



Case Prospectus

Three-year-old William sits erect and reaches out to stroke the neck of his therapy horse, Spencer.

When William, a 3 year old with developmental delays, began Hippotherapy at Little Bit during the winter of 2007, he required nearly complete assistance to walk and significant assistance just to sit on a horse. He is now sitting independently on the horse and took his first unassisted steps – 24 of them, to be exact! William's mom, Anne, adds, *“William has made huge strides since starting at Little Bit. His walking improves everyday and he is beginning to squat down to pick things up rather than falling to the floor to retrieve them. The people here are incredible. William's physical therapist Steve is so knowledgeable and has taught us so much. We take the lessons we learn here and use them at home. It's a huge help.”* Since starting at Little Bit, Anne has seen such progress in his mobility, his speech, his neurological milestones, that she sometimes wonders if there's anything that Hippotherapy at Little Bit can't do. As with all our riders, hope is something Spencer and Little Bit provide in abundance to William and his family.



Thirty one years of steady growth

Founded in 1976 with just one horse and five riders, Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center has grown to become one of the largest full-time therapeutic horseback riding programs in the United States and an industry leader in therapeutic riding program delivery. More than 250 students a week receive therapeutic horseback riding instruction through Little Bit. These students are supported by 18 specially-trained therapy horses, 6 instructors, 3 therapists, 450 volunteers and a small administrative staff. The riders at Little Bit represent more than 75 different disabilities, and come from around the Puget Sound area. While riders range in age from 2 ½-60 years old, the majority of our riders are under 18.

Little Bit has evolved from a small, entirely volunteer-run effort to a highly professional, accredited program that is viewed as a model for other centers in its field. Little Bit was the first nationally accredited program (by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, NARHA) of its kind in the Pacific Northwest and is currently one of only three Premiere Accredited Centers in Washington State.

Therapeutic riding programs were established in Western Europe in the early 1950's and in North America in the late 1960's. The number of therapeutic riding programs has expanded rapidly in recent years, due to widening acceptance of their value. Little Bit currently offers five different therapeutic riding programs geared to the specific needs of riders.

Therapeutic horseback riding provides a range of physical benefits, including strengthening muscles, preventing bone weakness and joint dislocation, and improving balance and hand/eye coordination.

As a rider's overall health improves, so also does his or her life expectancy, socialization skills, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Hippotherapy (from the Greek "hippos" meaning "horse") involves a physical or occupational therapist utilizing the movements of the horse as a therapy tool.

Adaptive Riding involves a highly individualized lesson plan of learning to ride the horse with the instructor taking into account the rider's physical, emotional, and mental strengths and limitations and goals.

Many Little Bit riders experience a freedom of movement that they have never felt before. The horse produces a three-dimensional movement pattern very similar to the movement of the human pelvis during normal, upright walking. This pattern cannot be duplicated in a traditional clinical setting. In addition, the sense of achievement that comes from riding and maneuvering a 1,100 pound horse is strong medicine. It replaces self-doubt with self-confidence.

Little Bit's programs are funded through a combination of class fees, in-kind and cash donations, and special events. The actual cost of hippotherapy, for example, is substantial, typically \$210 per 45 minute treatment, and is usually not covered by insurance. Many of our parents are already financially stressed due to their child's special medical needs, and are unable to afford the full class fee. Therefore, donations help offset the cost, reducing the fee to only \$105 per session. Other classes such as Adaptive Riding have similar subsidies. Special events such as our annual auction help provide additional funds for scholarships and

program needs. Pursuant to our core value of providing services free of physical, emotional, and financial barriers, Little Bit provided 125 scholarships in 2009, totaling over \$60,217, to support riders who could otherwise not afford to participate.

Current Challenges

Demand Continues to Rise

Little Bit's waiting list currently stands at about 200 potential riders - a wait of up to two years! Rider retention is 85%, and the demand continues to grow. Each year, more and more people are diagnosed with disabilities, and at the same time, are becoming more aware of the positive benefits of therapeutic riding. Doctors and therapists continue to recommend our service, despite the waiting list. The wait is particularly difficult for our very youngest riders, as studies have shown that early intervention in children with disabilities (between 2 ½ -7 years old) is critical to helping them reach developmental milestones such as walking or speaking.

