

Just What the Doctor Ordered

Corn owns and runs Ride to Walk and Sierra Pediatric Clinic to help disabled kids

By Susan Belknap
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Playing in the sand, throwing a ball or riding on a swing may seem like typical activities for most children.

But Kristine Corn, doctor of physical therapy, DPT, at Sierra Pediatric Therapy Clinic in Granite Bay, knows these simple activities are therapy for about 100 patients with neurological disorders that she sees each week.

Corn has owned the clinic located at Douglas and Barton Road for 23 years and each week sees patients ranging from less than 1-year-old to some who are almost adults. Many suffer from cerebral palsy, autism, head trauma and other types of sensory dysfunction. Some patients are Granite Bay residents while others travel from as far as Modesto or Stockton.

Therapy for each patient is as varied as they are. Corn said that the course of action depends on what the neurologist or prescribing doctor has advised relating to the patient's diagnosis as well as the evaluation from Corn and her staff. Before any type of physical therapy is administered the muscular skeleton system, patients posture and x-rays are reviewed. In addition, Corn observes how the child moves or doesn't move in order to determine the correct therapy for that individual.

For Corn and her staff, learning the individual patient's strengths and weaknesses and working with the family of the patient as a team helps to make therapy more beneficial.

She recalled a particular 5-month-old baby whose parents brought him into the clinic with several problems.

Through various handling and positioning techniques, Corn was able to settle the child down into a calm state.

clinic toys The inside of the clinic looks more like a playground than a medical office with its swings, balls and ball pit, Lego table and playground equipment. Parents are always encouraged to be part of the child's therapy as Corn feels that the more the parent can learn at the clinic the more they can continue with follow up at home and the more progress the patient will hopefully experience.

There are different goals for each patient but one universal objective Corn said she hopes achieve with all the children: To let them experience that most children without neurological problems do naturally, play.

Corn works on helping the children move their muscles. In the beginning stages of therapy sometimes her patients don't understand that Corn is trying to help them. Often patients cry and are not cooperative and she's even had her hair pulled.

But according to Corn, soon after the initial appointment many patients start to look forward to their visits and she receives lots of hugs.

"I see changes, small changes in my patients often in one or two visits," she said.

One course of therapy that works well for some patients is riding a horse. According to Corn, there is a therapeutic program that helps these children develop muscle tone and an upright posture. Just sitting on a horse, even with the help of a physical therapist, the patient has to use muscles he or horse might not normally use. With lots of practice, the muscles get stronger and the patient gains better control.

Corn began incorporating therapeutic horse riding with her patients about 19 years ago when she bought a pony that the children would ride up and down the clinic's driveway. Corn said she noticed how the children's bodies changed with its movement. As the horse moved, the children had to shift their weight from side to side and it made their bodies' flow with the movement of the horse.

About 10 years ago Corn bought some property in Lincoln and last February, that 20 acres became home to "Ride to Walk" Ranch, a non-profit organization dedicated to therapeutic horseback riding. The property features a six-acre lake, stocked with various types of fish, a covered arena and 13 carefully screened horses donated by private citizens.

In an effort to involve the whole community, Corn said there are three rotary clubs that are currently helping to build wheelchair ramps throughout and a local Boy Scout troop is in the process of developing a camping area. Corn contacted the California Water Fowl Association and they built some wood boxes for the wood ducks that like to visit the lake.

Not all patients participate in horse therapy as it is quite expensive, approximately \$153 per ride. The high cost is due to the cost of owning the property, caring for the horses, veterinarian fees, food for the horses and the professional therapists on staff.

In order to make the program more accessible to her patients Corn said families can work at the Bingo Palace in Sacramento. In fact half of the budget for the ranch comes from proceeds from Bingo. But Corn said earnings from Bingo have dropped since the opening of the new casino Thunder Valley.

This type of setback doesn't seem to bother Corn. It appears that her enthusiasm, positive outlook on life and love of the children keep her going. She said her favorite part of their job is the interaction with the children and their families and the joy of watching the children get

better. Her goal is to give the community a better understanding of the disabled and what can be done for them and their families.

For more information call Sierra Pediatric Therapy Clinic at (916) 791-2747.

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