

# Therapy teaches special needs students to ride horses



MELISSA MONTOYA, MMONTOYA@NEWS-PRESS.COM 10:54 a.m. EDT March 16, 2015



(Photo: Kin fay Moroti/news-press.com)

As Kimmy Correa took control of Ted, a 1,200-pound Percheron, the crowd cheered.

The horse trotted across the riding arena with poise as 14-year-old Kimmy held on. Volunteers walked beside her to make sure she was steady.

Kimmy, who has cerebral palsy, is in her eighth year of equine-assisted therapy. When she began she needed two pillow-like objects to keep her upright.

Today, she can hold herself up, and that, her mother Yanet Luis said is a testament to her progress.

"It's helped with her posture," said Luis, 31.

While therapy provided Kimmy at the Naples Equestrian Challenge has helped her physically, Luis said, it's also given her fun.

"Just overall, it's about having something to look forward to," Luis said.

Each week, during one 30-minute class, special needs students train to be better riders. About 170 students receive therapy, said Beth Yurkovic, advanced instructor at the school. Over the course of Saturday, 75 students participated in the 15th annual horse show. On Sunday, another 75 are set to show off their progress; some will receive trophies.

When Kimmy was handed her trophy, Luis took pictures with her cellphone. She called Kimmy's name and asked her to smile. Kimmy would quickly smile, before bashfully turning away her face.

"It's so special for them because they watch their friends, their siblings and their neighbors receive awards all the time," said Missy Saracino, program director at the Naples Equestrian Challenge. "It's their time to shine."

## Therapy

Doctors often refer their patients to therapy, Saracino said.

"They get to be outside, active and they get to be with an animal," she said.

The Naples therapeutic center has eight therapy horses. They're in the process of training one, named Peppermint Patty, a 750-pound Strawberry Roan that stands at 14 hands. Peppermint Patty is missing an eye but instructors hope to teach their students a lesson.

"Patty has a disability, but that doesn't make her any different," said Robin Heroth, a horse trainer and instructor.

Concepcion Lopez, of Bonita Springs, said her daughter has taken to the therapy sessions.

Nine-year-old Cinthia Guzman, who has Down syndrome, has participated in therapy sessions for at least four years now, Lopez said.

Cinthia's face comes to life when Guzman mentions horse-riding.

"She's progressed," Guzman said. "She has a bunch of movement in her hands."

At first Cinthia was scared, Guzman said. But she's gotten used to the large animals.

"The day she doesn't ride, she gets fussy," Guzman said.

## If you go

- Naples Equestrian Challenge horse show

- 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. today.

•Naples Equestrian Challenge Riding Arena, 206 Ridge Drive

•Admission is free; barbeque lunches will be available for \$5.

•For information, visit [NaplesEquestrianChallenge.org](http://NaplesEquestrianChallenge.org)

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Michael Tracy rides Saturday in the Naples Equestrian Challenge's 15th Annual Horse Show in Naples. (Photo: Kinfay Moroti/news-press.com)

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