

Impact Maker

2013 \$100,000 Grant Recipient

Equine-Assisted Therapies of South Florida

By Sandi Schwartz

Riding horses is more than just for cowboys and racing at the track. A plethora of research confirms that horses can be effective for therapeutic purposes, referred to as equine-assisted therapy. Caring for a horse by feeding and brushing it can be quite soothing and builds confidence and patience in both children and adults. Learning to ride a horse also has tremendous benefits, such as figuring out how to calm oneself down, building focus and mindfulness, and working collaboratively with the animal. The physical contact with the horse and the rhythmic movement while riding can also be relaxing.

One of the first grants awarded by Impact 100 Palm Beach County was to support Equine-Assisted Therapies of South Florida (EATSF) for their project in 2013-2014 to provide equine therapy scholarships to single parent special needs children residing in Palm Beach County. This demographic was a priority because increased medical costs, medications, therapies, and after school care cause stress and anxiety for economically challenged families with special needs children. Plus, families with special needs children have almost twice the divorce rate. Equine therapy has demonstrated the ability to not only improve the life of the special needs child, but also to reduce the stress and pressures of the entire family.

Economically challenged families with special needs face many hurdles. "Families with special needs children have almost twice the divorce rate. Equine therapy has demonstrated the ability to not only improve the life of the special needs child, but also to reduce stress and pressures of the entire family."

Founded in 1982 by the name Horses and the Handicapped of South Palm Beach County, EATSF is located in Tradewinds Park and Stables in Coconut Creek, yet over half of the individuals they serve live in Palm Beach County. The organization provides therapeutic riding and equine activities to children and adults with special needs so that they can benefit physically, mentally, and emotionally. This is accomplished through four types of programs: Therapeutic Riding (TR) to ride gently and rhythmically; Hippotherapy (HIPPO) that utilizes equine movement facilitated by a physical, occupational, or speech therapist typically used for those with physical challenges; Unmounted Horsemanship (UH), a learning-based program focused on horsemanship and horse care; and Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) in which a licensed mental health professional works with the participant and horse to explore feelings and behaviors. The disabilities of their students vary, with the majority being autistic and others having cerebral palsy; down syndrome; developmental delays; multiple sclerosis; and brain, speech, or stroke disabilities.



"[T]he support of the women at Impact 100 helped elevate our mission and how we are seen in the community, expressed Molly gratefully." Impact 100's grant helped Equine-Assisted Therapies of South Florida obtain funding from other sources after the grant ended.

Participating in equine-assisted programs positively impacts individuals of all ages and ability levels. All programs at EATSF work toward achieving specific physical and developmental goals. Individuals with cognitive, emotional, and physical special needs can experience numerous benefits from being involved in a mounted or unmounted program at EATSF. These benefits include improving balance, coordination, fine and gross motor skills, confidence, muscle strength, processing ability, and social interaction, while decreasing anxiety and depression.

Because of its popularity and effectiveness, EATSF programs are not that easy to get into. They typically serve about 100 participants at a time that need to have a written diagnosis to participate. There is often a waiting list to start a 10-week long session. Once in the program, participants can stay as long as they want. Some have been with EATSF for 30 years.

Molly Murphy, Executive Director, explained how helpful the Impact 100 grant was for the program. "At the time, the only form of assistance was Medicaid. This grant really allowed us to not only support families we were currently serving but also bring in new participants off the waiting list and to expand our services to more people who could benefit from them."

As with many other organizations, the Impact 100 grant helped them secure funding from additional sources after the grant ended. "The grant really opened the door to a group of people who didn't know about us and didn't realize the impact of our services. Just getting in the same room with organizations doing similar work and the support of the women at Impact 100 helped elevate our mission and how we are seen in the community," expressed Molly gratefully.

Sandi Schwartz is a professional writer and valued Impact 100 PBC member. We appreciate the work she does to highlight the transformative work of our \$100,000 Grant Recipients.

**Equine-Assisted Therapies of South
Florida is another example of the
Impact our grants make in southern
Palm Beach County!**