

SSTRA saddles up for relocation plan

Long-standing group launches fundraising campaign

The following is the first in a series of articles about the Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association and its quest for a new home on Salt Spring Island.

SUBMITTED BY SSTRA

Liz Anderson, an active and tireless volunteer in our community, has been a strong supporter of the inclusion and development of individuals with physical, intellectual or emotional challenges.

As the parent of a daughter (Suzy) with an intellectual disability and the co-founder and board president of the Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association, Liz is acutely aware of the incredible benefits the program provides to the riders, their families, the volunteers and the community.

Just one example of Liz's ongoing commitment to the viability of the program was her willingness to provide us with a temporary home on her private property for the last 14 years. Never intended to be a long-term solution, it is time for SSTRA to thank Liz and her family for their incredible generosity and move on to a new home.

We are looking for a home that enhances the convenience, comfort and safety of our riders and allows for the expansion of our program and supports community equine activities.

SSTRA is launching their Relocation Fundraising Campaign on Nov. 28, which coincides with "Giving Tuesday." We need your support to raise \$500,000 to secure a new home and to cover the infrastructure costs which will include a covered riding arena for all-weather riding for the program and community to use.

Please help out and donate online at www.sstra.ca or call Erika Ponsford at 250-653-9925 for further information on the needs.

SSTRA has been providing unique equine therapy to both



PHOTO COURTESY SSTRA

Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding program client and volunteers out for a ride. The well-established community program is fundraising so it can relocate on the island.

children and adults with special needs in the community for over 16 years. This special equine-assisted activity helps to improve muscle tone, balance, posture coordination and motor development as well as psychological, cognitive, behavioural and communication skills and well-being. SSTRA is dedicated to supporting our riders in achieving their greatest potential.

There is no greater calling than helping others! Please contribute to this important community program.

SSTRA gives riders a chance to excel

Independence also a therapeutic riding benefit

The following is the second in a series of articles about the Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association and its quest for a new home on Salt Spring Island.

The Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association has promoted the well-being and education of children and adults with physical, intellectual or emotional challenges through the development of equine skills on Salt Spring Island for the last 16 years.

Gail Muise, a board member and parent of one of the riders, was recently asked what benefits she and her daughter have experienced with the program. Her daughter Leah joined the SSTRA 2012 summer program after successfully participating in the Southlands TRA program in Vancouver.

Gail says that the program has helped Leah build self confidence, reduce her anxiety and increase deep relaxation and it has given her an opportunity to excel and be independent. Her love of nature and animals has been deeply nurtured and her experience with SSTRA has enhanced Leah's ability to compete with herself, make mistakes and learn from them, and to grow stronger.

When asked what she finds most ben-



PHOTO COURTESY SSTRA

Leah rides her favourite horse Blondie.

eficial about the program, Leah says, "that it has helped her body by improving her balance and core strength and has allowed her to spend time with her favourite horse, Blondie, and indulge her passion for riding.

Gail also believes the program has given Leah a sense of belonging to something worthwhile, something to fundraise for. She gave a speech to over 200 fellow students at her school

to help fundraise for SSTRA's annual Ride-Walk-a-thon. This was something that she had never done before but the increased self confidence which she gained through riding with SSTRA enabled her to inspire 31 sponsors to give!

Gail says that she is grateful to the instructors and volunteers who have made it possible for her daughter's wonderful experience by showing great leadership, knowledge, compassion and patience with her over the last five years.

The SSTRA program benefits individuals with cognitive, physical, emotional, social or a combination of these challenges. Persons with these types of issues are often restricted in their movements and interaction. With equestrian therapy, they are given the opportunity for independence and mobility.

SSTRA relies heavily on private funding. To continue providing this much-needed program to individuals of SSI we are launching our relocation fundraising campaign and hope that increased awareness of the benefits of the SSTRA program will inspire you to help out.

Please donate at www.sstra.ca or call Erika Ponsford at 250-653-9925 for more details. We also welcome new volunteers.

Riders taught with care and compassion

SSTRA instructors share perspectives on program's impact

SUBMITTED BY SSTRA

THIRD IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES

Rain or shine, the weather has no dampening effect on the smiles of the Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association riders or the compassion and enthusiasm of their amazing instructors.

