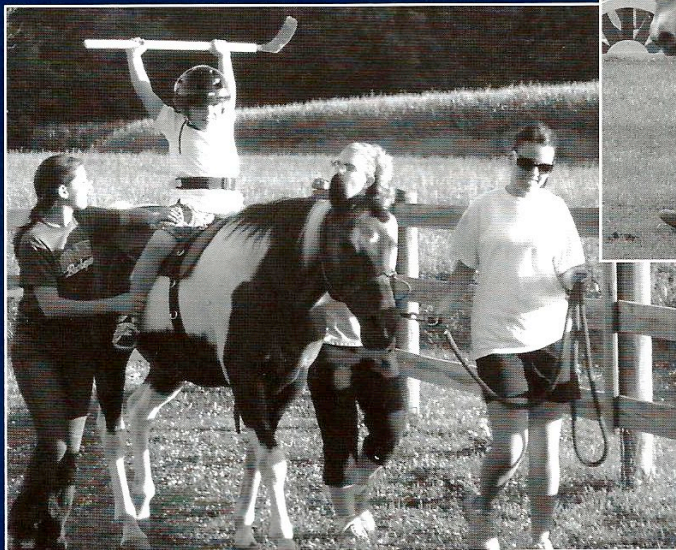


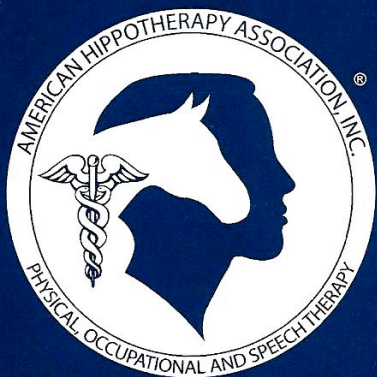
HIPPO THERAPY



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"Treatment with the Help of the Horse"

AMERICAN HIPPO THERAPY ASSOCIATION, INC.



Triangle Therapy Services Finds its Own Corner of the World

By E. Jeanni Bonine, OTR/L, HPCS and Margie Bengé, OTR/L, HPCS

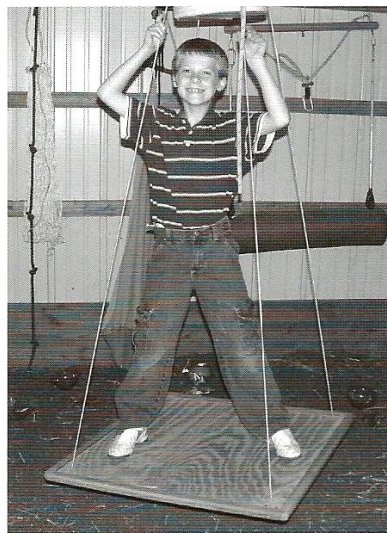
This last May, I attended the AHA international conference in St. Louis. I was charged at the conference to make connections and gather information on reimbursement stories and other information to share with our readership. This in mind, I attended one particular breakout session highlighting several different types of business models that can be used for practices incorporating hippotherapy. As I was listening to the wide range of presenters, I was intrigued by the many different business models represented in the panel; for profit center-based, non-profit center-based, private practice in various scenarios, etc. I felt as though it represented how therapists are practicing across the nation. Looking back, I realized that in HIPPOThERAPY magazine we have primarily

featured center-based practices and in reality there are many other models used. In this article, I will be focusing on a therapist-owned private practice. In that same breakout session, I happened to be grouped with Margie Bengé, OTR/L, HPCS. In talking with her, I felt inspired hearing about her successful private practice and how it embodied all of the ideals of applying hippotherapy in a truly comprehensive manner and accessing the variety of resources available in the non-traditional environment. Being at the beginning of my own journey in private practice and speaking with a clinician as well versed and experienced as Margie gave me confidence that this type of model can be successful and fulfilling. I found this experience so beneficial and inspiring that I wanted to share her story with you!



