

THERAPEUTIC RIDING PROGRAM OF NGO POLITROPO

www.politropo.org/riding_cure_ENGLISH.htm

Description of the Therapeutic Riding (TR) Program

Introduction

The Non Governmental – Non Profitable Organisation (NGO) Politropo materialised in Volos and Nea Ionia, in Magnesia, in central Greece, a pilot program that offered therapeutic riding group sessions to individuals with disability. The programme was free of charge for the adolescents and adults that participated, was part-financed by the European Union (75%) and the Greek Ministry of Employment and Social Protection (25%) – Operational Programme “Employment & Occupational Training” and lasted 1 year. The therapeutic riding programme had the support of the Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece, of the Association of Parents, Friends and Guardians of Disabled People of Magnesia and collaborated with the social services of the Municipalities of Volos and Nea Ionia Magnesias.

Via the present program we offered – for the first time in the region of Volos – a free of charge TR service for 13 adolescents and adults with disability (initially for 10 people entered the programme but 3 of them had to leave due to changes to their life circumstances, and 3 others used their position in the groups).

NGO Politropo made a systematic effort to organize the TR service in a scientific base and with internationally acceptable criteria.

1. Therapeutic Riding and its Usefulness

Therapeutic - educational riding is an internationally recognized educational - therapeutic approach for individuals with mobility, sensory, mental, psychological and psychiatric problems and difficulties.

The introduction of the horse in the treatment and the education of people is not a modern discovery. According to Carol O'Connor, author of the article ‘The Silent Therapist’ (<http://www.catra.net/info/silent.html>), from the 17th century, some German doctors (Gerard van Swieten and Anton de Haen) considered riding as a particularly intensive exercise of body, that acting upon the whole organism, could strengthen and increase its resistance, and act effectively against mental illnesses.

In 1969 Antonius Kroger, a pioneer special education teacher, introduced a new approach, the “therapeutic-educational riding” for children with behavioral disorders, and for children and adolescents with psychological problems. He realised, that with the assistance of the horse he could influence positively the disturbed behavior of these individuals and facilitate their psychomotor development.

Therapeutic riding acts on the joints, the vertebral column, the muscles and the central nervous system that regulates kinetic, sensory, cognitive, psychological and social functions.



The rider with disability adapts the posture of his body, in order to maintain his balance during each step of horse. This almost reflexive reaction to the repeated, three-dimensional oscillations of his trunk, improves his mobility (with regard to his body posture, his balance, his muscular tone and the harmony and symmetry of his movements).

This “dialogue of movements” between horse and rider is a very good psychomotor exercise that cannot be repeated by any machine, no matter how intelligently manufactured it may be. Thus therapeutic riding constitutes a completely distinct opportunity for therapeutic intervention for people with psychomotor difficulties.

Therapeutic riding does not aspire to replace the classic special education, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and psychotherapy but to supplement and combine them effectively. The referral of the rider’s doctor is required for his attendance in the therapeutic riding sessions.

The interaction between horse and human is a unique experience that has attracted public admiration and has been a source of inspiration from ancient times. The myth of centaur was of special importance to the philosophy of this program. The mountain Pilion that lays next to the city of Volos has been regarded from ancient times the home land of the wise centaur Chiron, a peaceful healer and teacher of medicine.

“In contemporary culture, the centaur persists. Its benign character has become established, perhaps mainly because the one characteristic most closely associated with horses is nobility. The “noble horse” is an archetypal concept, and the equine animal often has the capacity to confer that quality upon its human associates. No human-animal relationship is more intimate, both mentally and physically, than that between mount and rider, for the two share an interspecies unity of understanding and kinetic communication that is unparalleled. The centaur figure is holistic, celebrating the oneness and complementariness of the human and equine natures, symbolically merging the physical aspects of being with the mental and spiritual” (Elisabeth Atwood Lawrence, 1994, p. 66)

The centaur figure invites us to reconsider our position in this world, to tame our own fears and to use the wisdom of equines to expand our abilities to relate peacefully with our fellow beings - humans and animals alike – with respect for diversity.

