



4STEPS MIRROR 2024

4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program

5367 Sixty Foot Rd, Parsonsburg MD 21849

410-835-8814 www.4stepstrp.org

4STEPS Therapeutic Riding Program is a 501c3 charitable organization

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SAFETY FIRST edition

“It’ll be all right for a second...but what if?”

Article by Sandy Winter, Founder, Executive Director, Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor (CTRI)

When it comes to safety it’s best to listen to your gut. If you feel like something could go wrong, take a moment to reduce your risk. Avoid the preventable. Our tried and true therapy horses spoil us. Our bomb-proof, solid citizen horses may inadvertently teach us that it’s okay to skip some safety steps. Being around our established herd of well-trained horses for a long time, it’s never a good idea to forget what can happen. You know what your training teaches you to do and not to do - - don’t walk under the lead rope of a tied horse, reaching under the horse while facing the wrong way is a bad idea. Allowing the reins to touch the ground could result in a catastrophe. You know what you can usually get away with but have you ever thought “it’ll be alright for a second, but ‘what if’?”



What if a stray dog runs through the arena? What if a rider loses his balance? What if a tree or a branch falls while on the trail?

When you’ve been around horses long enough your gut knows best. Most of us first learn how to handle horses with a trusty instructor or trainer. That’s great! But good old experience has taught me to expect the unexpected. Always stick to the safety protocols and listen to your intuition. The ‘what ifs’ probably won’t happen, better to be safe than sorry! 4STEPS strictly adheres to *PATH International Safety Standards* and has developed and followed protocol to demonstrate a commitment to quality assurance of administrative, program and facilities standards. Facilities standards are upheld to minimize hazards. Our facilities are groomed daily to identify issues such as manure removal, fence repair and trail maintenance. Program instructors and volunteers are trained to preserve a high level of safety and instruction. Our horses are assessed for health and wellness on an ongoing basis. They are trained, desensitized and exercised for program suitability. Safety is a responsibility that every person on our team assumes. 4STEPS is proud to serve our community with a well-developed SAFETY FIRST culture striving to perform tasks safer and be aware of the ‘what ifs’.

Understanding the Horse's Perspective



What Is perspective? Simply defined as 'a point of view'.



Because horses are prey animals they perceive their environment as a threat, instinct reaction of 'fright and flight'. Domesticated horses will be alert and notice the smallest changes in their environment. They find safety and comfort in the herd, and in addition to their own vigilance, rely on others in the herd to be alert and point out danger. On the other hand, therapeutic riding centers' instructors and volunteers rely on horses being steady predictable and reliable for participants. A sudden spook or startle can be a reaction to perceived danger, can be unsafe and cause a fear reaction in the participant or worse, a fall.

How do we prepare horses for changes in their environment that are sometimes unpredictable? How does the horse leader communicate that she will watch for danger and that the horse is safe in her care?

Much of the information horses gather from their environment come through their senses. Their vision is designed to give a broad field of view to detect predators and routes of escape. They see movement readily and recognize shapes instead of identifying objects as humans do. Common items that would be identified as threatening, such as a plastic bag blowing in the wind, can cause a horse to react with fear or nervousness because the horse is reacting to the movement instead of the object. The horse's perspective is that the movement it sees or the rustling noise it hears can indicate danger and the horse reacts accordingly with a spook or startle. A calm confident horse leader who understands the horse's perspective can help the horse interpret its environment so the horse views unexpected things in a calm, non-threatening way. Allowing the horse to use his sense of hearing, smell and touch can add to the information that the horse uses to interpret the situation. Looking at the horse's environment from the horse's perspective, both in the arena and on the trail, can help to create an equine partnership based on trust. Creating a mutually beneficial environment comes closer to creating a true partnership with the center's horses and a safer experience for participants.



Excerpt from PATH Intl Strides Fall '23, The PATH to partnership, The Horse's Perspective by Dr. Sherry Butler CHA, Certified Horsemanship Association; PATH Intl, Professional Association of Therapeutic Riding Intl

SAFETY from a VOLUNTEER'S POINT OF VIEW

Written by Linda Marcus,
4STEPS Volunteer

As a volunteer at 4STEPS I teach our riders SAFETY FIRST. I show riders how to safely approach a tied horse and make the horse feel comfortable about our presence. When helping the rider groom his horse I keep the rider safe by showing him how to make a 'big wide safety circle' around the back of the horse and proceed to the other side to finish grooming. Grooming is done in a consistent and methodical way so that both the horse and rider benefit from the experience and both rider and horse knows what to expect.

To ensure our riders' safety, a rider is never left unsupervised. We stay with the riders throughout their time at the farm. From introducing them to their horses to leading their horse back in the paddock after the ride our riders are never left without supervision.