SSTRA employs a team of trained instructors who are certified through a two-year course that covers all aspects of the therapy, as well as horse and stable management. Lynn Thorburn has been with the association since inception. Instructors Jacqueline Sutton and John Herbert started as volunteers in 2006 and became instructors in 2008.

We asked the SSTRA instructors to share their perspective on the program and the value it brings to the community.

"The experience has benefitted so many children in this community," said Lynn Thorburn. "These children, who have challenges with fine motor skills, balance and social interactions, get a boost in confidence. We see improvements in all three functions from their time with the horse, both in the ring and in the stable.

"Teaching so many different children and adults over the years has been the most rewarding aspect of the program for me," she added. "Watching a new rider come and meet a horse for the first time, maybe overcome a fear of such a big animal, then fall in love with that same horse is a magical moment. The riders learn so much it is amazing.

They learn from their interactions with us instructors and the volunteers, they learn about how to care for another being, as well as learning riding skills."

Due to the one-on-one aspect of therapeutic riding, the riders get the full attention of at least two people for an hour, which helps accelerate their learning. This level of attention is not possible at school due to classroom size and may not even be available at home very often, depending on the number of siblings they have.

SSTRA provides development on physical, mental and emotional levels. Riders gain knowledge in horse grooming, care, tacking up and unpacking, as well as riding skills. As most of our students fall somewhere on the autism spectrum, this multi-level approach is invaluable as their muscles get stronger, and the riders improve their balance, reduce spasms and increase relaxation of body and mind. Attention spans increase and focus improves over time and the riders learn to manage their emotions with respect to other people and the horse.

Parents have reported that their children are calm for several days after riding and this is invaluable to families and parents in their day-to-day of managing their families.

"It is very important for community to support SSTRA because there is literally no other way that riders can benefit on so many levels to improve their quality of life. Having a warm living being to passively and actively stimulate physical and mental capacities is not possible any other way," said



PHOTO COURTESY SSTRA

Instructor Lynn Thorburn, right, leads a riding session for seven-year-old Vienna Brinks, along with volunteer Roberta Shortreed.

Sutton. "The program helps people on emotional, physical and psychological levels. Being around and having hands on the horses brings a real awareness and a necessity to 'be here now.'"

"I've had an autistic rider in a heightened stage of agitation almost instantly transform into a state of calmness when he came into the presence of the horse. Another rider was terrified to sit on a bench or go anywhere near the school playground, and now he will climb and jump off anything. Lots of people come to us with varying mobility issues and the riding helps with their balance, flex-

ibility and muscle development. The benefits are endless. It's very rewarding work," instructor Herbert said.

In the 16 years since the program began, hundreds of individuals have participated from kindergarten age to seniors. Currently SSTRA is looking for a new home and is asking the community of Salt Spring to help out financially so we can continue to offer this important service to those in need and their families.

People wanting more information or to support SSTRA can visit www.sstra.ca or call Erika Ponsford at 250-653-9925.

Relocation drive officially launched

Therapeutic riding group points to Giving Tuesday

SUBMITTED BY SSTR

FOURTH IN A SERIES

For the last three weeks we have shared information about what we do at SSTR, how we impact individuals and their families, and the value we provide to the community of Salt Spring.

Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association has worked incredibly hard for the last 16 years to improve the lives of individuals who are physically, intellectually or emotionally challenged. During that time, hundreds of individuals from kindergarten age to seniors have benefitted from our program. We believe it is important to continue this absolutely life-changing work and ideally grow the program so we can help even more individuals in the community that need us.

We are looking for a new home. With that, we are striving to enhance the con-



PHOTO COURTESY SSTR

Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association volunteers Leanne LaFrance, left, and Van Wylie with rider Cutlass Johnson on horse Hailey.

venience, comfort and safety of our riders, expand our program and support community equine activities. But there is so much work to be done and so many expenses to cover and we need your help to get things off the ground. By making a special gift today you will not only help set us up for sustained success but also give us the opportunity to expand and

continue to offer this much-needed program.

Over 80 per cent of our funding comes from people like you — private individuals, rather than governments or large institutions. Through your generosity and the support of our volunteers we can continue to provide this vital service to the community.

Nov. 28 is Giving Tuesday

and the official launch of our Relocation Fundraising Campaign. Your donation is essential to help us move to a new home and continue to improve lives on Salt Spring Island.

Any amount you donate will make a difference. Please donate at www.sstr.ca or call Erika Ponsford at 250-653-9925. Thank you for your support.