

RideAbility History and Background:

Program history and philosophy: RideAbility began in 1997, founded by Ellen Newman, Mary Lubahn and Lynne McCutcheon. Mary had given birth to a daughter with a disability and was afraid she would never get to take her daughter horse back camping or share the enjoyment of horses with her daughter. Mary, her neighbor (Ellen) and her daughter's pediatric physical therapist (Lynne) decided to research therapeutic riding.

The first year was financed by a grant from the Minnesota 4-H Foundation and the volunteers were members of the Roscoe Rockets Minnesota 4H Club. Their Community Pride Project won a State Fair trip!!!

RideAbility was recognized for providing therapeutic recreation for children with disabilities and also for:

- (1) emphasizing mental health rewards of interacting with peers (with and without special needs)
- (2) including parents as active program participants and
- (3) providing a support network for the parents with common life difficulties.

The program grew from three riders on a warm night in June 1997 to more than eight riders with disabilities by the end of the summer. Ellen, Mary and Lynne set-up and ran the program for 5 years and finished incorporating it as non-profit, setting up a board of directors, gaining United Way funding and completing processes and forms, etc. as suggested by NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association). Jim and Jeanie Michelizzi volunteered to host RideAbility at their farm. In 2001, Jeanie became the volunteer executive director and program director. Today Mary is the RideAbility secretary, Lynne continues to serve as RideAbility's lead physical therapist and Ellen remains a volunteer and advocate of the program.

We are very family centered, inspired by the original idea of providing horse back riding for children with disabilities **and** their siblings. This implementation of inclusion is quite unique for a therapeutic riding center. RideAbility received an award for inclusion in 1999, presented by Arc SE MN.

We also provide events each year for the whole family, including:

- Annual meeting themed for family fun
- Barn Dance fundraiser (w/riding time for children and young at heart)
- Student RideAThon (w/extended horseback riding for the students)
- Student Horse Show (where students and their family and friends ride the horses)
- One Day Fun Day extended classes that can be scheduled for community groups

We encourage families and volunteers to help with the RideAbility float or horses in local parades during the summer months.

After more than 10 years of RideAbility, Mary Lubahn's daughter has learned to ride independently, owns her own horse, and (YES!) has gone horse back camping with her mother!!!

We view our students as our main clients, and our volunteers as secondary clients who also need an enjoyable and therapeutic environment! Let's have fun with our kids!