One of the most important areas to ensure safety is mounting and dismounting. The rider waits while the instructor performs a safety check. The horse is then led to the mounting block (or ramp depending on the type of mount). The horse leader moves to the front of the horse to keep him in place during the mount. The designated offside volunteer acts as a wall to guide the horse into place. Holding the off-stirrup to counterbalance the rider's weight, the instructor helps the rider confidently step into the stirrup. At the dismount, the leader holds the horse and the instructor helps the rider dismount to the ground.

When working with horses and riders with a special need there is always a risk of an incident occurring. If a challenge arises that causes concern, the team discusses the issues with the instructor after the lesson, resulting in



communication with the team and opportunities to improve. Insuring everyone's safety empowers the team through trust, education, appreciation and motivation (TEAM). 4STEPS TEAM is remarkable and they are dedicated to their service and perform with love and care for this amazing organization. I am blessed to be a part of the TEAM at 4STEPS and love seeing the smiling faces of our riders who experience healing and growth in many ways.



Jude is 7 years old, has autism, sensory processing delays and low muscle tone. His equine partner is Kitty. After a day at school, when Jude arrives for his weekly lesson, he is often tired and his energy is low. Kitty's high energy helps him adjust physically to the task to stay upright, sit tall in the saddle and manage Kitty's stride and movement with strength, balance and awareness. Developing Jude's core muscles and trunk control are among the program goals that are developed for Jude. Using a bareback surcingle without stirrups to depend on, Jude has to use his abdominal muscles to stay balanced. Of course our

trusty sidewalker keeps him safe and encourages good posture to help him accomplish his lesson objectives. Over time Jude has developed stamina to spend more time in the saddle. It is easier for Jude to do tasks when he is physically able to.

Safety, Fun and Therapy in the arena and on the trail

Jude was very quiet when we first met but it was quickly apparent that he liked Kitty's movement at a trot. The trot is a 2-beat gait with a moment of suspension in between beats. Kitty's jiggity, jiggity movement, her short steps and quick action makes Jude giggle. Quickly picking up the cue "1, 2, 3, trot!", he spontaneously asks Kitty to trot. The movement Jude feels gives him a big jolt of oxytocin, which is a 'feel good hormone' that elicits joy and pleasure, opening the door for learning and healing. As Jude rides along the trail with his handler and sidewalker he is engaged. He has developed physically and has the stamina to participate in his hourly lesson. It's amazing to see Jude's big smile and his improvement in strength and balance.



Another goal developed for Jude is to become more verbal. A horse's walking gait moves the human body in a similar pattern to the human pelvis which facilitates increased trunk control, stability and breath support. Giving commands to a horse and having the horse respond enhances language development and teaches valuable non-verbal communication through body language. Playing rule based games such as red light/green light, tag, zig-zag and placing and gathering items in buckets, to name a few, encourages Jude to use his verbal cues to identify objects, match colors and add numbers. Jude's favorite thing to do on the trail is hum and sing songs. Practicing 'whoa', giddyup' and steering helps him practice his fine motor skills and develop eye-hand coordination. Every week after Jude's lesson he offers treats to Kitty, hugs his staff, and waves goodbye as he walks off tall and proud!

Article written by Maribeth Kulyncz, 4STEPS Instructor for Riders with Disabilities (IRD)



Training to be a Therapy Horse

Horses are the very core of what we do every day and the heart of our riders.

School horses play a vital role in our mission and make riding accessible to many potential riders who wouldn't otherwise get to experience the horse-human connection. Likely a conservative estimate, in the life of a therapy horse he will care for several thousand special needs riders. A good therapy horse is consistent, attentive, forgiving and able to navigate emotions of a timid rider. *Where do these amazing horses come from and will it be the right fit?* Each horse is vetted for suitability.



1) can it be led on a lead rope with ease and compliance? 2) can the horse lower its head to demonstrate submission? 3) is it friendly, does it like people? 4) is it healthy?

When 4STEPS was founded 20 +years ago its foundation horses were retired Standardbred Harness Race horses such as the ones racing at Ocean Downs. 4STEPS decided that these horses were a good fit because they are available. They are big, strong, forward moving, have a good work ethic and love carrots, apples and hugs. It was thought that these retired race horses knew a lot and could provide the experience of being trained and handled by professionals, no matter what discipline.

When we get a new horse we pair it with another one of our seasoned therapy horses to let the horse pair-bond. The herd mentality makes training stress-free because the new horse will simply follow its partner. Training these horses for saddle work is simple. Although the equipment is different, girthing a saddle feels the same as girthing a harness. Although each



horse is different, when mounted, the horse usually waits for direction. Training really begins on the trail. The trail is a scary experience for a new horse. Used to running on a track, the footing on the trail is much different. The uneven ground needs getting used to. Stepping over sticks and a puddle or two deflects the horse's attention from the rider on its back. With a confident handler and rider, eventually the horse relaxes and becomes engaged in the ride. The first ride and subsequent rides end with treats of carrots and apples. What's not to love about 4STEPS?!?

