another example of the charitable spirit that we embrace in our relationships with our local community. Thank you Posts Sinepuxent 166 and Crisfield Post 16.

HORSE POWER

4STEPS *Horse Power* program offers experiential and expressive equine-assisted behavioral services for individuals who have difficulties functioning in traditional educational and social settings. Through our summer camps local school-age children and young adults learn valuable social skills, horsemanship and life lessons. Our Veterans find physical, social and emotional support to alleviate stress, anxiety, mood, sleep and addictive behaviors. According to U.S. Veterans Administration, working with horses reduces isolation and gives many Veterans who suffer from suicidal feelings a sense of hope and a reason to live.

Helping an individual identify and voice his feelings is beneficial to the participant and his equine partner. Immediate results include an improved interest in life, healthier peer relationships, healthier attitudes, confidence, responsibility, and self-esteem. Understanding and validating those feelings without judging, correcting or criticizing helps strengthen the bond between a student and an instructor. It also helps the student understand himself better and possibly begin to also better understand the feelings of others. Horses teach us invaluable life lessons in and out of the saddle. From teaching general responsibilities like feeding, grooming, and tacking, to learning to ride and communicate with body language, horses improve the mental and physical health of participants. Horses are incredible educators, teaching participants as much if not more about themselves.

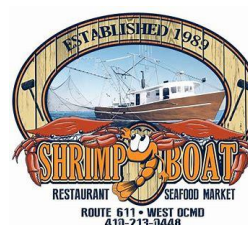


CREATING SUSTAINABILITY

When wondering how we keep our center afloat, it's really simple! Our best marketing is *word-of-mouth* and it doesn't cost a lot. What we do is focus on building relationships and being enthusiastic about our center with everyone we meet, a skill in which our all-volunteer staff, volunteers, instructors, board members, participants and their families excel. 4STEPS relationship with its community offers opportunities for marketing our center. It's all about relationships with our individual donors, civic groups, business community, our students, their friends and families and our volunteers—everyone who in some way touches our center. The benefits of this outreach proves to create a sustainable program. This kind of word-of-mouth marketing has supported our center during good times and bad times. At 4STEPS we celebrate “little victories!” Visit our facebook group to read stories about hope, recovery, and people helping others. These stories reinforce the amazing work our center does! [Friends Who Like 4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program](#)



Underground
Facilities
Unlimited
SBY



BUILDING COMMUNITY - SHOP LOCAL, GIVE LOCAL

Message from the Treasurer, Dick Warren

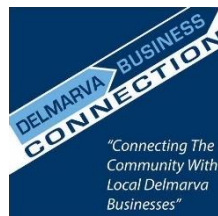
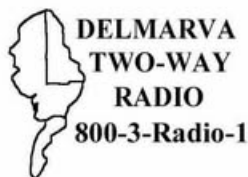


When asked to name my favorite restaurant, cafe, or shop, I almost always cite a unique local business. I embrace the idea of distinctive businesses with local character, but often forget their survival depends on community patronage. We owe it to ourselves to consider the quality of our experience and the benefits we get when we choose a locally owned, community-based business.

Local owners with much of their life savings invested in their businesses have a natural interest in the long-term health of the community. Community-based businesses and civic groups are essential to charitable endeavors, frequently serving on local boards, and supporting a variety of causes. Yes, there are some corporate chains and national charitable organizations that give back to towns

in which they do business, but anyone who raises funds for local non-profits will tell you that local businesses and civic groups are their base of support. Supporting local businesses and local civic groups helps support us too! The overall impacts are clear: 'SHOP LOCAL' and 'GIVE LOCAL' to play a vital role in our community. On the pages of this Newsletter are businesses who have supported 4STEPS in fulfilling its purpose in our community.

4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program is a nonprofit 501c3 charitable organization dedicated to enhancing and enriching the lives of children and adults in our community with special needs through the power of the horse.



