



## **2020 PROGRAM EVALUATION**

2020 was a year unlike any other, so it's hard to even know where to start this year's program evaluation. I seriously thought about simply writing, "we survived" as the entire evaluation! But, after thinking about it a bit, I felt like that wouldn't be accurate or fair because we accomplished so much more than just survival. I believe it's important to document how we adapted, all that we learned, and how we've adapted to continue providing excellent programs in the future. This will be a different evaluation than in the past, but it may be the most significant of them all because of the pandemic's impact, as well the use of new terminology issued by our accrediting agency, the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH).

### **PANDEMIC TIMELINE**

2019 was a very difficult year for our staff personally, with almost every single employee facing a major life challenge or significant life event. These ranged from marriage, high risk pregnancy with complications, miscarriage, surgeries, serious car wrecks, death of immediate family members, and the resignation of two employees who moved out of state. We were all stretched thin to cover for each other, but this allowed for excellent cross training. We were under enormous stress, but it drew us closer together. I was so proud of our team and knew everyone was very tired from the stress of 2019. So, we intentionally planned a light winter term (January – March 2020) to give us some much needed rest, the ability to dig into our strategic plan, and time to restructure our staffing.

We hired three new employees in early March and planned for 2020 to be our busiest and best year ever. After all, we reasoned, we'd done so well despite all that happened in 2019, wouldn't 2020 be a piece of cake? We were so naïve!

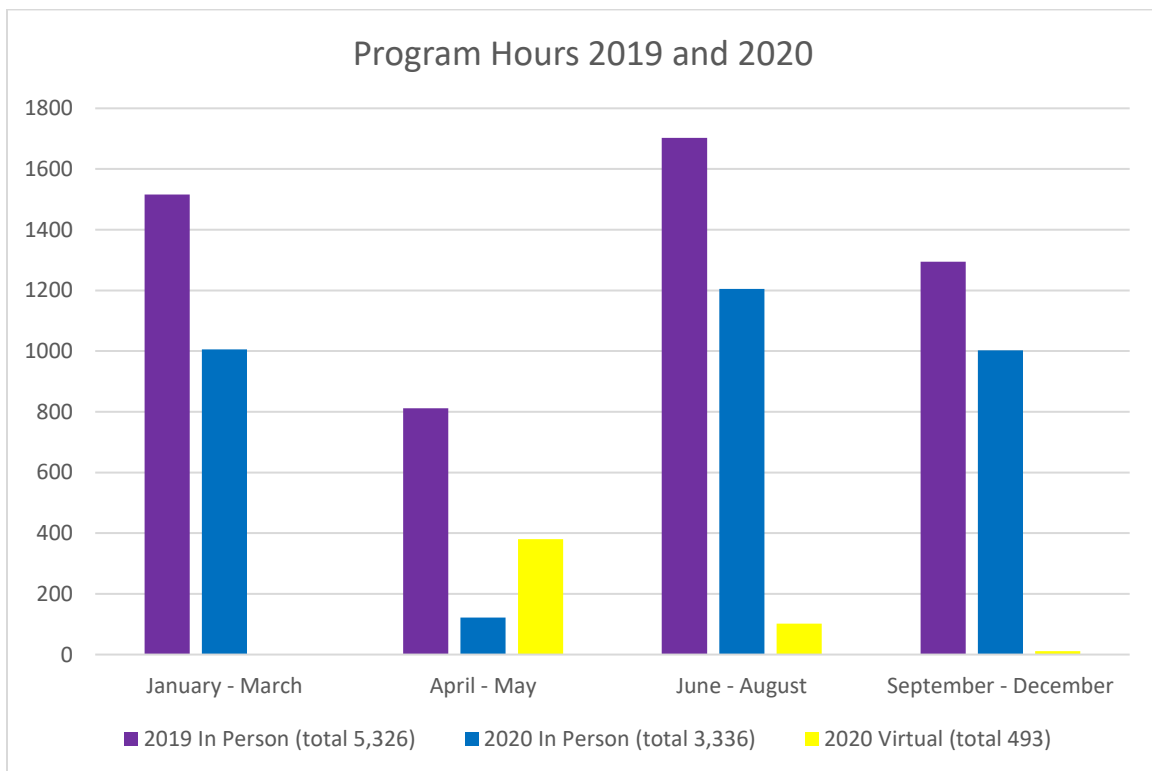
In mid-March, we closed our programs due to coronavirus, but expected to be reopened in early April. When we realized an April reopening wasn't going to happen, we got to work! We first created a plan for caring for the horses and property and then began working to virtually connect with our students. We knew it would be important to provide some "stability" (get it?) for them in such uncertain times. We created online classes, horses held video chats with students and became penpals, and we sent barn themed craft kits to our students. We held weekly online training programs about disabilities for our volunteers. And, like every organization in the nation, we did all this while creating contingency plans for contingency

