

## Everyone Can Ride – Equine Assisted Therapy

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In Slovenia I did a practical work with children with disabilities. Children were from The Residential Treatment Institution and they were attending equine assisted therapy one day per week. Some of those children were mildly autistic, some had problems with aggression, they had no empathy and some had depression. The therapy was under the supervision of occupational therapist, who was also equine assisted therapist, and there was always present teacher from the Institution and a kinesiology student.

Every therapy we usually started with different games without the horse (role plays, obstacle course games in the horse arena...) and then we went to the stable, where they had to prepare the horses. Then we went to the arena and demonstrated them some groundwork with the horse, where it was important that they were alert on the interaction with the horse and they needed to be very gentle, because horses are truly sensitive animals. After that, we taught them some

new riding skills and for the final part of the therapy we went out for a ride. We were at all time watching and leading the horses, but during the ride we gave children some exercises, for example they had to copy us – the movement we showed them on the ground, they had to repeat it on the horse. At the end of each session they took care of the horses and then we had a short discussion about the past therapy.

When I finished my practical work, I was pleasantly surprised how big of an impact horses have on those children. Horses gave them the feeling of inclusion in the society, because there were other people in the stable during therapies, they felt calm and show a lot of compassion towards animals and towards their schoolmates as well.

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