TR capitalizes on this unique horse human interaction and promotes learning and wellbeing for both species. It includes continuous care, training and learning in a three way relationship between horse, TR team and clients.

The client, the horse, the instructor, the horse leader and the side assistants collaborate very closely. Through the interaction with the TR team and the horse (during grooming, exercises and games, recreational walks and discussions), the client develops motor, cognitive, psychological and social resilience. Consequently TR acts as a holistic therapeutic approach.

Our clients described the horse as a “precious friend” and called the TR sessions “lessons”. This name is quite liberating in comparison with the name “therapy” which implies pathology.



2. The TR programme aimed to:

- Help individuals with mental retardation, autism, and related disorders (some of them with mobility problems too), from the region of Volos and Nea Ionia by providing them with the opportunity to participate in weekly group TR sessions,
- Provide information to those who were interested to learn about TR and to help voluntarily,
- Cooperate with the local social services and supplement the services they offered.

3. Training of personnel

The coordinator of the programme Daniil K. Danilopoulos (DD – a child and adolescent psychiatrist), and the secretary of programme, trainer and leader of the therapeutic horses Pinelopi S. Sarafi (PS – a preschooler's teacher), have both been trained as level C (basic) Therapeutic Riding instructors at the Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece and continue their training in riding and in TR in cooperation with their supervisor, Mr Nihad Ibraheem, a clinical psychologist, specialised in TR in Germany.

The horses Markos and Rados belong to Pinelopi and Daniil, are very cooperative, especially trained for TR and their training continues on a regular basis.



4. Timetable of the TR program

Ιαν-Φεβρ-Μάρτ 2007	15 Μαρτίου 2007	Έναρξη προγράμματος
April-May-June 2007	Mid May 2007	<p>Completion of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of selection of the clients • Construction and installation of the special ramp for the mounting of riders with mobility problems and/or horse phobia
	23 May 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of the group TR sessions and continuation on a weekly basis except days with extreme weather (hot or cold) that the activity could not be performed due to the lack of a covered riding arena (the sessions ended with the expiration of the program in mid May 2008) • Materialisation of the TR program
July-August-September 2007	September 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction and installation of the toilet that was fully accessible for disabled people (The expenses for: this toilet, the stabling, the feeding, the veterinary care of horses and for the TR and riding equipment, was all covered personally by DD and PS) • Materialisation of the TR program
October-November-December 2007		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materialisation of the TR program
January-February-March 2008	12 March 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusive meeting of the TR program at the municipal building of Metaxourgeio in Nea Ionia.
	14 March 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expiration of the TR program
April 2008	19 April 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farewell meeting with the program participants and their families at the Riding Club of Magnesia.

5. Selection of the adolescents and adult clients who participated in the TR sessions

The parents/guardians of the adolescents and adults (who attended daycare or/and rehabilitation programmes in 3 centers of the Municipalities of Volos and Nea Ionia) were informed by each centre’s staff about the programme. Those of them who were interested and wanted their child to participate in the TR programme:

- met individually with DD who informed them about the programme and the TR activity, discussed every query they had and gave them a brochure outlining the programme and the benefits of TR. http://www.politropo.org/pdf/info_goneis_therapeftiki_politropo.pdf
- Filled an Application Form for their child’s participation in the TR programme, http://www.politropo.org/pdf/Aitisi_therap_poli.pdf
- They visited their doctor and asked for his opinion and a prescription for the child’s attendance in the TR programme.

In order to restore their safety and protect their health, we excluded from the program:

- Clients with very severe disabilities (ie: quadriplegics) due to the lack (at that stage) of specially trained staff with sufficient working experience
- Clients with epilepsy that was not properly controlled with medication
- Clients with severe cardiac and respiratory problems

6. Dangers and safety measures

In order to protect the rider in case that either the horse was startled or the rider lost their balance, we took the following precautions and safety measures:

- They always wore a special riding helmet,
- They held - when needed – the handles of the special Therapeutic Riding surcingle (gymkhana surcingle) or the handle attached to the front of the saddle – when a saddle was used,
- They always had by their side the TR instructor and - whenever available – a side assistant,
- The activity took place in a properly fenced riding arena that was covered with sand,
- The horses were barefoot (without metallic shoeing) because in the case of a kick or a strike the injury would be much milder,
- The tools and the tack equipment for all TR activities and for the training of horses were in accordance with international safety standards and were used to facilitate horse and rider training with gentle methods and
- A first aid kit was available on site and thankfully there was no need to use it as there were no accidents.