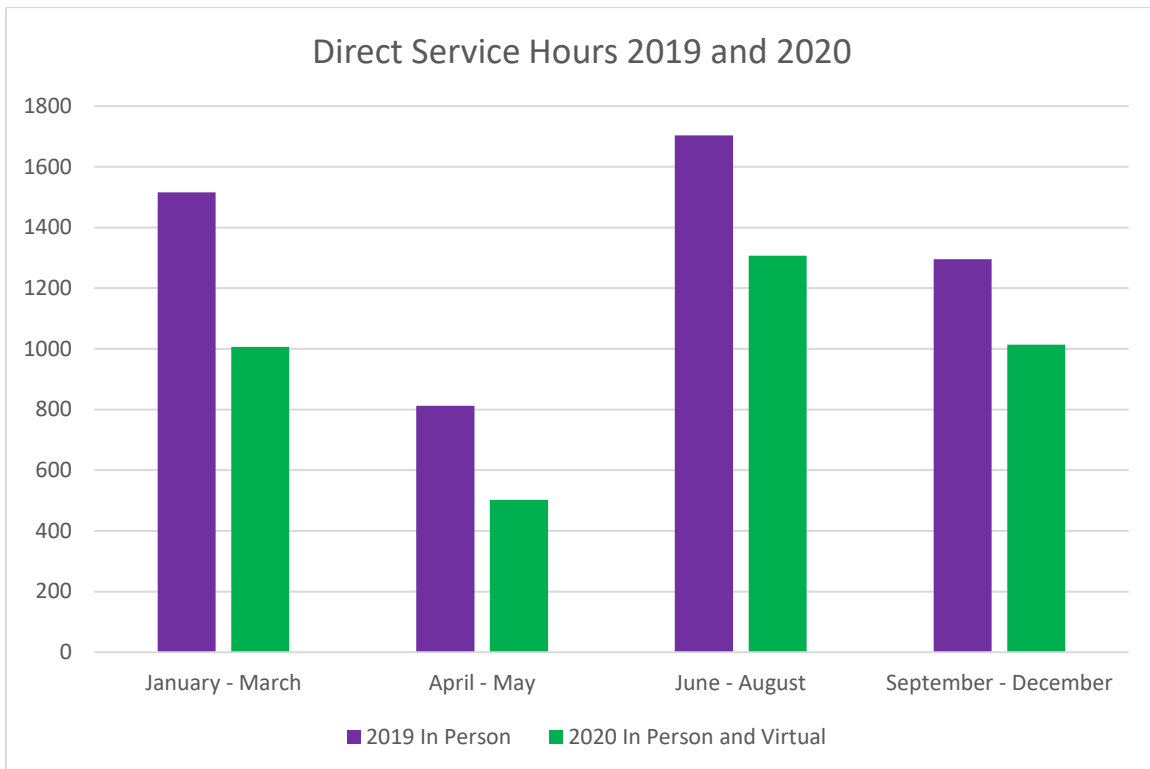
plans. We had to revise all of our procedures to include distancing and additional cleaning. Unfortunately, we had our first ever round of layoffs and made the difficult decision to limit the use of volunteers in order to reduce exposure to coronavirus.

By June, we reopened to our most advanced riders because they required less close contact than riders needing sidewalkers. We offered private time at the barn for families, which was especially important for families who do not have yards for outdoor play. Everything took twice as long to do, and it was incredibly difficult to wear a mask during the Alabama summer. But, we did it!

We were able to add more students back in September by using parents as sidewalkers. Students needing the most support were offered unmounted classes. Things still didn't feel normal and I'm not sure they ever will again. At least, though, things felt routine and the unpredictability was now predictable. Believe it or not, we were thankful that 2019 had been a year requiring so much cross training among our staff because we had certainly needed it in 2020. As the year ended, we reflected on how 2019 helped us to prepare for the challenges of 2020 and counted our blessings.

