

EQUI  KIDS



SPEECH THERAPY

Welcome to the Speech Therapy Program

Speech Therapy services at EQUI-KIDS are provided by a licensed Speech Language Pathologist and are available to children and adults. Best practice dictates that occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology professionals integrate hippotherapy into the patient's plan of care, along with other therapy tools and/or strategies. The term hippotherapy refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology professionals use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement as a therapy tool to engage sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems to promote functional outcomes. Hippotherapy has been regarded as a therapy tool/strategy that can be utilized by occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language therapy professionals while working within their scope of practice by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA).



Why Horses?

- “Hippos” is the ancient Greek word for horse. Hippotherapy literally means ‘treatment with the help of a horse.’
- The horse’s movement has much to offer the patient and is a powerful tool. Equine movements are multi-dimensional and, in many ways, are similar to human body movement.
- A horse takes, on average, 100 steps per minute or 3000 steps during 30 minutes of equine movement. That movement, which is naturally variable, is key to learning or re-learning tasks.
- Provides sensory input, particularly proprioceptive, vestibular, tactile, and visual.
- Promotes multi-channel input, simultaneously with biomechanical input, and helps to regulate an otherwise disordered sensory system.



Speech and Language Areas

- Receptive language delays and deficits
- Expressive language delays and deficits
- Pragmatic language delays and disorders
- Articulation delays and disorders
- Phonology delays and disorders
- Stuttering/Fluency Disorders
- Oral motor delays
- Voice (breath support, volume, vocal abuse and misuse)
- Auditory processing disorders
- Dysarthria
- Oral/verbal apraxia of speech
- Swallowing/Feeding difficulty

Speech Therapy Benefits Utilizing Hippotherapy

- Speech and language development is not just about what occurs in the mouth.
- Organization and integration of the sensory systems and core strength, trunk control, and breath support are important parts of speech and language development. The ability to register speech and language, attend to it, and process it is all related to these systems working.
- Sensory and motor development are important in speech and language development. Speech is a complex motor task requiring that numerous muscles must work together to produce different sounds, all while coordinating with breath support.
- The therapist is able to facilitate increased trunk control, stability, and breath support through the movement of the horse. These functions support speech and language.
- The patient receives proprioceptive input, vestibular input, tactile input, auditory input, olfactory input, and visual flow, all simultaneously as the horse is moving. It is not possible to replicate this in a clinic.
- The therapist is able to address the same goals as they would address in a clinic setting, but to the patient, they are just having a good time with their favorite pony!



Meet Heather Oman, M.A., C.C.C., SL/P,



Heather Oman has a Bachelor's Degree in communication disorders from Boston University and a Master's Degree in Speech Language Pathology from The George Washington University. She is a PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor and Registered Therapist.

Heather has 20 years' experience working in the field of speech pathology and is trained in Prompts for Restructuring Oral Muscular Phonetic Targets (PROMPT). She has spent the past seven years practicing Hippotherapy in connection with Equine-Assisted Services Centers. In her spare time, Heather also loves to garden and pretends to have a green thumb.

Getting Started



Thank you for choosing Speech Therapy at EQUI-KIDS to help you or your loved one achieve speech and language goals. We realize that you have options regarding speech therapy, and we are happy you selected EQUI-KIDS.

To apply please take the following steps:

- Contact our Program Director to request the Speech Therapy application.
- Mail, fax, or email the completed forms to EQUI-KIDS. We will contact you to schedule an appointment for an assessment after processing your application. The assessment will take up to 1 hour.
- Following the assessment, we will contact you to let you know if an appropriate spot is available and if EQUI-KIDS will be able to meet the needs of the applicant.



Contact Us



We look forward to hearing from you soon. Please reach out and a member of our team will be happy to get you connected!

Program Director

Kathy Chitwood

757-721-7350, ext 101

Email: kathy.chitwood@equikids.org

Speech Therapist

Heather Oman

757-721-7350

Email: heather.oman@equikids.org

EQUI-KIDS Therapeutic Riding Program

2626 Heritage Park Drive

Virginia Beach, VA 23456

757-721-7350 | information@equikids.org | www.equikids.org