Margie's moving journey to hippotherapy is best described in her own words:

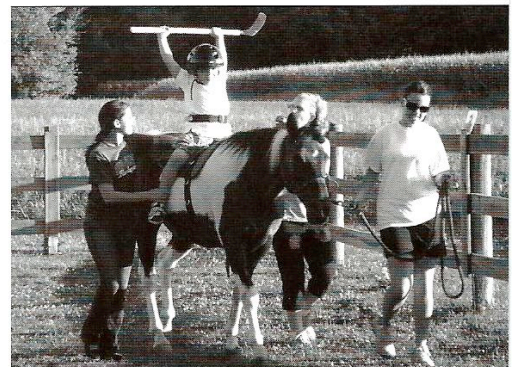
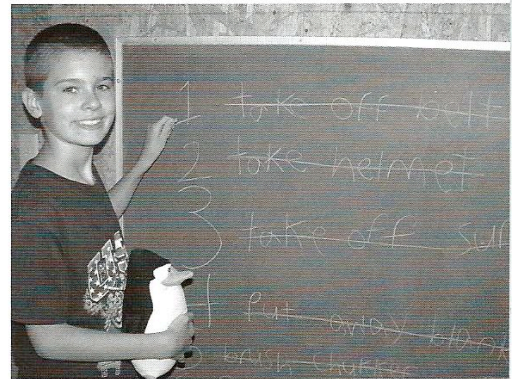
I had always wanted to do something with horses (It was my childhood passion) but between husband's career, kids, move, etc. there never seemed to be time to pursue something else. Prior to my current practice,, I worked in the states of Michigan, Oregon, and Ohio in adult rehab: acute care, rehab, skilled care, and home health. I also taught in an OTA program for 5 years. When I was 36, my mom was killed in a car accident. Besides being devastating, it was a wake up call that "life is short" and I needed to pursue my dreams. I took a job in the schools to start learning the world of pediatrics (yes, you can change areas successfully mid-life). As I was working in the schools, I started the coursework to get my adaptive riding instructor credentials and AHA training for hippotherapy. It took a long time to fit it around everyone else's schedules (a working mom's lifelong dilemma) but slowly I did it. I got experience working and volunteering on the boards for TRI (Therapeutic Riding Institute of Dayton) and CRH (Cincinnati Riding for the Handicapped). In 1998, my father also died. We decided to move "home" and keep the 20 acres of land where I was raised. In doing so, I needed to find work in a rural area with few



opportunities for therapy employment. With much trepidation and prayer, I decided to create my own job. Thus, Triangle Therapy Services, was born. The name was symbolic: for the trinity (to give me the strength to do this)and two interlocking triangles for the land passing from one generation to the next. The land is also coincidentally in the shape of a triangle. I attended several business courses (including AHA's), bought books, and jumped in.