Our direct service program hours for 2020 may be fewer than they were in 2019, but I believe every hour had more impact than ever because our students needed faith, hope, and love at the barn in ways we had never imagined.





### **TERMINOLOGY CHANGES**

The Red Barn is accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH). PATH, along with several other organizations, issued some terminology guidelines in 2020 so that terminology would be consistent in the industry. The term “therapeutic riding” had sometimes been confused with “therapy,” causing some families to believe their riding lessons were mental health or physical therapy on horseback.

The new terminology uses the umbrella term equine-assisted services and divides them into the three broad categories of horsemanship, learning, and therapy, with different activities in each.

# Equine Assisted Services (EAS)

In December of 2020 PATH International created unifying language for equine-related activities in order to minimize confusion regarding services. Equine Assisted Services are split into the three categories explained below: Horsemanship, Therapy, and Learning.



## Horsemanship

Adaptive equestrian sports  
Adaptive riding or therapeutic riding  
Driving  
Interactive vaulting



## Therapy

Counseling  
Occupational Therapy  
Physical Therapy  
Psychotherapy  
Speech-language Pathology



## Learning

Equine-assisted learning in education  
Equine-assisted learning in organizations  
Equine-assisted learning in personal development

In order to be aligned with PATH's new terminology, we reclassified our programs into these broad categories. More specific information can be found in the article *Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A Consensus Document* by Wendy Wood, Kathy Alm, Joann Benjamin, Lynn Thomas, Debbie Anderson, Lissa Pohl, and Michele Kane. The program descriptions below are taken from this document.

The Red Barn currently offers:

#### Horsemanship

- Adaptive equestrian sports: Preparing students to compete in horse shows, such as Special Olympics and The Exceptional Cup.
- Therapeutic (or adaptive) horseback riding: Making horseback riding lessons, as well as the accompanying unmounted horsemanship skills accessible to individuals with diverse needs.

#### Learning

- Equine-assisted learning in education: Focusing on academic skills, character development, and the promotion of relevant life skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Equine-assisted learning in organizations: Assisting organizations and other workgroups to build effective teams and leaders that enhance work dynamics and performance.
- Equine-assisted learning in personal development: Assisting individuals and groups to discover new ways to face life challenges and opportunities by developing skills in effective problem-solving, decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and communication.

#### Therapy:

- Occupational Therapy: Incorporating the horse's movement and the barn environment into the individualized care plans of clients.
- Counseling: Some of our Learning programs are offered to organizations in conjunction with mental health professionals working at those organizations.
- Speech: Some of our Learning programs included a therapy component as they were led by a speech therapist, but the activity itself was not speech therapy.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION PHILOSOPHY

In 2015 we adopted the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework for our program evaluations. This is based on the work of Mark Friedman at the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute. The RBA framework encourages the measurement of how much was accomplished, how well it was performed, and what difference was made in the lives of those served. The RBA framework uses the example of a high school to explain each section of the framework.

**How much did we do?** This is a question of quantity and is most easily answered. For example, a school might say that they taught 700 students in a given year.

**How well was it performed?** This question moves the focus from quantity to quality. Is there a distinct quality difference in education between a class size of 35 students compared to a class

size of 20 students; a class with adequate resources compared to a class with exceptional resources?

**What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?** These are the most difficult of questions to answer because of the long-term implications that must be measured. How can you determine if children in small classes with exceptional resources are better off than children in larger classes with adequate resources? Would you measure by graduation rates? College acceptance? Standardized test scores?

We want to continue using the RBA framework, but are using the 2020 program evaluation as a way to “reset” our measurements for each section.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION – EQUINE ASSISTED SERVICES: HORSEMANSHIP**

Our Equine Assisted Services: Horsemanship programs include:

- Adaptive equestrian sports: Preparing students to compete in horse shows, such as Special Olympics and The Exceptional Cup.
- Therapeutic (or adaptive) horseback riding: Making horseback riding lessons, as well as the accompanying unmounted horsemanship skills accessible to individuals with diverse needs.

### **How much did we do?**

Of all the questions, this is the easiest to answer because it simply involves keeping a record of activities. Other than changing the way some programs were classified, we did not have to make any changes to our recordkeeping.

**Adaptive Equestrian Sports:** Our 2018 strategic plan included working towards having our students participate in horse shows. In 2020, six of our students participated in a virtual dressage show and we took two students to a local horse show in Decatur.

