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According to the 2000 Census, 7.9% of Texans between the ages of 5 to 20 years old were living with some sort of disability. This percentage was matched in Comal County, higher in Bexar (8.9%) and Bandera Counties (8.3%), and lower in Kendall County (5.9%) (Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer, 2006). A wide variety of local and national programs exist to provide therapeutic physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development for children with disabilities. Different types of programs include animal assisted therapy, artistic programs, athletic programs, and camps.

### **Animal Assisted Programs**

The York Retreat, an English mental health facility founded by Quakers during the 1800's, was the first known facility to use animals in its therapeutic programs. However, the phrase "pet therapy" was not coined until 1964, when psychologist Boris Levinson noted that his dog helped him make progress with children during therapy sessions. Early pet therapy programs focused on enhancing the social and emotional quality of patients' lives. However, research has also shown that pet therapy improves the physical condition of patients, such as lowered blood pressure, posture improvement, and greater balance (Heimlich, 2001). Wide varieties of animals are used in pet therapy programs for the disabled such as dogs, cats, monkeys and horses. Horse therapy remains one of the most commonly utilized and researched types of programs.

### *Equine Therapy*

Two types of programs using horses appear to be most beneficial for children with disabilities. The first, therapeutic horseback riding, teaches recreational riding skills. The second, hippotherapy, is a specific type of physical therapy prescribed by doctors to treat disabilities. Hippotherapy, a Greek term meaning "treatment with the help of the horse," relies on the movement of the horse to influence the person; it attempts to decrease spasticity, increase range of motion, strength, and endurance, and improve balance, mobility, and head/trunk control (Buswell & Leriou, 2007; The Saddle Light Center, n.d.). Like therapeutic horseback riding, hippotherapy also facilitates improved self-esteem and emotional self-awareness by developing a relationship between the disabled child and the horse.

Many summer camps offer horseback riding as part of their curriculum for disabled children, but three programs in the San Antonio region focus specifically on equine therapy. Established in 1999, the Horse-Connection in Boerne serves Kendall County with individualized therapeutic riding programs for children who exhibit emotional, behavioral, physical, and developmental disabilities (The Horse-Connection, 2008). The Triple H Equitherapy Center, located in Bandera County, serves as the facility for the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, Horses Helping the Handicapped, Inc. This organization commenced operations in 1996 and has been recognized as a NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association) Premier Therapeutic Riding Center since 1998. Its *Riding to Independence* and

*Hooves, Hearts, and Heroes* programs provide therapeutic horseback riding experiences for children with disabilities (Horses Helping the Handicapped, n.d.). In Bexar and Comal Counties, the Saddle Light Center, started in 1991, offers therapeutic horseback riding and hippotherapy for children and teenagers with neurological, orthopedic, learning, emotional, and other disabilities. The founder of this organization is a licensed physical therapist, therapeutic riding instructor, and classically trained hippotherapist. The Saddle Light Center is also a member of NARHA and exclusively serves disabled people through year-round programs (The Saddle Light Center, 2008).

### **Artistic Programs**

The fields of dance, art, and music also offer professionally-developed therapy programs that can be beneficial to children with disabilities.

#### *Dance Programs*

According to the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), dance therapy is "the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process that furthers the emotional, cognitive, social and physical integration of the individual" (Health Professions Network, 2005). Begun in 1966 and based on research by dancer Marian Chace and St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C., the ADTA had more than 1,200 members in the year 2000.

One of the premier dance programs for children with physical disabilities is Music & Motion, begun in 2004 by the Maryland Youth Ballet. A unique feature of this program is the overhead track system installed in early 2007. Children dance while suspended in a vest sling, which is attached to a rail system hanging from the ceiling, allowing them freedom of movement and complete independence. Rebecca Leonard, a physical therapist and one of the founders of this program, implemented this system because "recent research in physical therapy indicates that partial weight bearing therapy is among the most promising in developing large motor skills" (Maryland Youth Ballet, n.d.).

In the San Antonio area, the In-Flight Dance program is a mixed ability dance company that includes children and adults in wheelchairs. In

addition to providing high quality dance instruction, the dancers perform and speak throughout Texas and in other states (Inflight Dance Company, 2007). In Bexar County, children with disabilities can also receive dance instruction through the Kinetic Kids program conducted at the Flip City Gym.