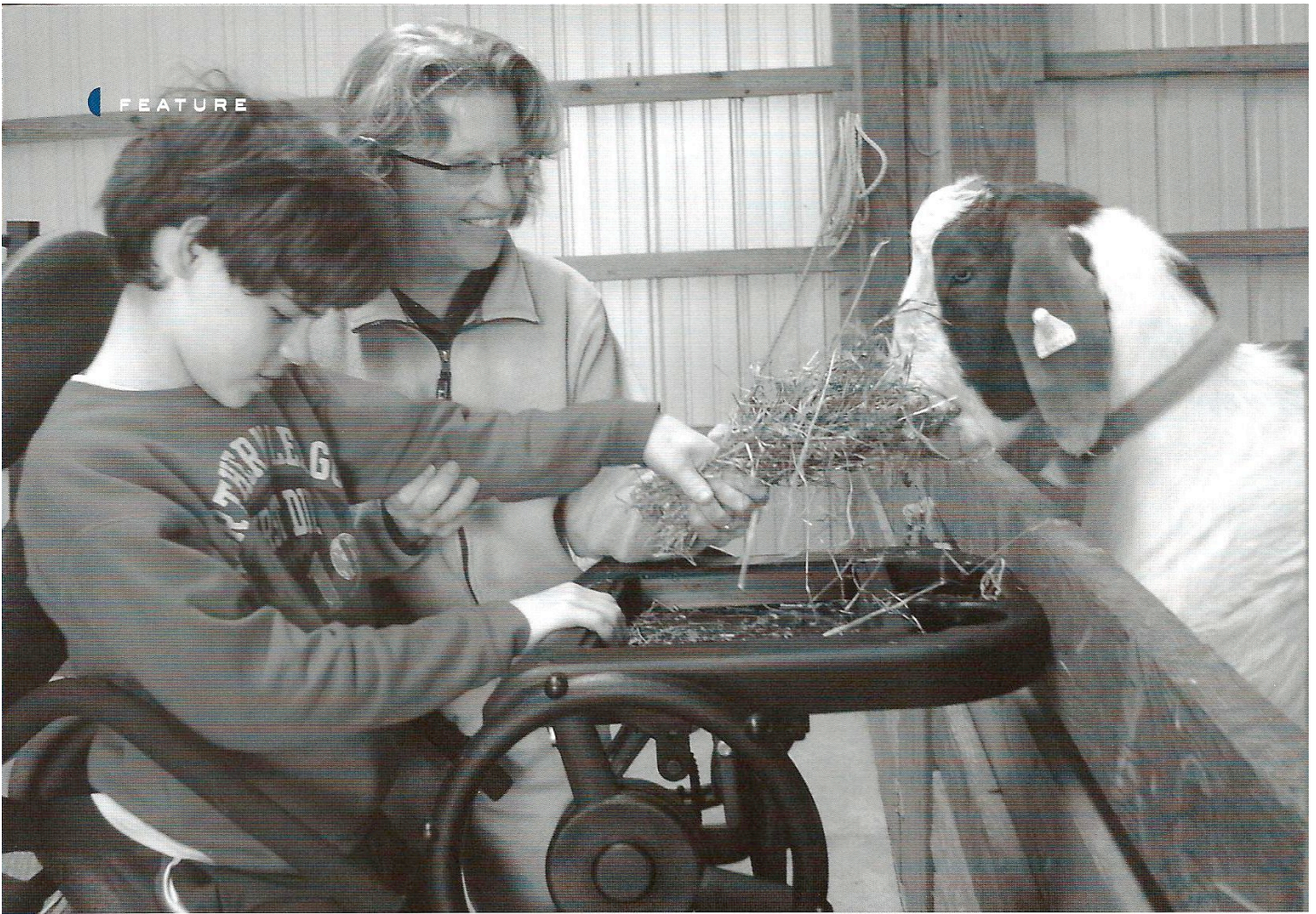
Triangle Therapy Services is located at Margie's home on 20 acres in Eaton, OH. Together, with Michele Gething, CCC/SLP, they serve approximately 40 clients per week. They are open year round with the exception of school holidays at which time the facility is closed. Triangle Therapy follows a transdisciplinary model in which therapists coordinate on all their clients to ensure that their treatment compliments and supports each other's goals. Margie states that working closely with speech therapy under this model has greatly expanded her treatment skills as an OT. They offer private occupational and speech therapy services as well as treatment using hippotherapy, daycamps, and agency subcontracting. Triangle Therapy Services receives its reimbursement through insurance

FEATURE
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billing, private pay, and agency contracts.

Treatment incorporating hippotherapy is offered in spring, summer and fall and is open to approximately 7-13 clients per 8 week session. These sessions make up approximately 20% of the practice. The clients who receive hippotherapy as a part of their treatment plan generally are already receiving services, and have been determined to be appropriate by the treating therapist. Those clients then shift their current treatment plan into



the arena; goals are not changed but simply addressed in a different treatment setting. If additional hippotherapy spots are available, services are opened up to outside clients during the summer following evaluation for appropriateness.