**Therapeutic Horseback Riding:** We provided 765 hours of mounted and unmounted horsemanship lessons to individuals with disabilities and special circumstances.

### **How well was it performed?**

In the past, we have used the following statistics to determine how well we taught riding lessons:

- What is our student retention?
- What percentage of lessons was taught?
- What is the demand for the program?
- What are staff qualifications?

- How many incident reports were completed?
- What did the students and parents think in satisfaction surveys?
- What riding skills were mastered?

**Student Retention:** Over the past few years, student retention has become increasingly difficult to measure. For example, a student may not be able to participate for two terms due to surgery, but then return back in 6 months. Is that student considered retained once they return or is it like they are a brand new student? Or, what about when a student participates in multiple programs? To further complicate things this year, due to coronavirus restrictions we were unable to serve involved students needing the most support (at least 2 sidewalkers) or those unable to wear masks, so this metric would not give meaningful information for 2020. For these reasons, we are no longer using this measurement.

**Percentage of Lessons Taught:** In the past, this statistic has been helpful for planning purposes, but does not provide meaningful information for 2020 to coronavirus restrictions. At first, we did attempt to track it, but it became incredibly confusing to schedule anything not knowing who would be able to work or attend from week to week.

**Program Demand:** There are currently 70 students on our waiting list, along with several other agencies that would like to bring groups to the barn. We will continue using this metric in future evaluations.

**Staff Qualifications:** For safety and to ensure quality programs, it is important for employees to be well trained and certified in their respective responsibilities. During the down time of coronavirus, we were not able to provide a lot of continuing education to employees due to lack of in-person programs offered. Most classes that would benefit our employees are held in-person because it's hard to work virtually with a horse! In the future, we will continue to provide training and continuing education for our employees.

**Incident Reports:** An incident report is completed every time someone falls off a horse or requires more than basic first aid. We did not have any incident reports in 2020.

**Satisfaction Surveys:** Due to being understaffed and incredibly overwhelmed, we did not do a very good job of sending out satisfaction surveys throughout the year in 2020. And, we did not receive many responses when we did send out satisfaction surveys – probably because parents are also overwhelmed! We will continue using satisfaction surveys in the future and will do a better job of sending them. But, we did receive the following comments in 2020:

**Areas of Improvement:**

- Longer lessons, with more time at the barn. Through the years, parents have consistently asked for longer lessons, but this makes it difficult to see as many children due to staffing limitations.
- Ability to come multiple times a week. During the summer, we allowed students to come multiple times a week because this limited our staff's exposure to coronavirus.

We were unable to continue this when we began seeing more students in the fall. Children who were no longer able to come twice a week were very disappointed. Parents told us that they had seen more significant improvements when children were coming twice a week. While we understood the parents' desires, we also felt it was important to have as many of our previous students return as possible.

- Some parents indicated that they felt our covid restrictions were too strict.

**General Satisfaction:** Parents reported overwhelming satisfaction in the services received, progress made, communication, and facility appearance. Additional comments included:

- *I think you went above and beyond during this difficult time.*
- *The Red Barn has a clear commitment to excellence and has far exceeded our expectation on every level.*
- *I appreciate that her instructor points out her strengths versus only mentioning her weaknesses.*
- *They'd come every day if they could.*
- *It's her only activity where she can truly let her guard down. She trusts everyone to be honest with her and help her improve.*
- *In other activities, she goes a time or two and then doesn't want to go back. She always wants to be at the barn.*
- *The communication and clear goals are far better than any other extracurricular we have been involved in.*
- *The Red Barn is an extension of the love and care we, as parents, desire to give our daughter. It is an extra boost in helping raise her to be a loving, caring, and confident person.*
- *It is the highlight of our week.*

**Riding Skills:** In 2014 we began using the Rider Instruction and Evaluation System (RIDES) to track the mastery of riding skills divided into five levels. Each level contains both mounted and unmounted skills and mastery is checked at the end of each term. The levels are:

Level 1 - This level of rider is primarily walk only on lead. Trotting is minimal, if at all.

Level 2 - This level of rider is learning basic riding skills at the walk and trot on lead.

Level 3 - This level of rider is learning to ride off lead at the walk and on lead at the trot.

Level 4 - This level of rider is proficient at riding off lead at the walk and is learning to ride off lead at the trot.

Level 5 - This level of rider is working on more advanced skills off lead at the walk and trot and is learning to canter. When our students complete this level, we consider them to have graduated from our programs.



