

# Little Hooves & Big Hearts Bringing Joy to Seniors and Special Needs Children

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Since its founding in 2007 by Valley resident Patty Green, the nonprofit organization Little Hooves & Big Hearts has been helping seniors and children with special needs get to a better place in their lives, both physically and emotionally, through interaction with specially trained miniature horses. Patty, who remembers watching her father's polo matches as a child, started riding at the age of four, and she's been an avid horse lover ever since. When Patty met Tammy Mockbee, LHBH's Executive Director, at the Miraval Resort, she knew she had found a soul mate who shared her love of horses and a passion for helping others.

The success that Little Hooves & Big Hearts has had with their clients in the past eight years is consistent with a growing body of evidence showing that equine-assisted therapy can be a highly effective treatment option for many individuals with physical impairments or developmental disabilities. According to the Institute of Equestrian Therapy, "Major improvements have been observed with cerebral palsy, mentally retarded, autistic, emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, stroke and accident victims." Equine therapy can also be of great benefit to seniors confined to nursing homes, assisted living centers or hospices, especially if they suffer from dementia or all-too-common feelings of loneliness and dependency. [Madison's Story is a true testament to the power of the Little Hooves & Big Hearts program.](#)

LHBH's various interactive treatment programs, whether they involve petting, grooming, walking, driving or simply observing the minis, share some or all of the following objectives: giving clients an improved sense of physical and emotional well-being; increasing muscle strength, joint mobility, balance and coordination; improving communication and perceptual skills; building self-confidence and trust; and fostering stronger connections to the outside world and to other people.

For individuals able to visit LHBH's five-acre equestrian facilities in Oracle, the therapeutic process typically begins with a client assessment conducted by one of the organizations equine therapists, who will structure an initial program of activities tailored to the client's needs and abilities. Depending on the individual's progress, the treatment program may be modified along the way, and at each step of the process, the LHBH team goes to great lengths to ensure the physical safety and emotional security of each client.



Children with special needs and other clients visiting LHBH's facilities in Oracle are offered a full range of "Stay and Play" activities. Each activity, whether group or individual, represents a form of equine therapy that targets one or more specific behavioral objectives. These objectives include improved coordination and motor skills, enhanced observational, communication, reading and listening abilities, increased self-confidence and trust, expanded multitasking skills and strengthened connections to the physical world and to other people.

Each year the LHBH team brings joy and happiness to hundreds of seniors confined to nursing homes, assisted living centers, and hospices. In a typical visit, the organizations equine therapists lead the minis from room to room, and residents are able to interact with the horses by petting or cuddling them or simply by observing these gentle creatures, which look like giant stuffed animals that have come to life. The fact that LHBH's therapists are exceptionally empathetic allows them to make each of these interactions a more personalized and beneficial experience. Equine therapy has proven to be a powerful antidote to the feelings of loneliness, dependency, and isolation often experienced by seniors who are unable to live in their own homes or with family members. In the presence of the minis, even patients suffering from dementia tend to be less withdrawn and more in touch with their feelings.



For more information on Little Hooves & Big Hearts and how you can help, visit <http://littlehoovesandbighearts.org>.