Steven Sweigert
Financial Services
OCMD

4STEPS relies on donations and fundraising in order provide **scholarships** to those who would not otherwise be able to participate. We are grateful to be part of a supportive community that believes in our mission to provide therapeutic horseback riding and equine partnership programs for individuals with special needs. And your gift is tax deductible!

Please send your donation to

4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program

5367 Sixty Foot Road, Parsonsburg, MD 21849



**Thank you for
your gift!**



NAME _____ Phone _____

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ email _____

I would like to support 4STEPS. Enclosed is a check for \$ _____.

To pay by paypal or credit card go to www.4stepstrp.org

4STEPS OPERATION CHARLIE HORSE

For many years, 4STEPS struggled to figure out how to serve its Veterans. By diligently, creatively thinking outside-of-the-box, the center came up with a novel idea, which is when its Operation Charlie Horse Veterans Trail Ride Social came about. 4STEPS proposed a Veterans trail ride to the local American Legion Posts as a way to find Veterans, active-duty military and first responders who have lived or experiences traumatic events and to provide comradery for participants and their families. Trail rides take place on Maryland Department of Natural Resources property amid remote forest trails in the fresh air where they can unplug and focus on the tasks at hand.



The events went so well that 4STEPS held its 4th bi-annual trail ride. The events were so popular we increased the number of offerings to provide for its popularity. Operation Charlie Horse is offered on Sundays in April and November and are open to all veterans and their families free of charge. For more information of 2025 events contact American Legion Sinepuxent Post 166 in Ocean City and American Legion Crisfield Post 16.

MISSION POSSIBLE – 4STEPS TO FACILITATING SESSIONS FOR VETERANS, ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY AND FIRST RESPONDERS.

The goal of Operation Charlie Horse is to encourage Veterans to encourage other Veterans who are in-need of healing through therapeutic equine-assisted intervention at 4STEPS. Unless you are part of that group, another can never fully understand what they have lived or experienced, but as credentialed professionals our staff has a responsibility to become familiar with and gain as much knowledge as possible about these specific groups. This includes their cultures, ways of communication, mindset and the value they place on camaraderie and being around others who share in their experiences and perspective. Most importantly it is recognizing how reencountering traumatic events, time after time, continues to affect them in their daily lives.

Hypervigilance or increase alertness Being regularly exposed to traumatic events, continually handling critical incidents and experiencing actual or perceived threat of injury or death can overwhelm coping resources. Partnering with horses allows participants the chance to be in the presence of a being who lives in the moment. Building a relationship with a horse gives a participant the opportunity to experience what it's like to have a quiet mind free of thoughts about the events that occurred in the past or the worry of what's coming in the future. Through their body language, horses provide feedback to let participants know when they have arrived in the place of quiet and stillness, that was once uncomfortable to them. Horses can help them experience the peace that can come with letting down their guard and being vulnerable.





Redefining success “Initial Success or Total Failure” is the unofficial motto of the armed forces defining what’s at stake when any outcome short of complete success on a mission or an emergency call occurs. It leaves no room for in-between. A goal in working with horses is to help participants experience setbacks in a lesson (and hence in life) as inevitable and to view setbacks as positive lessons, that not all situations are critical, that the overall goal is not to have the horse perform the task perfectly and that establishing and maintaining the relationship with the

horse is the key to the reward. The reward is seeing progress in the horse’s ability to try to perform the task. **Overcoming stigmas** “Don’t talk to us like we’re broken” is the stigma that comes with reaching out for support. Because of this, many will not reach out when the need arises. So, if they make it to the barn they have taken the most significant step possible. They are aware they are struggling or they wouldn’t be there. **The power of silence** Paying attention to details is a skill perfected and leaned on because it means safety and survival. Allowing these men and women to interact with their horses in silence, without interjecting at every turn, gives them the opportunity to take advantage of what is already instilled in them: noticing the details, piecing them together and finding solutions. Silent communication can be more powerful than words and can allow for the deepening of their bond with their horse. What is most important is that they begin to transfer everything they have learned in working and bonding with their horse to life outside the arena.