MAX (AKA Maxwell da Savage, BR437) is our newest herd member. He is 7 years old, he is easily trainable and loves human attention. He loves cuddles, treats and is easy to look at!!! It took some time for him to be accepted by the herd but he offered submission to those in charge and became best buddies with MOCHA!!! After 6 months of training MAX has proved himself ready to join the program. Our participants, big and small, will be excited to ride him in our upcoming Spring Session.



Staff Development Instructor Certification

Written by Judy Dzimiera, 4STEPS Instructor for Riders with Disabilities

Do you really want to trust just anyone to put your child on a 1,000-pound animal with a mind of its own? 'What if' they really don't know what they are doing and there is an accident?

Just like fitness trainers, emergency medical technicians, bus drivers and auto mechanics require special training and a certificate or license to be in their field, so should therapeutic riding instructors. For safety reasons alone, not just anyone should be able to call themselves a riding instructor and open up for business. Learning how to ride involves more than just climbing aboard and learning how to steer.

This past September, after 20+ years of volunteering at 4STEPS, I took the plunge and attended a week long intensive *Instructor for Riders with Disabilities* national certification clinic in Rhode Island. Sandy joined Maribeth and me to fulfill her continuing education requirements. We were tested and evaluated on six of the most important aspects needed for a qualified instructor: safety, horsemanship knowledge and riding ability, disabilities education and specialized teaching techniques, behavior and emotional control, group control, responsibility and professionalism. As a professional providing riding instruction and/or unmounted work of therapeutic value, I gained competency and preparedness to safeguard our participants through safe and knowledgeable delivery of equine assisted services. Preserving the highest standard of ethical principles are vital to my responsibilities and obligations. These principles include professional competency, integrity, honesty, confidentiality, objectivity, sound judgement, public safety and professional compliance. My passions include horses and education. Being a certified therapeutic riding instructor allows me to combine my passions and share them with our 4STEPS community.

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Thank you to everyone who participated in our annual Fundraisers. Because of your help we've met our goals and are able to offer scholarships in 2024.

2024 DONOR RECOGNITION - THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!

Thanks to the generous people who believe in our mission. *Without you we could not do what we do.* Each gift is special to us no matter how much it is. Your gift stays here on the Eastern Shore helping to support our disabled community. The services you support help individuals transfer the good feelings they get at 4STEPS to good feelings all day long. This means so much to a person with a disability.

Individuals

Richard Warren	Mary & Larry Jock	Uncle Johns Soap	Elks OC Ladies Aux
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SPONSOR A PARTICIPANT \$250 provides a 6-week session for one special child. \$1500 provides for a whole year. Whatever you are able to afford is greatly appreciated. Every dollar counts and stays in our community working to enhance the lives of others.

Financial Challenges: Meeting Sustainability Needs

Dick Warren, Treasurer, Board of Directors, Program Volunteer



“Thank you, one and all, for your generous and ongoing support”.

Investing in the future of 4STEPS is a part of strategic planning towards the sustainability of our program. Professional development is an important component of maintaining standards for the work we do. This year Sandy, Judy and Maribeth went off to ‘horse college’. They received national certification as therapeutic riding instructors. This is a big deal for ensuring the future of equine therapeutic services for our disabilities community. It is in the best interests of the 4STEPS program and the population we serve that we have Judy and Maribeth to ‘take the reins and run with it.’ Having more instructors allows us to serve more people and perform our duties aligned with our SAFETY FIRST culture.

“So what does it take to support professional development at 4STEPS?”

...budgeting...and money to balance the budget. Balancing the budget is accomplished by monitoring expenditures (needs and wants) with realistic income potential. In matters of personal and equine safety it is important to look ahead and plan for the future, recognize foreseeable risks and develop strategies to avoid or minimize those risks.

4STEPS has been operating for over 20 years and it is because of frugal fiscal and financial planning that we have been able to reach this sustainable landmark. In large measure, sustainability depends on meeting the current costs of investing in the future. In short, it will take a partnership with donors who share our vision and appreciate the value of the services we provide for our special needs community.

Congratulations to Sandy, as mentor, and to Judy and Maribeth as newly certified therapeutic riding instructors. Thank you for your determination and hard work.



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

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

Name _____ Phone _____

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Faces of 4STEPS

BECAUSE OF A  HORSE



To celebrate Veterans Day a few of 4STEPS 'Operation Charlie Horse' Veterans assembled for a recreational and therapeutic trail ride in honor of those who have served. 4STEPS offers Veterans, active military and their families horseback trail riding adventures including instruction for those abled and disabled. Horseback riding provides physical, emotional, cognitive, and social benefits. Learning how to be with a 1000 lb horse, a Veteran can feel comforted by its trust. 4STEPS offers a relaxing environment for Veterans to bond with each other and their equine partners.



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Enhancing Lives Through Equine Activities

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