7. Transport and Care of the clients

The TR program participants enjoyed a lot their transportation with the - specifically designed for their needs - buses of the 3 day centers of DOYK and DOKPY (Municipal Organizations for Health and Social Issues of Volos and Nea Ionia) and were escorted and cared for by the staff of these centers.

8. Description of the activity

The riders of the programme participated in weekly group TR sessions. We formed two groups with 5 individuals in each. Both groups were held once a week and each group lasted 2 ½ hours.

As soon as they arrived at the Riding Club of Magnesia we gathered at the yard of the club and then headed to the stables to meet the horses and take them out with us. During this walk, the clients enjoyed very much their contact with nature, with the horses and with other animals (ponies, dogs, cats and chicken).

Then the group members took turns to lead the horses to the area outside the arena. Leading a 1000 pound horse from the ground is an exciting and challenging experience. Each client decided and directed not only his/her steps but the horse's too!

All members were taught horse grooming, principles about communication with horses, safety measures, basic riding skills and participated in games with the horses. Riding was only one part of our program. We placed emphasis in all aspects of the relationship with the horse. Our clients responded to our invitations and displayed great curiosity to learn by using the opportunity to participate in these activities. In every group meeting, with the assistance of the coordinator and the horse's leader, the participants used appropriate tools and helped each other to groom M. and R. This involved brushing their mane, body and tail, cleaning their hooves and then saddling them for riding.

An adolescent with intensely hyperactive behavior managed to slow down by resisting the demands of the 'rush' (that troubled him) in order to avoid scaring Markos during grooming and riding.

By offering this care to each horse, the clients communicated their friendly intentions and compassion and they were amazed by both horses' cooperation! During grooming we hosted conversations about the horse's communication, feelings, sensitivities and needs and this provided the opportunity to discuss about every group members' communication, feelings, sensitivities, needs and actions for the care of themselves and of others.

Hoof care was particularly important. When a horse accepts to allow a human to clean his hooves, it literally surrenders the only defense it has to protect itself from danger because it is a prey animal and flight from danger is the only option for it. The horse displays this kind of willingness to a human only if it entrusts him and feels safe that he won't hurt it.

Hoof care is a trying experience for each client because - independently of their mental and motor capacities - they all recognized the danger involved (to be kicked) and felt fear, but with encouragement and instruction from the staff, they achieved great triumphs over their fear and motor difficulties and this elevated their self confidence.



The brushing of the horse’s mane, body and tail was a pleasant activity for the participants and the horses, a good chance for practicing fine motor skills and a starting point for discussions that acknowledged, validated and reinforced their efforts for self and other care and for independent living.

By offering care to the horse, abilities (that were previously overshadowed by difficulties) emerged and the clients’ role changed. From troubled and disabled people, they were transformed to helpers, partners and strivers.

Following grooming each participant mounted safely on his/her horse with the use of the special ramp or from the ground.

A father was surprised when he heard the instructor asking his son to go to the mounting ramp and wait there. He rushed to help his son, but stopped when he heard ‘He can manage on his own!’ The eighteen year old son moved slowly but skilfully with his wheelchair and then waited for the instructor, the horse leader and the horse to approach the ramp and assist him to mount. The father could not believe what he was seeing... After the session he shared with the team that he was impressed with his son’s cooperation and said that although his son could not remember days and dates, he always mentioned his “riding lesson” from the previous day and was looking forward to it!

Mounting was an entertaining, transforming and provocative experience. It allowed clients to change their observation point: to see the world differently and from a higher level.