#### *Art and Music Programs*

Like dance therapy, art therapy programs focus on the *process* of creating art as a tool for developmental, emotional, and cognitive growth. For example, art created by disabled children can serve as a visual record of the development of muscle control needed to color within lines. "For children with disabilities, art can be especially valuable in helping them communicate thoughts and feelings that might otherwise stay locked inside or end up expressed in inappropriate ways" (McGrath, 2005). Music therapy programs involve listening to and/or participating in music and utilizing the unique qualities of rhythm to help disabled children improve respiration and express emotion. "Research supports connections between speech and singing, rhythm and motor behavior, memory for song and memory for academic material, and overall ability of preferred music to enhance mood, attention, and behavior" (American Music Therapy Association, 2006).

One of the most successful programs that provides both music and art therapy to children with disabilities is Heartsong, which operates as a 501(c)(3) organization in New York. Children participate in 30-45 minute sessions on Saturdays during the school year, where they play instruments, move to music, and create art. Heartsong has assisted over 1,000 children since it was founded in 1992 (Heartsong, 2009). In San Antonio, the Kinetic Kids program offers music classes using instruments, a Kindermusik program which focuses on movement to music, and Art for All sessions, which include painting, photography, beading, and t-shirt creation (Kinetic Kids, n.d.).

### **Athletic Programs**

The first international competition for athletes with physical disabilities, the International

Silent Games, took place in 1924. By the mid-1900's, adapted sports were played not only by athletes, but became common as a rehabilitative tool for war veterans. The National Wheelchair Athletic Association created a division for people ages 6-18 years old in the early 1980's, and the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 further established the education system's role in helping improve the psychological and physiological lives of children with disabilities (Malanga, 2008).

San Antonio offers many opportunities for adapted sports activities for children with disabilities through hospitals, city programs, and non-profit agencies. As part of the San Antonio Hospital system, Warm Springs Sports has provided beginning to competitive level sports programs for people with disabilities ages 5 and up since 1989. It offers All Can Ski, Abilitees Challenge, Wheelchair basketball, football, softball, pool parties, fishing trips, and a fitness wellness program (Warm Springs Sports, n.d.). The San Antonio City Parks and Recreation Department provides an adapted sports program similar to the one at Warm Springs. Its therapeutic recreation programs include track and field, sailing, air guns, power soccer, adaptive cycling, wheelchair tennis, fencing, rugby, and basketball. In 2007, sled hockey and adaptive golf were added to the program (San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, n.d.). Kinetic Kids also offers many sports programs for children with disabilities, including gymnastics, t-ball, cheerleading, basketball, tennis, swimming, yoga, and flag football (Kinetic Kids, n.d.).

### **Camps and Recreation Programs**

Children with disabilities can also participate in camp experiences. Common camping programs for the disabled include (Discover Camp, 2003):

- Specialty camps (specifically for children with disorders such as autism or Down's syndrome)
- Inclusive camps (serve both non-disabled and disabled children)

- Day Camp (programs that only occur during the day)
- Residential Camp (overnight programs - often last one or two weeks and may offer respite programs for families and caregivers)

A small-scale study on a specialty camp for youths with disabilities showed that campers "experienced self-reliance, independence, and a new understanding of their physical potential" (Goodwin, D.L. & Staples, K., 2005). Another study reported modest improvements in self-esteem and parents described improvements in areas of cooperation, responsibility, and self-control (Michalski, Mishna, Worthington, & Cummings, 2003).

In addition to programs offered through large non-profit organizations such as Easter Seals and the Special Olympics, there are two camps in the San Antonio region that serve children with disabilities. The Children's Association for Maximum Potential, or C.A.M.P., offers week long summer camp sessions to children ages 5-21 with disabilities. The camp also includes non-disabled siblings in the activities and offers parents a respite program. This program, created in 1979, includes archery, arts and crafts, canoeing, horseback riding, nature activities, outdoor cooking, sports and recreation, and swimming programs. Each week caters to children with a different type of disability (Children's Association for Maximum Potential, n.d.).

The Texas Lion's camp, based in Kerrville, serves Texas children ages 7-16 with disabilities, diabetes, and cancer. Campers attend one of nine week-long summer sessions or a three-day day camp. Since its inception in 1953, over 50,000 children have been served and more than 1,500 attend each summer. This camp includes arts and crafts, nature studies, field sports, horseback riding, swimming, and overnight camping. A unique feature of this program is that it does not charge the campers to attend the program (Texas Lion's Camp, 2008).

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