Students progress at their own pace, but in a methodical way. Some skills are mastered quickly, and other may take longer. The point of the RIDES system is not to compare students to each other, but only to identify that skill mastery is indeed taking place over time and to outline logical riding skill progression.

RIDES levels also help us identify horse and volunteer need. For example, the graph below indicates that the majority of students are on levels 2 and 3, which require the horse to have a volunteer leader. Level 2 students typically have an additional 1-2 volunteer helpers in the lesson.

Due to coronavirus, our focus on RIDES skill mastery was less than usual for several reasons:

- Many parents reported that their children were stressed and anxious, so lessons focused more on relaxation.
- The stress and anxiety, combined with not being able to ride for many months, meant that almost all students regressed in their riding skills.
- Masks made it difficult to work on skills requiring strenuous activity, like trotting. So, all activities were at the walk, even if the student had previously been trotting.
- In order to reduce the number of people surrounding the student, we only used parents as sidewalkers and had to adjust the activity level for parents.

There was some RIDES skill mastery in 2020, especially for level 1 and 2 students. But, due to the pandemic's impact, we have decided to re-evaluate all students as of 2021 in order to have a new baseline for their progress moving forward.

### **What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?**

Even before the pandemic, these were the most difficult questions to answer. Our goal is that everything learned at the barn can later be transferred to daily life and relationships with others, but that can be difficult to measure long term.

Parents were surveyed to determine if they saw growth in certain areas when their child was at the barn and if they saw improvements carry over into other areas of life. The top six answers are listed below, as well as some parent comments.

	Saw improvement while at the barn	Saw improvement carried over at home
Self confidence and self esteem	90%	90%
Following directions	70%	70%
Communication	70%	90%
Coordination	70%	60%
Physical strength	60%	50%
Sequencing steps of a task	50%	50%

Parent Comments:

- *I am seeing it more as she gets older and she shares conversations from the barn.*
- *She is better able to communicate and manage her anxiety for the most part. I see her confidence improving and she is able to handle more responsibility at home, school, church, etc.*
- *The confidence and social skills have helped at school and church. Ability to follow directions and sequencing steps of a task have been a tremendous help in academics.*
- *She is slowly coming out her shell and starting to speak again. She's built relationships and that's usually very hard for her to do.*
- *Not only has she gained a love for horses and a passion for riding, she has gained confidence, coordination, improved in all areas of academics, and shown gains in socialization.*

In 2019 we began collecting pilot data on balance, trunk control, and reach for a small group of students. Our initial plan had been to collect this information over time to track improvements, but the disruptions from coronavirus have ended this project.

In the future, we hope to have the results from the University of Alabama School of Social Work research study to indicate if participating increased child behavior and family well being. Additionally, we are looking into participating in other studies on the benefits of therapeutic riding, such as NYU's "Reining In Anxiety" study, as well as a UK project measuring change in communication, physical ability, relationships, horsemanship, confidence, and enjoyment. We have also discussed creating a task analysis linking RIDES skills to activities of daily living.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION – EQUINE ASSISTED SERVICES: LEARNING**

Our Equine Assisted Services: Learning programs Include:

- Equine-assisted learning in education: Focusing on academic skills, character development, and the promotion of relevant life skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

- Equine-assisted learning in organizations: Assisting organizations and other workgroups to build effective teams and leaders that enhance work dynamics and performance.
- Equine-assisted learning in personal development: Assisting individuals and groups to discover new ways to face life challenges and opportunities by developing skills in effective problem-solving, decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and communication.

### **How much did we do?**

We provided 2,849 hours of programming that would be considered as Equine Assisted Services: Learning within the new terminology. However, since the new terminology wasn't published until late in 2020, we did not track it by specific classification (education, organization, personal development). There is also a great deal of overlap between the education and personal development classification, making it sometimes difficult (at least for us) to distinguish between the two.

We believe that all of our Equine Assisted Services: Learning program hours would be considered either learning or personal development.

Of the 2,849 hours, 492 were provided virtually, and 1,056 were in our job skills class. The remaining 1,301 included camps, classes, trainings, field trips, evaluations, and any other direct service hour that was not a riding lesson or therapy.

### **How well was it performed?**

In the past, we have only used student satisfaction surveys to determine how well these types of programs were implemented. However, the satisfaction surveys were not completed this year due because we forgot to send them with everything going on.