Riding and leading the horse with the reins was a difficult and quite complex task. Riders needed to maintain body balance, contain their feelings and communicate with the horse and with the coordinator. The games on horseback with fruits, balls, buckets etc. were especially entertaining!

Trotting with the horse was very exciting and entertaining and also assisted the improvement of body balance, self control, rhythm awareness, physical strength and endurance. An adolescent enjoyed singing “Hands up and I reach everything, lets go higher than love” (M. Chatzigiannis, 2006) every time he trotted with Markos.

The clients dismounted from the horse with or without the use of the ramp. A young woman with moderate mobility difficulties and mental retardation made an enormous effort to override the fear and the balance instability that troubled her and finally managed to mount and ride Markos. When she dismounted after the first session she said “I am a grown up now”!

Towards the end of the group session riders shared and offered by hand a small quantity of fruits to the horse as a return for the pleasure and cooperation they received. Careful horse feeding facilitated the riders risk taking management capacities and the group cohesion. The members of one group were especially supportive to an adolescent who feared he would be bitten by the horse and he managed to feed M. by hand in most sessions!

During the sessions we included each client’s idiosyncratic and favorite expressions in our discussions and joined the clients who spontaneously sang their favorite songs during the activity and sung with them. We also participated in a client’s favorite dialogues from a traditional shadow puppet theater (Karagkiozis). He was very talented in acting such roles and we validated and reinforced his efforts for a show that he wanted to organize. A few months later he gave his show in a local university lecture hall with great success!



We also tried to synchronize our body language with that of our horses and clients. One client with autism who spoke very rarely, after a few sessions started to whisper ‘let’s go’ to prompt Markos to start walking.

In one occasion Rados was startled by something and made an abrupt side movement, but he quickly calmed down. Although the young man who was riding him was very scared, he managed to stay mounted. After this incident he wrote on a white board “Today I overcame fear” and smiled while a volunteer took a picture of him and Rados. He often used to say with pride “You are my brother Rados”!

At some point Rados became sick with a severe limb infection and we had to stop riding him and to provide care for him. The clients’ interest, care and compassion for him were quite moving! They grabbed the chance to provide help and with their care, devotion and respect they entered the helper’s role.

9. Information on the TR program and follow-up

The coordinator was giving feedback to the parents /guardians about their child’s participation in the TR programme in person or by phone.

The parents /guardians could watch the activity but without intervening to the work of the TR team (coordinator, leader of the horse, horse and side helper). They had the opportunity to discuss with the team after the therapeutic riding group session.

The program participants, their relatives, every interested professional and the public could all be informed about the evolution of the TR programme, about issues regarding disability, mental health and TR, by visiting the web site of Politropo: http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure.htm

10. The web site

The web site was created in May of 2007 and was continuously updated with the addition of texts, photographs, essays, articles, references, bibliography and links. It was created in order to contribute to:

- inform and attract public and special-interest group attention on the usefulness of TR,
- the development of TR and to the official state recognition of TR as an effective alternative holistic educational and therapeutic approach in Greece,

Within a year the web site became the most important source of information on the internet on TR (in the Greek language).

Up to April 2009 it attracted more than 2000 visits (hits) and contains (a – d):

a. Photographs

- Photographs of the horses that were used in the programme:
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album-2.htm



- Photographs from the construction, transport and placement of the ramp for the mounting of the riders who need it: http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album3.htm
- Photographs from the construction, transport and placement of a toilet that is suitable for use by people with mobility problems: http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album5wc.htm
- Photographs of the installations: http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_setting.htm
- Horse training photographs: http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album6%20training.htm
- Photographs from TR sessions:
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album7therapy1.htm
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album7therapy2.htm
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_album7therapy3.htm

IMPORTANT NOTE: All information, photographs and video of our clients on the website and in this edition are presented with the written informed consent of their parents/guardians. We omitted pictures of 2 clients whose parents did not give us their permission and we only gave copies to them.