Our capacity is limited primarily by physical constraints. We can only stable a maximum of 20 horses, which can serve no more than 240 riders per week. If one horse is ill, or unable to be ridden, classes may be cancelled. Also, we do not have sufficient space to provide the ongoing exercise and training needed by our horses without impacting class time.

In addition, with only one covered arena, space is at a premium, particularly during the cold, wet winter months. Class sizes are limited due to quality, safety and parking concerns. Currently, multiple classes must sometimes be scheduled simultaneously in the arena, creating a significant safety and quality challenge. Our single outdoor arena is also overused during good weather. There is not enough room on the property to expand or further upgrade our existing facility. We have attempted to meet the needs of those on the waiting list by expanding to a 7-day a week program, with classes running from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Still, we are very close to reaching our maximum capacity at this facility.

Lack of Trained Professionals

An additional challenge lies in the lack of enough instructors, physical therapists and occupational therapists trained in therapeutic riding. We must have qualified, trained staff in order to serve the burgeoning number of new riders. Only five training facilities exist in the United States, none in the Pacific Northwest.

Lack of Existing Research

Finally, while anecdotal evidence about the value of therapeutic riding and hippotherapy abounds, the lack of scientific, clinical research in the field hinders its development. While many doctors and other specialists increasingly refer their patients to Little Bit and similar programs, insurance companies and the medical profession are hesitant to provide reimbursement or formal recognition of therapeutic riding programs.

Vision for the Future: Building Capacity and Sustainability

Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center has launched a fundraising campaign to raise \$11.0 million to expand our facilities, increase capacity and provide sustainability during the transition to a new facility. In addition, Little Bit hopes to begin building an endowment for innovative research and training initiatives. A successful effort would allow us to meet the following goals:



- Expand our services and significantly reduce the number of potential riders on a waiting list.
- Provide educational opportunities and specialized training for therapists and instructors interested in a career in the therapeutic riding field.
- Conduct clinical research into the positive benefits of therapeutic riding and hippotherapy.

In January 2008, Little Bit purchased Simpatico Stables, a 17-acre horse property located in Redmond, just minutes from our current Woodinville facility.

Much of the property seems to have been designed with therapeutic riding in mind. Situated on picturesque Bear Creek, the property is expansive, a quiet place for horses and humans, with many of the attributes of our ultimate wish list already on site:

- a 43-stall barn that doubles our current capacity
- two arenas, one covered and one outdoor
- a round pen
- individual turnout for each horse and three grass pastures
- a quarter-mile sand racetrack with grass infield
- a club house and a family home that can be converted
- enough acreage to create our own sensory trail on the site
- easy access to trails and Farrel-McWhirter Park
- natural wetlands that provide shelter for diverse wildlife
- a facility that has operated under best practices for farm management

Little Bit will retain our current facility as a center for research and training. In order to provide service to more riders, we will need more instructors and therapists. By providing educational opportunities in a dedicated space, Little Bit not only adds to its own pool of staff resources, but also increases the availability of this talent throughout the country, helping the industry to grow nationally.

Finally, by conducting carefully controlled clinical research at the new facility, we will be participating in the creation of a solid body of scientific evidence of the benefits of therapeutic riding and hippotherapy. While anecdotal evidence abounds, clinical data is scarce, and insurance companies are reluctant to pay for therapy. Additional research may convince the insurance industry to begin covering this type of therapy, relieving a substantial financial burden from families already dedicating significant funds to care for their child's special needs.

Extraordinary Strides • Transforming Lives

Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center's Board and staff are passionate about the potential of this project to better meet the needs of hundreds of disabled children and adults in our community. As our waiting list grows, each day another child like William is unable to enjoy the benefits of early intervention - delaying important developmental milestones such as speaking, walking, or even holding up their head. The need is urgent and growing, and can only be met with the continued support of our community. Thank you for participating in this important process.

