

**La Opinion, March 12, 2015**

## **Horseback Therapy**

### **Dream Catchers stimulate kids with disabilities**

Joan Blank worked in the fashion industry for 25 years but being a volunteer where they offered equine therapy changed her life's path.

It is why today she directs Dream Catchers LA, a nonprofit organization that offers therapy with horses to people of all ages in Los Angeles, including Latin kids.

"Being on a horse helps them in many ways because it works their motor skills and different neurological and muscular problems that the body may have", said Blank. "The movement of the horse stimulates at a neurological and muscular level".

According the organization's director, the results on each person depend a lot on the kid's disability, a lot of them suffer from cerebral palsy, autism, post-traumatic or emotional disorder.

"The therapy is more than mounting a kid on a horse, not just a pony ride", said Blank. "We have to know the kid's disability and be able to design a therapeutic program that helps them, either physical or cognitive".

The therapy is based on a weekly equine sessions for kids and adults whom they call "riders".

Although the session is therapeutic, Blank and another group of volunteers make sure the kid has fun. For them the smile and emotion of the little riders is reflected during the half hour that they are on the horse.

"On top of enjoyment, these therapies have helped a lot in controlling his body and having better balance", said Maria Gutierrez, mother of Fernando Gutierrez, who suffers from cerebral palsy and mental retardation. "He loves horses".

English Translation Courtesy of Luis Miguel Cosio.