- Photographs of tools we use (Grooming tools, Tack equipment, Therapeutic Riding tools, Horse training tools): http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_TOOLS.htm

b. Sample publications

- An article about the programme from the local newspaper Thessalia (in greek)
www.politropo.org/riding_cure_pub_thessalia.htm
- A downloadable powerpoint presentation (in greek) on the the evolution of horsemanship throughout history and on the evolution of TR.
www.politropo.org/pdf/HORSES_AND_PEOPLE.ppt

c. Essays, Texts and Articles

About Educational-Therapeutic Riding

- 'Therapeutic -Educational Riding' – PS's final essay (in greek) from her training as a level C TR instructor at The Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece,
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_sarafi.htm
- 'Equine Assisted Psychotherapy' - DD's final essay (in greek) from his training as a level C TR instructor at The Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece,
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_danilopoulos.htm
- 'No pretension of being cured' - Article by Michaela Scheidhacker, translated in greek by PS,
<http://www.politropo.org/pdf/Oxi%20prospoiisi%20oti%20Qerapevontai.pdf> and,
- 'THE HORSE: Real Relational object and archetypal symbol - Article by M. Scheidhacker translated in greek by DD <http://www.politropo.org/pdf/M%20SCHEIDHACKER.pdf>

About disability

- 'Attitudes And Biases around disability', article by DD, in greek*,
http://www.politropo.org/pdf/Staseis_kai_prokatalipsis_apananti_stin_anapiria.pdf
- 'Disability: Definitions and Social Dimensions'*



- http://www.politropo.org/pdf/anapiria_orismoι_kai_koinoniki_diastasi.pdf
- 'The family with a disabled person as a system'*
http://www.politropo.org/pdf/H_oikogeneia_AMEA_ws_synthma.pdf.pdf
- 'Interdisciplinary intervention in the service of people with disability'*
http://www.politropo.org/pdf/diepistimoniki_paremvasi_stin_anapiria.pdf
- 'The Developing Mind' short excerpts from Dr Daniel Siegel's revolutionary book, translated in greek by DD, http://www.politropo.org/pdf/H_anaptissomeni_noisi.pdf
- 'It's You I Like', a moving article by Fred Rogers translated in greek by DD,
http://www.politropo.org/pdf/ena_lepto_siwpis.pdf

About horses and horsemanship

- 'Monty Roberts' Ideas for Life', short excerpts from Monty Roberts' inspiring book, translated in greek by DD, http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_Monty%20Roberts.htm
- 'Prayer of a horse', poem by anonymous poet, translated in greek by DD,
<http://www.politropo.org/pdf/horse%20poem.pdf>
- Bibliographic references (for books, articles, and web sites etc, in english and greek, selected by DD and PP) for information on riding, horse care, horse training and therapeutic riding:
<http://www.politropo.org/pdf/bibliography.pdf>

d. Links

With greek and international web sites about disability, riding, therapeutic riding, riding as a sport for disabled people, and also links with the web pages of some famous horse trainers:

In Greek:

- http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_sweden.htm
- <http://www.disabled.gr/lib/?cat=1>
- <http://www.esaea.gr>
- http://www.trag.gr/default_gr.htm
- http://www.fa3.gr/eidiki_agogi/sports-in-elepap.htm
- http://www.kathimerini.gr/4dcqi/w_articles_kathcommon_2_09/04/2004_1282811
- <http://www.horse.gr/pgeDynamic.asp?SelectMenu=Articles&CategoryID=25>
- <http://www.paralympic.gr/index.php?lang=gr&sec=1&ctq=36&cid=37>
- <http://www.aspergerhellas.org>
- <http://clubs.pathfinder.gr/aloga>

In English:

- <http://www.frdi.net>
- <http://www.ghrk.just.nu>
- <http://www.an-design.se/irt/info.htm>
- <http://www.pegasuseurope.be>
- http://intra.org.il/articles.php?tPath=15_46_73
- <http://www.fund4horses.org/info.php?id=647>
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/allinthemind_20051220.shtml