Our AMAZING CIVIC GROUPS

Thank you for the generosity of our **local civic groups** who are champions and who tirelessly serve to better our community and who’s individual and collective generosity has been the mainstay throughout. Without their support we would not be able to do the work we do.

Kiwanis Club of OP
Ladies Ancient Order of
Hibernia Ch 1 Sussex County
Ocean City Elks Lodge 2645
American Legion 237, Hebron
American Legion 16 Crisfield
Knights of Columbus #9053, OC
Crisfield Lions Club

American Legion 166,
Leathernecks
Optimist Club SBY
Ladies Aux OC Eks #2645
American Legion 218,
Sharptown
Pocomoke Elks Lodge #1624
AL Boggs Disharoon
Ocean City Lions Club

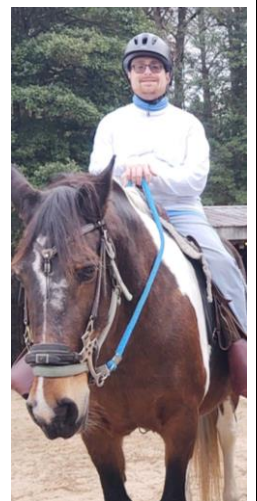
Salisbury Elks Lodge 817
Optimist Club OC/Berlin
Ocean Pines AARP #4507
American Legion 64, Sby
Vietnam Veterans Ch 1091
Powellville Ruritan
Red Knights Intl Firefighters
Willards Lions Club
American Legion Post 166, OC

2025 DONOR RECOGNITION THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!

Thank you for your donation to 4STEPS during our campaign to raise scholarship funds for children and adults with special needs in our community. Because of your generous support the people you sponsor benefit in many ways.

Each participant's needs are different and the benefits of therapeutic horseback riding and equine-assisted learning activities are improved balance, coordination, and increased range of motion, reduced anxiety and development of patience and self-discipline. Children with learning disabilities develop better attention spans, listening skills and concentration while learning horsemanship skills in a positive therapeutic environment. Our participants learn to follow directions and take the responsibility of care for their horses. Just as important, they get the simple joy of brushing, grooming, socializing with volunteers and experiencing unconditional love from their horses.

Your donation is used to maintain our ongoing commitment to offering the highest level of personalized care and quality in all we do and to offer scholarships to those special individuals whose families would otherwise not be able to afford to pay for these services. Your help makes this good work possible.





dedicated fundraiser thanks christmas fund helped the best
genuine because of you awesome work helping
supporting the community food bank inspiring wonderful work
balance heart and soul coaches work greatest people
improve time teachers students help merci beaucoup
place success unity **thank you** world
great example senior homes saving lives a million thanks
contribute **volunteers**
extracurricular activities special
thankful greatly appreciated better

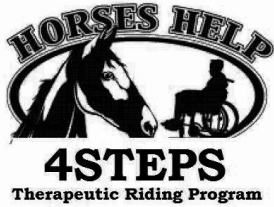


4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program

5367 Sixty Foot Road, Parsonsburg MD 21849

Enhancing Lives through Equine Activities

4STEPS is a 501c3 non-profit organization



THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

There is nothing more heartwarming than watching your child make a friend. The smiles, the giggles, the hugs, and the play put a smile on any face. More than having a companion, making friends can help children have an increased sense of belonging, boost happiness, reduce stress and improve self-confidence. There is power in friendship.



One of the first fears that some parents of children with special needs have is that their child will never make a friend. The insurmountable world of “different” seems overwhelming. No child needs to be without friends. At 4STEPS, we seek to help all kids make friendships and to help friendships grow. While there is no way to force a friendship, horses improve the possibility that children can form bonds with their riding partners.



www.4stepstrp.org