

Savannah Russell & Katelan Sinski
A Study of the Speech and Riding Connection

In August, student researchers traveled to Durango to visit a therapeutic riding center and gain insight and skills in providing help to student riders with special needs. They learned a great deal from the director of the center who had thirty years' experience and many anecdotes about the success of therapeutic riding for a wide range of special needs. In the fall the researchers attended the Individual Education Plan for their designated rider, they learned that at his age (17) he was no longer going to receive speech therapy even though that was identified as his greatest need.

The researchers began to study ways to improve speech as they observed their rider with special needs spoke very freely and enthusiastically during riding lessons. After meeting with a speech therapist, the researchers specially designed a method to test the special needs rider using LVST-LOUD speech therapy program. A set of ten command phrases and a pre-test and post-test were designed and two control tests were conducted to enable the special needs rider to become comfortable during testing sessions. The researchers then conducted a series of five tests using the same testing phrases, methods, and testing station over four weeks. The data recorded indicated a positive change in the special needs rider's speech. Both the pre-tests and the post-tests showed improvement over time. This experiment will be continued to further understand and study the results and to gather more data with the use of controls and more testing sessions.