- <http://www.shhrc.org>
- <http://www.worldhorses.co.uk/systems.htm>
- <http://www.equineassistedtherapy.org.uk>
- http://www.hippotherapy.ru/english/references_materials/index.shtml
- <http://www.narha.org>
- <http://www.catra.net>
- <http://www.wayofthehorse.org>
- <http://www.ttouch.com>
- <http://www.centeredriding.org>
- <http://www.montyroberts.com>
- <http://www.parelli.com>

11. The people who helped in the TR program

This programme would have been impossible to exist without the priceless and precious contribution of the following people:

Professionals:

George Stylas, Mina Styla, Apostolos Loumbrinos, Kostas Koukouvinos & Vangelis Vompras.

Staff of DOKPY-Municipal Organisation for Social Intervention & Health of the Municipality of Nea Ionia Magnesias:

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12. Publicity

Within the context of the publicity of this TR programme, and in addition to the web site and several publications, the team of people at Politropo produced:

1. A leaflet titled: “Therapeutic Riding”
http://www.politropo.org/images/riding_cure/publicity/fylladio%20final.JPG
2. A poster titled: “Trust overtakes fear: Therapeutic Riding Programme for Troubled People”
http://www.politropo.org/images/riding_cure/publicity/afissa.JPG
3. A CD for use with a pc which contains the above mentioned powerpoint presentation titled: “Horses and People”
4. A DVD which contains a presentation of the Therapeutic Riding Programme of the NGO Politropo in the local (Volos) television channel ASTRA TV programme “Discussions with experts”, that took place on Thursday 21/02/2008” (duration: 40 '),
5. A DVD with the actions of the TR programme in the form of a short film that was presented in the conclusive Meeting of the TR programme that was organized by NGO Politropo on Wednesday 12/03/2008 (duration: 12 ') and took place at Metaxourgeio centre of the Municipality of Nea Ionia. This film can also be viewed by the web site visitors at:
http://www.politropo.org/riding_cure_ENGLISH.htm and also at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-PHqKZ_bUo
6. A DVD which contains recordings from the conclusive Meeting (duration: 90')

13. The conclusive Meeting of the TR programme

The publicity and public sensitization actions began with the creation of the web site, continued with press publications, with the targeted-to-the-interested groups distribution of the poster (special education, municipal agencies for disabled people, Department for Special and Preschool Education of the University of Thessaly, etc), with the programme presentation in the local TV programme, with the production of the leaflet and ended with the conclusive meeting of the TR programme that was organized by NGO Politropo on Wednesday 12/03/2008 and took place at Metaxourgeio centre of the Municipality of Nea Ionia. This centre is fully accessible for disabled people.

The interested professionals and members of the public were informed and invited to the meeting by press announcements and also by personal mail or e-mail invitations.

The meeting was attended by more than 70 individuals. Everyone was given a file which contained a copy of the meeting timetable, a TR leaflet, a notepad, a pen and, a feedback form for their evaluation of the programme and of the meeting.

Of the 70 meeting attendees, 65 wished to be informed for future actions and programs of Politropo regarding the evolution of Therapeutic Riding and other social care activities.



The first part of the meeting:

- started with the registration of the participants,
- then Mrs Dimitra Karouzaki, President of the Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece, spoke about the history and evolution of TR in Greece,
- Mr Nikos Antonakis, sociologist and social worker, founding member of Politropo, followed and reviewed the activities of Politropo and reflected on the results of the TR programme
- the first part of the meeting was completed with DD’s presentation of the above mentioned 12’ film.

During the break the attendees of the meeting had the opportunity to:

- see many pictures from the sessions that were exposed at the entrance of the building,
- enjoy a light buffet and refreshments and
- socialise by discussing their opinions and impressions.

