

Three Gaits Video Script

We're here to continue a 26 year old dream. This dream began in 1983 when 8 riders participated in a summer pilot program. Little did the original founders of Three Gaits know that their vision would grow into a vital community organization that improves the lives of more than 300 people each year.

“Three Gaits is an incredible, valuable, unique service for children with disabilities and I give it my full endorsement!” Dr. Deborah McLeish, MD UW Health Pediatric Rehabilitation Specialist

When Three Gaits began there weren't a lot of opportunities for individuals with special needs to become involved in recreational sports and activities. The goal of starting this program was simply to provide horseback riding lessons for individuals with disabilities. 26 years later Three Gaits does so much more than just offer horseback riding lessons. Four programs, under the umbrella of equine assisted activities are now offered. We consider every rider to be an individual and strive to help them achieve their goals. Those goals range from strengthening core muscles needed for walking to building the confidence needed to increase self-esteem.

“I just want to live at Three Gaits.”

The largest of the four programs offered at Three Gaits is our therapeutic riding program. Under seven NARHA certified riding instructors, weekly lessons allow riders to progress horsemanship skills such as steering, trotting, cantering, or walking through fields. But as every horse person knows the skills learned from the back of a horse carry to all areas of life outside of the arena as well.

One parent comments, “My son has always struggled in school. Not with his academics, but his ability to fit in. He doesn't have the social skills needed to make and maintain friends; it has been a constant battle in his life. My heart broke when he came home from 2nd grade in tears because he couldn't figure out why he was excluded. It was at that point that I knew I needed to find an activity in which he could experience success. After his first riding lesson at Three Gaits, I knew his giant smile was an indicator that we'd found something that would work. After his first ten lessons, I knew we were hooked! He's now been riding for 5 ½ years and in that time his confidence has skyrocketed. He's excited that he can ride horses and tells other kids that this is very special for him. He's also met a few friends at lessons, for which he is very grateful. We love Three Gaits!”

“After a month at pre-school and Three Gaits, our daughter ditched her walker and began walking on her own.”

For riders who have very specific therapy goals we are able to offer our hippotherapy program. Three Gaits is proud to have two excellent occupational therapists who, partnered with our four-legged equine friends, incorporate the goals of occupational therapy into an experience that no one would believe is actually therapy.

Serving clients as young as two as well as adults, hippotherapy at Three Gaits is always an adventure. Exploring imaginary worlds filled with polka-dotted dinosaurs on a magic carpet ride, to kneeling or even standing on the back of a moving horse – you never know what you'll see during a “typical” hippotherapy session at Three Gaits.

“I didn't think this could be as much fun as riding!”

Three Gaits driving program, established in the fall of 2008, provides a fantastic opportunity for people with disabilities to explore another avenue of horses without sitting atop the horse. From behind Three Gaits' endearing and adorable driving horse Nora, drivers are able to experience the full gamut of challenges and obstacles. Drivers benefit physically as well as emotionally. The joy spending a beautiful sunny afternoon, enjoying nature, driving down a grassy path is pure freedom.

“My best friends are at Three Gaits!”

Three Gaits day camp programs serve more than 70 riders each summer. With camps for younger children between the ages of 6 and 9, or youth from 10 to 13, Three Gaits' day camps are built upon the foundation of inclusiveness. Including children with special needs along side children who are typically developing, day camps at Three Gaits allow children to be children as they learn valuable lessons like “everyone is important” and “everyone has a voice that needs to be heard”. Beginning each day, campers spend time learning to care for horses as they groom and tack prior to their riding lessons. During un-mounted activity time you'll find kids giving the horses baths on warm, sunny days and playing team-building games after lunch.

“This is the highlight of my week!”

Not one of the four programs offered at Three Gaits would be possible without the contributions of volunteers. Last year Three Gaits volunteers shared more than 11,000 hours...That's more than 30 volunteer hours each day. There is nothing Three Gaits volunteers can't or won't do. From serving on committees to trudging through snow to catch the last horse in the paddock, or running alongside a trotting horse for yet another lap to allow a rider to practice their skills – Volunteers are able to make everything possible!

One of Three Gaits volunteers shared his experience: “For about 10 years, Three Gaits was the place where my wife Bev went every Thursday, giving me a guilt-free day of golf or napping, depending on the season. Over the years I'd heard some stories about the kids and the horses and other events at Three Gaits, but I didn't really grasp what it was all about. Finally, curiosity got the best of me and I asked if anyone could show up and volunteer. Just like that I was hooked.

I came to Three Gaits that first day with no experience with horses beyond picking losers in horse races and admiring them in pastures. My familiarity with kids with special needs was at about the same level. Together, they are a powerful force. From a volunteer's perspective it is tremendously rewarding to see kids' confidence grow from week to week as they learn riding skills. You see kids who will barely talk to you in September telling long-winded stories in December. It's way cool. “

“Altogether, the riders, horses and the people involved make Three Gaits a tremendous experience.”