Margie employs two part time speech therapists, one part-time OT, and two horse handlers. She shares that PT is not an intentional omission but has not been possible to add due to limited treatment space. Seasonally, she hires a recreational therapist that leads a summer autism camp and an educator that leads a speech enrichment group. Margie states the following regarding her supervisory style, “My style is to hire excellent therapists who are trustworthy and share my philosophy. Then I allow them to set their own schedules, work around their families, and be independent. Hopefully, this compensates for less pay than would be made at a larger facility.” In addition to staff, extensive volunteers are used for sidewalking and for aides during camps as well as OT and OTA students during their clinical rotations. Other than a volunteer that cleans the barn once a week, daily barn

cleaning, horse care, and land maintenance has been a family affair. Her husband actively helps and all three children grew up working in the practice; now they’ve passed the torch to Michele’s children. Margie owns 3 horses and follows AHA guidelines for use and training.

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One of the things that makes Triangle Therapy so exemplary is the concept of the non-traditional environment. Keen observation and clinical reasoning skills are used once a new child comes into the unique setting to determine what in the environment is motivating to them. They acknowledge that it is different for every child. It might be a favorite animal (they have horses, a miniature donkey, Nigerian pygmy goats, a duck, two dogs, and cats), being in the woods, the scooter board, swings, outdoor playground,

or clinic-based therapy toys. Therapists then try to infuse therapeutic goals into these motivating activities. Margie states “The skill of a good therapist is to take any goal and incorporate it into any activity by the way it is structured and presented.”

Margie feels that the most important aspect of non-traditional treatment is to be an excellent therapist in the first place. It is extremely important to keep up in one’s profession with up to date treatment ideas and evidenced based practice. As an OT she has extensive continuing education in sensory integration. In addition to hippotherapy, her occupational and speech therapists are trained in Therapeutic Listening™ and the most current strategies for autism. Most of the items in the barn are on a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and are in the process of being converted onto an IPAD for ease of use.

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Margie’s passion for this type of treatment is clearly evident when she describes her practice. Four years ago, during a hippotherapy session, she suffered a left basal ganglia ICH and had to be air lifted to a trauma unit. Once there, she spent a week in ICU followed by several months of speech therapy. Faced with the very real possibility of not returning to her dream, Margie’s creative speech therapist incorporated writing reports and other business skills into her rehabilitation. Meanwhile her co-worker and friend, Michele, kept the practice going. After much diligence,



Photos courtesy of Triangle Therapy Services, LLC

Margie started back part-time and within two years was back to full-time. Margie said the following regarding her ordeal “When you think it might be taken away from you, each day of having the ability to work is a blessing.

I thank God that I am once again healthy enough to treat kids and run a business. My goal for myself

cognitively after going through this was to get my HPCS. And I am happy to report that I passed the test a year ago!”

Margie truly is an asset to the field of hippotherapy and non-traditional therapy and her business, an example of a truly integrated approach that is individualized and motivating for a wide range of children. For more information about Triangle Therapy Services, please go to www.triangletherapyservices.com

Margie Bengé OTR/L, HPCS is a licensed occupational therapist and a hippotherapy clinical specialist with a focus on pediatrics and sensory integration. She is the founder of Triangle Therapy Services, LLC, a non-traditional pediatric treatment facility, utilizing animals, the outdoors, and hippotherapy.

E. Jeanni Bonine OTR/L, HPCS is a contributing editor for HIPPOThERAPY magazine. She is a board certified Hippotherapy Clinical Specialist, and a Path Intl. registered adaptive riding instructor. Jeanni currently works as a pediatric therapist at Unlimited Performance, and is the Director of Heightened Potential Co. You can reach her at Jeanni@heightenedpotential.com