The second part of the meeting:

- Started with a 35 min detailed audiovisual presentation by DD of the aims, ways and effects of TR as a holistic approach, of the work done during the programme, and of future possibilities locally and nationally,
- Continued by Mr Nihad Ibraheem, (clinical psychologist, Therapeutic Riding Instructor) who presented with audiovisual material good TR practices in Greece and internationally,
- Then Mr George Stylos, the chairman of the Riding Club of Magnesia, where the TR programme was materialized, offered his opinion and support with a short and vibrant talk.
- The mother of a programme participant, and representative of the Association of Parents, Guardians and Friends of Disabled People of Magnesia, moved everyone present with her personal account of her son’s relationship with horses and their positive influence in his life and behaviour. She said she thought that “centaurs existed in reality and that they were wise paraplegics who were capable of achieving the horse’s cooperation to the point that it laid down to assist them to mount and then stood up and they walked in unity”. She has been the most dedicated supporter of TR because she wants her son to “walk with the horses legs”!
- And the meeting ended with a lively discussion about conclusions, prospects and the next objectives for the continuation, financing and development of TR in the region of Magnesia and in Greece.

In summary, the pilot TR programme of Politropo:

- was – for the first time in Greece – part financed by European Union (75%) and the Greek Ministry of Employment and Social Protection (25%) and lasted 1 year,



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- was a pilot program that offered free of charge therapeutic riding sessions to 13 individuals with disability, for the first time in central Greece,
- had the support of the Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece, of the Association of Parents, Friends and Guardians of Disabled People of Magnesia and collaborated with the Social Services of the Municipalities of Volos and New Ionia, in Magnesia, in central Greece.
- contributed to the local social economy by providing: a) employment for one person (PS), and with the assistance of the team, b) education and therapeutic help for the 13 participants.
- contributed to the development and recognition of Therapeutic Riding as a holistic educational-therapeutic approach and in Greece by providing the first systematically organized and systemically oriented paradigm of it's application in Magnesia.

The meeting was co-organized by Politropo and the following:

- Association of Parents, Friends and Guardians of Disabled People of Magnesia
- Municipalities of Volos, Nea Ionia and Esonia
- Prefecture of Magnesia

The responses of the audience were very positive and the comments of parents, professionals and programme participants were enthusiastic.

The meeting attendees rated very positively TR and the TR programme. They all believed that it is positive to continue the activity and most of them wanted to be updated for developments around TR.

14. Completion of the TR program

After the expiration of the programme we organized a farewell meeting with the program participants and their families on Saturday, 19th of April 2008 at the Riding Club of Magnesia.

In this meeting, Daniil and Pinelopi offered to each programme participant:

- One album with 20 printed photographs from their sessions,
- One DVD with the 12 min presentation in the form of a film,
- One CD with more photographs and videos, and
- One color printed certificate
http://www.politropo.org/images/riding_cure/publicity/sample%20certificate.JPG

The parents/ guardians were invited, to express (verbally and by using a feedback form) their opinions on, evaluation of and thoughts about their child's attendance to the TR programme. Most of them expressed their wish for continuation of the TR programme and for an increase of the sessions' frequency and duration, because they were pleased with the results. This is shown by



their documented evaluation of the positive effects that they saw especially in their child's: learning skills, mobility, mood, social skills, behavior and relationships.

Up to May of 2008 the efforts of Politropo had attracted enough public attention and there were links (that referred to the web site of the TR programme) in the following 6 Greek web sites:

www.e-horse.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=444&Itemid=35

<http://www.horse.gr/pgeDynamic.asp?SelectMenu=Articles&ArticleID=934&CategoryID=25>

<http://www.specialeducation.gr/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=542>

<http://www.volos-city.gr/ecportal.asp?id=19735&nt=103>

<http://indiannaspiritfarm.forumup.gr/post-4740-indiannaspiritfarm.html>

http://www.taxydromos.gr/article_detail.asp?node_serial=001001&node_id=2&article_id=9071

15. Reflections on the philosophy, application and results of the TR programme

The TR programme of Politropo was designed and materialized with the following criteria:

