

INDEPENDENCE SADDLE IS MOVE'n ALONG

Updates and Highlights

TWO seems to be the magic number for the Independence Saddle. In the **two** years since the MOVE International Board of Directors concluded that the Independence Saddle is compatible with the MOVE philosophy and is designed for use in the MOVE Program, there have been **two** significant studies of the saddle.

The first study focused on the benefits of the saddle for the rider, and the second focused on the impact of the saddle on the horse. The conclusions from both studies have resulted in increased use of the saddle by individuals and therapeutic riding centers around the world. In addition, the goal of both studies was to build awareness, establish credibility, and find acceptance in the equestrian world for this first-of-its-kind adaptive saddle that allows individuals with the most severe multiple impairments the opportunity to experience the benefits of equestrian therapy. (The individuals often excluded from riding because they are "too difficult" to safely maintain while astride a horse.)

FIRST STUDY

In the first study, the progress of 25 students at the Woodland Developmental Center in Marysville, Michigan, a MOVE Model Site, was tracked for two years in a partnership with Liberty Riders, Inc., a NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association) Therapeutic Riding Center. The results of that study showed remarkable improvements in the students' endurance, mobility, communication, and social skills, thereby improving their general quality of life. (For more details about this study, see the article, "A Collaborative Effort Allows People with Disabilities to Experience the Joy of Horseback Riding," *EPMagazine*, June 2008, pp. 32-33. Beverly Young, special education teacher and MOVE Site Trainer at Woodland Developmental Center, is the author.)

SECOND STUDY

The second study took place at the Mary Anne McPhail Equine Performance Center on the campus of Michigan State University. Originally, the staff of Independent Strides

asked Bonnie DePue, the director of CHUM (Children United in Movement) in Mason, Michigan, a NARHA Premier Accredited Center, to field-test the Independence Saddle with her severe multiple impairment riders. DePue



intuitively saw the saddle's possibilities for increasing mobility and she saw riders at CHUM experiencing success. (For more information about CHUM or for more details about the study conducted at Michigan State University, go to www.independentstrides.com.)

To legitimize her findings that the saddle was not only capable of delivering effective therapy to this population, but also safe for therapy horses, she used her university research affiliations and worked with a panel of Ph.D. experts on the relationship between horses and humans to set up the testing

of the saddle. On May 28, 2008, there was comprehensive testing of the Independence Saddle and its effect on the horse at the performance center. The data gathered during this day-long testing was analyzed by experts from various fields and the study concluded unequivocally that the Independence Saddle is safe for both horse and rider.

THE SADDLE'S IMPACT...

Although the results from these two studies verify the Independence Saddle delivers the beneficial results it promises, it is the human side of the story that has the greatest impact. Two delightful young ladies who participated in the saddle testing at Michigan State University aptly renamed the saddle, "The Happy Saddle" and "The Magic Saddle" because of what the saddle means to them.

The most heartwarming testimony though comes from Chris, one of CHUM's riders who said:

I never thought I could ride again. What a feeling for both my body and soul to enjoy moving this way again. I feel so much safer and yet I don't feel restricted either.

To learn more about the Independence Saddle, go to www.independentstrides.com.