Outdoor Health Initiative

The Outdoor Health Program provides funds to organizations and agencies to connect individuals to spaces within their communities through outdoor recreation and education programs. By connecting individuals to public outdoor spaces and engaging citizens in outdoor recreation, the Trust seeks to build ownership of local watersheds, increase stewardship and expand the base of citizen support necessary to advance the restoration of our natural resources.

HORSEPLAY Adaptive Environmental Education Camp for Children with Disabilities

HORSEPLAY offers adaptive environmental camp experiences for special needs children and their families. Using this experiential/expressive approach we educate clients in the values of forests as communities of fragile ecosystems needing protection.

The overall project was to create a summer activity, in the nature of a day camp, for individuals with physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities. The therapeutic horseback riding component of the program focused on physical exercise outdoors, using the horse for rhythm, motion and motivation to maximize use of the rider's aids. The objectives were to relax tight muscles, increase range of motion, improve stability and balance, and to enhance emotional connectivity with the participant and his/her environment on the back of a horse.

The activities other than riding centered on the horse and the partnership of horse and human. Those activities, which range from learning to lead and groom a horse to unmounted games, develop heightened self-confidence, ability of self-expression and self-esteem. Participating in games and activities with other clients develops both individual pride and social interaction. Additional benefits of the camp experience included creativity and manual dexterity being fostered through riding challenges and through arts and crafts activities.

Activities were adapted to accommodate the campers. Participants learned about elements of a watershed, ways to protect critical areas, soil types, erosion, buffers, energy conservation, and food chains. Experiential activities included 'rocking' the trail to reduce erosion, relocating native plants for stream buffers, collecting and composting organic material, planting and cultivating a native garden, and using maps to determine direction and landmarks, to name a few. Many activities were done from the back of a horse. Observation and photography of wildlife, placing homemade habitat structures for native bees and tree frogs, scavenger hunting, sampling and collecting insects and butterflies enhanced the camp experience.

20 students participated

24 volunteers

184 volunteer hours

40 scholarships awarded

CBTRUST
Chesapeake Bay Trust

A Study Shows The Benefits of Therapeutic Horsemanship Programs

CBT Grant Awarded:	$18,000
Total:	**$18,000**

A study from Washington State University concludes that kids who work with horses have a significant reduction in stress, as measured by markers in their saliva. The study was published in April 2015 in the American Psychological Association's *Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin*. According to Patricia Pendry, co-author of the study and a developmental psychologist at WSU, *"We were coming at this from a prevention perspective. We are especially interested in optimizing health stress hormone production in young adolescents, because we know from other research that healthy stress hormone patterns may protect against the development of physical and mental health problems."*

The study determined that kids who work with horses have a significant reduction in stress and represents research to support reports by therapeutic horsemanship professionals, parents and children of the positive impact of human-equine interaction. The study involved a 12-week equine-facilitated program for children in grades 5 through 8. The program provided weekly sessions in which kids learned about behavior, care, grooming, handling, and riding horses.

The researchers collected saliva samples from the kids before and after the 12-week program. The samples were evaluated for levels and patterns of stress hormones by measuring cortisol and the results showed that children who had participated in the program had significantly lower stress hormone levels throughout the day and in the afternoon than children who were on a waiting list for the program. Pardy believes the results of the WSU study provide scientific evidence to support claims of therapeutic horsemanship professionals, parents and children who report the positive effects of these programs. Pardy hopes the study will encourage the development of alternative after-school programs for kids.

Project Partners:

HORSES HELP
4STEPS
Therapeutic Riding Program

MARYLAND
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore, Inc.