- To provide equal opportunities in education, therapy, sports and entertainment for people who are troubled with mental retardation, autism, mobility or multiple problems,
- To provide comfortable and safe access to the spaces and installations for individuals with motor, mental, communication and sensory problems (in our area there is no other riding facility that is accessible for disabled people),
- To provide an activity that was friendly for the environment, for people and for horses,
- To facilitate the social integration of the participants with their attendance to the TR sessions and with their contact with the TR program staff, the members and visitors of the Riding Club of Magnesia and the horses,
- To help change the way the participants and the people in their environment (relatives, professionals, etc) viewed and described themselves, and to facilitate the re-authoring of the history of their lives and of their relationships. The purpose was to challenge the dominant descriptions 'isolated', 'problematic', 'disadvantaged', 'disabled' etc, and to facilitate the emergence of new descriptions like 'participants', 'collaborators', 'friends', 'helpers', 'strivers', 'horsemen', and 'horsewomen'.
- These new descriptions / stories / narratives were strengthened with the documentation and certification of the participant's effort with a) a change in the language that we used to describe them and that they used to describe themselves and b) and with photographs, videos, certificates, publications, etc.



- These documented proofs of their effort formed a deposit for recollections of unique life outcomes and an opening for the recognition and utilization of other unique abilities and efforts that occur in the daily life of the participants.

All the above constituted an innovatory pilot programme with a lot of respect for diversity and a holistic effort, which was warmly welcomed by the participants, by their families, by mental health, education and social services professionals and by the sensitized and interested public.

16. Therapeutic Riding as a form of Social Economy

The TR program includes conditions for the development of new forms of employment within the frame of the Third sector.

TR was offered as a specialized service to troubled and disabled people, and to their families. Hence, this process presupposes functions such as social solidarity and holistic systems regarding management of the activity. Certainly, the offer of TR services can also function in the private economy or in the public systems of organization services.

However, for two basic reasons, it appears that this activities belong - at least as an initiative, in the economic space that characterizes the third sector:

- Its innovative character, and the action flexibility, impede the undertaking of such activities from the public sector,
- The holistic character of the activity and the added value of social solidarity that is required do not constitute suitable conditions for investment from the private sector.

A TR service may create posts for a series of new professions (following specialized training for TR) like:

- Horse leaders
- Grooms
- Activity organizers
- Animators
- Physiotherapists, Occupational therapists, Psychologists, Riding Instructors, etc.

17. Goals for further development of Therapeutic Riding in Magnesia and in Greece

The foundation and operation of a Therapeutic Riding Centre with specifically designed installations:

- A riding arena with a rooftop will allow the performance of the sessions independently of weather conditions,
- A large room will be very useful for warming-up and exercises,
- A special lift will allow the comfortable mounting of people with serious mobility problems,
- The use of a mechanical horse may facilitate the warming-up of riders with increased spasticity and the familiarization and habituation of riders who suffer with horse or other animal phobias,



- With the use of a big, fenced paddock where the horses will be able to move and interact freely, they will have a much better social organization and psychology in contrast with closed spaces ('boxes'),
- The specific TR training of locally bred horses (Thessalian horses, Skyrian ponies) and their use in TR facilitates their survival and the use of the TR service by more individuals who may need it.

The foundation and operation of a Therapeutic Riding Centre with the above facilities:

- May become possible with the collaboration between private individuals, the local Prefecture, Municipalities, Education and Association of Parents, Friends and Guardians of Disabled People of Magnesia,
- May contribute to training and to the creation of job opportunities: secretary, groom, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, etc, and some of them may be disabled themselves,
- May contribute to the training of more professionals in Therapeutic Riding and to its recognition as a holistic therapeutic approach so that it is prescribed and its cost covered by health insurance (as it is in many European and other countries),
- May constitute a continuation of the connection with the local tradition and a practical application of the philosophy about education and health that is expressed from antiquity through the myth of Centaurs

Daniil, Pinelopi and the members and friends of Politropo continue their efforts to contribute to the above goals and thank everyone who assisted in the materialisation of the Therapeutic Riding program and also you for your interest.

18. Communication

If you would like to share your thoughts and/or learn more about:

- Politropo - you may contact Nikos Antonakis: antonakis.nikos@gmail.com
- Therapeutic Riding - you may contact Daniil K. Danilopoulos: daniildan@gmail.com

