

Rider Graduates from Richmond Therapeutic Equestrian Society Danny's Story

Danny joined the RTES family in 2002 at the age of 4 and is now graduating from our therapeutic riding program. Danny's parents have agreed to share his story.....



Figure 1 From L-R: Bev, Danny & Jasper, Sandra, Erin

Our son was born healthy and happy, but as the months rolled by we noticed that physically he wasn't progressing like other babies. Doctors told us to give it time, but after 15 months they agreed he needed tests to determine the problem. Danny could sit up and roll over, but he couldn't crawl and he had no support in his legs at all.

After all the tests were done, it was

determined he was born with low muscle tone and he needed a lot of strengthening. We had a physiotherapist visit once a

month with handouts and advise on how to incorporate muscle-strengthening exercises into his playtime and this became our daily routine. Eventually Danny developed arm and leg strength to be able to crawl and he took his first steps at almost 23 months. He was so proud of himself and so were we. It was a big step for him, but by the age of 3 he knew he couldn't keep up with his peers and this held him back from participating with other kids in physical activities such as running, jumping and biking, all the normal stuff kids do at that age. He'd refuse to join in but would sit and watch. It all changed when sometime later he was referred to the therapeutic riding program. It totally turned his life around. Danny loves animals – animal books, animal toys, animal anything. To him it was the highlight of his week and it had balance and muscle building benefits as well. When most kids were on training wheels, Danny was in a tricycle and there was a small incline by our house. He was finally able to pedal himself up the incline and eventually graduated to steeper inclines with time. We know this was the benefit of the riding program not only physically to develop his muscles, but also mentally. Danny knew that if he could sit on a big horse, he could handle that little incline. Danny is now able to ride a 2-wheeler without training wheels.

Another episode happened when he was in Kindergarten. After school one day he was plying tag with his school friends when one of his closer buddies suddenly piped up "you can't play with us, you run too slow". As a parent overhearing that comment when your child has worked so hard to progress, words can't express the look of hurt on his face. We let Danny know that everyone is good at something and if we don't know what it is, we keep looking for it. Shortly after Danny received some ribbons from the riding program and he was so proud of them he took them to show-and-tell at Kindergarten.

Danny was the only one in his class that had ever been on a horse. To receive ribbons as well was an added bonus. He knew being a fast runner wasn't everything. The whole experience gave him a new level of confidence.

The program has been a real stamina builder. For a while during the riding lesson, Danny would tell Sandra "this is easy". Thanks to Sandra's experience, the next few mornings following his lessons, Danny would have complaints of sore thigh muscles. After his lessons he'd give reports about something new he did with his horse. He has 2 favorite horses. Jasper, because he has Danny's favorite brownie colours and Summer because she gives the bumpiest rides.

Last year we were able to have Danny assessed for physical ability according to his age group and he is now within his age group range. He's not afraid to join in when his friends are playing tag or dodge ball or other things kids his age do. He's happy and healthy and loves animals.

We are so grateful to the therapeutic riding program, the horses, leaders, volunteers sponsors and everyone else involved in the beneficial program. Without it, Danny would not have the confidence, the muscle strength and the sense of achievement through his riding experiences that will be beneficial to him and his future.

*Thank-you for helping our son reach his potential.
Edith, Darrell and family.*

Danny has shared his interest of animals with everyone at RTES. During his rides, you could often hear Danny sharing a new piece of information about giraffes, elephants or even bears. After a vacation, Danny related his "tracking" expertise with the volunteers after finding animal tracks in the forests of Kelowna. One of Danny's favorite exercises on the horse is "around the world". When asked whether he liked riding forward or backwards best, Danny replied, "I like going forward because you can see where you're going but I like going backwards because you can see where you've been."