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## Ancient horse therapy helps special kids

By Harry Porterfield



May 19, 2005 — Sometimes things that are old become new again. There's an ancient therapy that's helping some very special children make real progress. ABC7's Harry Porterfield says those involved in the treatment are some people you should know.

Midwest Council for Children with Disabilities

One does not typically ride a horse this way unless something special is taking place and that special something is hippo therapy. The riders are youngsters who are challenged physically, developmentally or cognitively.

Cindy Fraley's adopted son is given to rages.

"He's really a new child. The best way I can describe it -- he's more comfortable in his own skin. He's calmed down," said Cindy Fraley, rider's mom.

Doug and Chris Young are the parents of four children in hippo therapy.

"Oh, we see such a difference in the kids. It is amazing," said Chris Young, parent.

"I was skeptical at first because I had never heard of it before," said Doug Young, parent.

Financial assistance for the therapy is provided by the non-profit Midwest Council for Children with Disabilities. Therapy sessions take place in suburban Crystal Lake. Dennis Fiedler is MCCD president.

"For children with disabilities who haven't learned how to crawl yet, haven't learned how to work the horse actually replicates that movement for them, and thus triggering their brain to think that they're actually crawling," said Dennis Fiedler, MCCD president.

This therapy isn't new. It was begun in 468 A.D. by the ancient Greeks and is called hippo therapy because in Greek hippo means horse.

"We were unable to shampoo, comb or brush her teeth without screaming. After five weeks of hippo therapy, we have been able to brush and fix her hair and use a battery operated toothbrush," said Diane Durante, rider's mom.

Amanda Helbling is one of the therapists.

HARRY PORTERFIELD



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"The horses love children. They have such a special relationship with children, and they know they have this responsibility of having this child on their backs, and they take it very seriously," said Amanda Helbling, therapist.

The parents, the kids and the staff at the hippo therapy sessions in Crystal Lake are some people you should know.

To learn more about that program and a fundraising golf outing on June 20 to support the therapy visit the [Midwest Council for Children with Disabilities' Web site](#).

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