We are working to develop some specific measures beyond satisfaction surveys for the future, but have not yet had time to determine what those will be.

### **What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?**

In the past, this has also been difficult to measure and we hope to have more concrete measures in the future.

But, we were able to extract some information about two students who participated in Level 3 Job Skills.

When Student #1 began the class, she completed an average 8 tasks per day and required 2-3 reminders about the tasks and had to redo them 2-3 times in order to complete them. By the end of the term, she was able to complete an average of 12 tasks per day with 0 reminders and did not have redo any of them. We observed increased endurance, independence in task selection, increased self-monitoring, higher quality of work, and self-correction of errors.

When Student #2 began the class, he had to be directed about which task to complete and needed cues before moving on to the next task. By the end of the term, he was able to select tasks independently and determine on his own when to move on to the next task. We observed that he developed flexibility and the ability to move between tasks (not becoming fixated).

The difference in the lives of these two students is that the skills developed will help them become employed, giving them some financial independence. Student #1 had attempted part-time entry level positions in the past, but had not been successful. After completing the Job Skills Level 3 class, she was hired as a bagger at a grocery store and has been able to keep that job for several months.

We also received the following email from a United Ability supervisor who brought students out to participate in Level 2 Job Skills.

*For six weeks, The Red Barn, embraced the students and taught them not only how to work, but also the greater lesson of coming to work and putting in a hard day's work; and hard work it was. Monday through Friday, the students were given a set of tasks to complete. The tasks ranged from hauling hay and spreading gravel to clearing pastures to make it safe for horses to roam. The students were assisted by staff members from The Red Barn to make sure they learned the correct way to perform each job task. They embraced the students' differences and cheered them on when they succeeded. Succeed they did. What happens when you take eight city boys who would rather be sitting in front of a video game in the air conditioning and put them on a hot farm to teach them how to work? Magic. Pure magic.*

*Magic may sound dramatic, but I saw this with my own eyes. When the Red Barn handed a boy a hammer and a drill who had never before used one and asked him to build a bird house we found out the student has a natural ability for construction that no one had ever uncovered. Now he has a new career path. When a young man walks in and feels the whole world is against him thanks the staff for believing in him when no one would and thanks them on the last day for teaching him how to work with tears in his eyes, the only explanation is magic.*

*Sometimes the boys wanted to give up. The work was hard. It was hot and they sweated through their masks, but the staff at The Red Barn was right next to them, working shoulder to shoulder. They made sure that when they left, they would be able to do any job that was put in front of them.*

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION – EQUINE ASSISTED SERVICES: THERAPY**

Our Equine Assisted Services: Therapy programs include:

- Occupational Therapy: Incorporating the horse's movement and the barn environment into the individualized care plans of clients.
- Counseling: Some of our Learning programs are offered to organizations in conjunction with mental health professionals working at those organizations.
- Speech: Some of our Learning programs included a therapy component as they were led by a speech therapist, but the activity itself was not speech therapy.

### **How much did we do?**

We provided 242 hours of occupational therapy. Due to the closure of UAB's Constraint Induced Therapy clinic during coronavirus, we were able to temporarily hire a therapist familiar with the CI Therapy protocol and provided 84.5 of those hours in a pilot program incorporating that model.

### **How well did we do it?**

In the past, we have only used student satisfaction surveys to determine how well these types of programs were implemented. However, the satisfaction surveys were not completed this year due because we forgot to send them with everything going on.

Of the 9 individual OT clients who did not participate in the CI Therapy model, 2 were unable to continue due to coronavirus, 4 were discharged from OT due to meeting their goals, 2 transitioned to therapeutic horseback riding, and 1 has continued receiving OT at the barn in 2021.

Four adults participated in the CI Therapy pilot program and three showed improvement in their daily self care routines.

### **What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?**

Due to HIPPA restrictions, we have not been able to decide how to report this information other than as above.

## **CONCLUSION**

Program Evaluations are written to help organizations improve and show donors the impact of their support. This year's had the added benefit of allowing us to reset and refocus the types of programs offered and our evaluation methods. Our schedule is beginning to feel more consistent and hopefully we will be able to return to better data collection in 2021. Our goal

for the remainder of 2021<sup>1</sup> is to determine what we want to measure and set up the systems to collect the data. We will try to retroactively collect the information for 2021 programing and realize that it may be 2022 before we have a true new baseline of any measurements.



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<sup>1</sup> This is being written in May 2021, so the year is almost halfway over.