

Written by Peter and his Mom, Peggy.

Peter has been riding since he was three years old. We used to live in New Mexico and when we returned to Canada, he started riding at Pride Stables. That was five years ago when he was seven years old.

Peter will be 13 in January and he has cerebral palsy. It affects mainly his leg muscles, left arm, balance and speech. Incredibly, he often sits better on the horse than he does in his wheelchair!

The heat and movement of the horse allows a fantastic stretch of Peter's inner thighs in a way that you can't duplicate with passive physical therapy. A weekly hour on a horse seems equal to a daily stretching regime that would be boring and painful. We've done that. We stretch while trying to maintain Peter's interest and good spirits. We sing, count in various languages, tell jokes and stories, and listen to music. It sure is a lot of work in comparison to an enjoyable, fun ride on his horse, Flicker. The day after he rides, I can "feel" the difference in the tightness of his muscles. Riding loosens up his stiffness.

The volunteers are so friendly and personable that Peter anticipates his riding lessons and looks forward to chatting with the volunteers. He finds out all about them and shares his personality with them every week. They are one of the best things about the program. The volunteers and organization of this riding program are wonderful. The consistency of volunteer support for riders like Peter is crucial. Pride Stables is super at retaining volunteers over many sessions.

For a child like Peter, whose speech is difficult to understand until you are familiar with him, this is valuable. He can look forward to interacting socially with his "favourite" volunteers every week. As well, they get to know him well enough to see beyond his disability and speech to his optimistic and fun-loving personality.

I hesitate to name any specific volunteers because we have had so many wonderful people working with Peter over the years. I don't want to miss any one of them. The bottom line is that Peter loves riding mostly because of his wonderful volunteers.

I think riding gives Peter a sense of self-esteem that he can do things other kids don't do. Peter also downhill skis. I try to let other people know that he does these activities because it opens their eyes to the fact that he is able to do cool stuff too. All too often in life the disabled are seen as "unable" when in reality, it just means "differently able".

"I like the horses and the riding and the volunteers especially," says Peter. This doesn't really capture his excitement and joy at going horseback riding. He positively squeals with glee! If you could only see him on a horse...