

Meet William

SHARING STORIES to grow: "Treatment with the help of the horse."

"We were really lucky."

That's how Anne Acker sums up her son's "early" participation in Hippotherapy.

"William has hypotonia, or low muscle tone, and some overall developmental delays," Anne says. "And at a year old, he wasn't rolling or crawling, despite all of the physical therapy he was doing."

William had been receiving early intervention physical therapy through the Boyer Children's Clinic in Seattle for nearly a year and a half. What William needed was a change -- something that would spark his interest and make the most of his abilities. But what options were left? Anne and her husband, Tom, didn't know where to look. That's when William's physical therapist suggested Hippotherapy at Little Bit in Woodinville, WA.

"The movement the horse produces in the patient's body is similar to walking," says Steve McKenzie, MS, PT, HPCS, William's therapist at Little Bit. "And that's unique and important for a strong core or trunk, but it's not the only benefit. Kids get tired of the 'clinic' atmosphere and horses really motivate them. Kids have fun here!"

Anne and Tom decided to register William on the waiting list. "William started riding at Little Bit when he was about 2 years old," Anne recalls. Although he had started to crawl and sit on his own, he still couldn't stand. In his evaluation, Steve noted that William was making sounds, but not speaking words.

"His parents had several goals for William," Steve says. "First, to learn to walk independently, but also to improve his speech. That all ties into trunk strength."

William may not know much about "trunk strength" or the other developmental benefits he gains from getting therapy on a horse, but he knows one thing: horses are fun! From his very first treatment, Anne says that William was never afraid. "He just leaned back into Steve's hands," she says.

*Session after session, William made steady progress -- his core strength improved along with his speech. Although not the focus of his physical therapy treatments one of William's first words was **Dolly**, the name of a favorite volunteer. William was finally taking steps and standing with the support of two helping hands. Then just one supportive hand. Then, amazingly, just the tip of his mother's fingers.*

"And then," Steve recalls, "we hit a plateau. Anne asked me, 'Why isn't he able to walk on his own?' Actually, William just wanted a security blanket. So I said, well, let's really work on it today." Steve adjusted William's alignment, and slowly, slowly removed his hands. It worked. William stood on his own four times, thirty seconds each time. But the biggest surprise was still to come.

“The very next day I get this call from Anne,” Steve recalls. “She tells me, ‘William walked twenty-four steps today -- by himself!’”

For Anne, it was an easy call to make. “Steve was the first person I think I called after Tom!” The therapist, volunteers and horse are all part of William’s therapy team.

“Sometimes I look with amazement,” Anne says. “There’s my little guy on the horse and then four adults dedicated to him for half an hour. Their whole focus is on William and helping him to improve.”

Since beginning Hippotherapy, Anne has seen such progress in William’s mobility, his speech, his neurological milestones, that she sometimes wonders if there’s anything that Hippotherapy can’t do. “William gets ear infections from time to time” she says with a smile in her voice. “I wonder what it can do for that?”

But most of all, Anne and Tom are just so proud of William. They feel lucky to have found Hippotherapy at the perfect time and hope other children will have the same opportunities.

“Early intervention is just so important,” says Anne. “William is the prime example of someone who has benefited. And we’re just so fortunate.”

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How we found Hippotherapy services

We travel during the year for my husbands work so after a long hot stifling summer in Texas; I told my husband that if his office was going to Texas the next summer then I would stay in Utah for the summer to visit with family. So we found a great furnished place in Midway, UT and settled in for the winter. When the next April came around it was time for my husband to head back out to Texas while we continued to stay in Midway, which is about 20 minutes from Park City, Utah.

My son Daniel has Cerebral Palsy and a Seizure Disorder from being injured during his scheduled induction with Pitocin, something I am now trying to warn women and young parents about since Doctors and Hospitals encourage the practice of scheduled inductions so frequently these days and knowledge of its dangers is not adequately communicated to pregnant mothers. As I spent the first years of Daniel's life scouring over all the information and therapies on Cerebral Palsy that I could find, I came across the idea of Hippotherapy. I vowed that one day I would find a way for my son to get this therapy.

One day, I was on Facebook and noticed that my sister 'Liked' an article featured in the news which talked about the National Ability Center and how it is a favorite place for athletes to recover from injuries. So I read through the article and visited the website (<http://www.discovernac.org/>) and discovered that they offer all kinds of Equestrian Opportunities for kids, including Hippotherapy. They also offer Horsemanship and Adaptive Riding sessions and so much more at their incredible indoor/outdoor facility in the mountain paradise of Park City, UT. I just about jumped out of my chair, knowing that the opportunity had finally presented itself at just the right time for my son to get Hippotherapy (and in the pristine mountains where Park City is located too)!

[Meet Daniel](#) (I'm sitting on my Mom's lap)

I visited the website and determined that I wanted to go down there in person to visit the place and talk about getting my son started. I was given some forms to fill out, one of which had me get a doctor's script clearing Daniel for this type of "medical therapy." After our initial visit (evaluation) we were on our way to beginning Hippotherapy.

Once a week we bring Daniel and my other 2 children to the National Ability Center and while Daniel is working with a therapists during his treatment session incorporating Hippotherapy, my daughter and son participate in an Equestrian Horsemanship Program. They are participating in their 3rd session (each session lasts from 5-6 weeks).

Since Daniel started Hippotherapy, almost every issue he was struggling with has improved significantly.

Daniel's therapist, with training in use of Hippotherapy as a treatment strategy, took inventory of his abilities at the first few sessions and helped me define some goals for Daniel. She worked with him in ways that would help him see gains in his weaker areas. During the first month, his progress was immediately noticeable in speaking more clearly, as well as physically being able to do things with minimum physical dependence on me. His progress is very measurable and it is amazing what a single session can do! Hippotherapy has strengthened Daniel's confidence in himself. He now believes he can

do 'hard' things. He still prefers to have me by his side for needed support, but attempts to do things that normally he wouldn't.

Daniel's therapist said that she believes the horses can sense the weakness in the child and they know that they are helping the child; very well put in my experience. Also, each one of my children has a connection with their horse. Daniel talks about Spirit, his horse, quite often. He wonders if Spirit is sleeping just like him when he is dozing off to dreamland during bedtime and he likes to tell people about Spirit when they ask how he is enjoying his time spent at the NAC. He says, "I ride Spirit" with all the gusto and tone of admiration a 4 year old with CP can muster.

Daniel is working with a great team made up of a down-to-earth skilled therapists who love working with children, his horse Spirit and specially trained volunteers.

Sarah Gwyn, Daniel's Mother

Sarah is Daniel's mother and has a blog about her experiences with her son. Daniel participates in Hippotherapy at the National Ability Center in Park City, UT.

www.walkdanielwalkdaniel.com

<http://wp.me/p1GMfD-9t>