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Horses help therapy patients at this Norco nonprofit

Leaps & Bounds Pediatric Therapy is planning for its upcoming annual 'Fall Fest'



Founder Dr. Cassandra Sanders-Holly works with patient Julian Madray on core strength and balance during a physical therapy session. Horse handler Nikolas Gustin and unidentified volunteer help facilitate the session. (Courtesy of Leaps & Bounds Pediatric Therapy)

By **REBECCA K. O'CONNOR** | Inland Empire Community Foundation

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Leaps & Bounds Pediatric Therapy Inc. provides physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy for children in the Inland Empire.

The Norco nonprofit was founded in 2010 by Dr. Cassandra Sanders-Holly.

In addition to services such as evaluation, consultation, treatment, home and school program activities, the organization offers hippotherapy. This specialized therapy utilizes the movement, rhythm, and repetition of horses to help clients with neuromuscular dysfunction gain strength and improved motor skills.



Occupational therapy patient Jesse Reidman develops fine motor skills while sitting backward on the horse. Occupational therapy sessions often utilize small toys or objects to develop hand strength while providing multiple stimuli for the patient to increase concentration. (Courtesy of Leaps & Bounds Pediatric Therapy)

Hippotherapy can be life changing, according to Sanders-Holly. Rather than teaching a child to ride a horse, they are teaching them to improve fine motor skills while sitting and language skills while talking to the horse.

“A lot of people ask why hippotherapy is so effective,” said Sanders-Holly “It’s because it’s intense. There are 3,000 balance challenges in just 30 minutes on a horse. We get a lot done in a short amount of time.”

The therapy is utilized for patients with a range of needs including those with cerebral palsy, missing limbs, spinal cord injuries, blindness and autism. Since



“We have a 16-year-old client with Downs Syndrome,” Sanders-Holly said. “When we asked what her favorite thing about the program was, she just beamed and said that she finally has friends. People can feel comfortable with themselves and make friends. That’s what every child wants to do.”



Abby Elfelt participates in adaptive riding to maintain muscle tone, flexibility, mobility, and posture while learning recreational horsemanship. (Courtesy of Leaps & Bounds Pediatric Therapy)

The cost of hippotherapy can be a barrier to many families with children in need. It can be costly. Medical insurance often only covers a portion of the cost. Friends of Leaps & Bounds Pediatric Therapy Inc, 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit corporation was founded in partnership with Leaps & Bounds to meet these needs. The organization helps to cover the remaining costs of therapy, keeping it low or no cost for those in need.

Recently, Friends of Leaps & Bounds received a grant from the Fred Stebler and Eva V. Stebler Foundation Fund through the [Inland Empire Community Foundation](#) to support its equine therapy. Friends of Leaps & Bounds also helps with the expense of caring for the horses. The program has 16 horses and the care and feeding of each costs \$6,000 a year, not including the expense of staff. The organization welcomes community support.

From 3 to 7 p.m. on Oct. 23, Friends of Leaps & Bounds will host its annual “Fall Fest: An Event for Individuals of all Abilities” at 4211 Valley View Ave., Norco. This



During the annual event, their campus is transformed into an activities center, with a pumpkin patch, pony rides, petting zoo, inflatables, games, live music, food and beverages and demonstrations from the California Highway Patrol and area fire departments. Admission is \$10 for ages 16 and older, \$5 for ages 5 to 15, and children 4 and under are free. Pony rides and food are available for an additional cost. The event also includes a fundraising chili and cornbread contest. Tickets and information are available on the organization's website.

“Coming to our fall festival is a great way to get involved or to volunteer with us,” Sanders-Holly said. “We are always looking for volunteers.”

Information: <https://leapsandboundspediatrictherapy.org/> or 951-339-3510

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