

Damien is an eight-year-old boy who loves animals, cars, Legos, soccer, basketball, football and, thanks to TREC, horseback riding. This describes most boys Damien's age except that he has special needs and that most often means he cannot participate or is limited in his participation in some way. The Therapeutic Riding Equestrian Center has given Damien a wonderful opportunity for a well-rounded experience that involves animals, activities, nature rides, instructions, lots of great people and most of all fun.



Damien was born with congenital hydrocephalus. Doctors informed us that he would most likely be blind and deaf and severely to profoundly mentally and physically disabled. The doctors were wrong; he sees, hears and is moderately disabled. We were, and continue to be determined to improve Damien's opportunities and decided very early on that love, hope, and faith were integral in helping him live a full life.

As Damien grows we are always looking for activities he will enjoy. I learned about TREC through friends and knew he would enjoy it. He began riding in July 2004 and absolutely loves it! He looks forward to riding "Toby" and has benefited in many ways.

Physically, when Damien rides his posture and balance improve, his leg muscles get an excellent stretch while sitting/standing in the saddle, and the fun activities during class help stretch his upper body muscles and back without him realizing it. In each session his instructors take time to discover Damien's physical strengths and build on those. He loves their individual attention and hearing his name when they compliment and direct him. Their smiling faces and enthusiasm help motivate Damien during each class. Each instructor is so positive with the riders and encourages their students to keep trying.

Socially, Damien has made many new friends who treat him like a typical eight-year-old boy riding to have fun. The volunteers greet him, make eye contact and always ask him if he's ready to ride. His speech, which is very limited, has also improved and he learned to say "Whoa" and "Walk On", two very important commands. Damien rides "Toby" (a wonderful horse) each session and is working on saying his name. This consistency is great for Damien as it builds his confidence with every new word or name he learns and can use appropriately.

Thank you TREC for putting a smile on Damien's face and helping him have a great experience every time he rides with you.

Kimberley Coughlin,
Mother of a happy rider and TREC volunteer