

The non-profit 501(c) (3) J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center, located in San Juan Capistrano, began in 1978 as The Orange County Riding Center. It was founded by Nancy and Derek Lewis for their son Michael who was born with cerebral palsy. Social worker and equestrienne Fran Joswick was the Center's first instructor and executive director and the Center was later renamed as the Fran Joswick Therapeutic Riding Center. In 2001, the J.F. Shea Co., Inc. donated seven acres of land for a permanent facility and the Center was renamed in honor of The Shea Company's generous gift.

The modest beginnings of The Shea Center have yielded an organization that has become one of the top equine assisted activities centers in the world. The Shea Center now serves over 860 participants each year utilizing 21 horses and the assistance of more than 750 community volunteers.

Located in historic San Juan Capistrano, The Shea Center serves people with disabilities with a variety of programs that include physical, occupational and speech therapy that can benefit from therapeutic horseback riding and activities around the horse. Riders must be at least two years old and evaluated by one of the staff physical therapists to determine an appropriate treatment program. Over 60 distinct disabilities are seen at The Shea Center including cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome, and traumatic brain injury.

Therapeutic riding involves a trusted partnership between a therapy professional or certified instructor, trained volunteers, and one of The Shea Center's program horses. A horse's three-dimensional walk closely replicates the movement of a human walk, helping stimulate the rider's muscle coordination, strength, posture, and balance. The special bond that develops between horse and rider also produces emotional and psychological benefits unique to therapeutic riding.

Accredited at the "premier" level by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) The Shea Center is internationally recognized for its excellence in therapeutic programs. It is also a therapeutic training facility drawing interns and students from around the world.

The Shea Center team consists of 23 full time, and 15 part time and contract staff members. All instructors and therapy professionals who perform evaluations, reassessments, and create individualized treatment programs for their clients are PATH certified.

The Shea Center's state-of-the-art equestrian facility consists of two covered arenas, one open arena, a forty-stall barn, two round pens, a farrier and veterinarian area, and riding trails.

The Klein Family Education & Therapy Building provides indoor space for an inclusive fitness center, physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, rooms for teaching and training, and facilities for instructors, staff, and volunteers.

The Shea Center offers a financial aid program for current and past military families as well as a sliding scale of fees for those in need of financial assistance.

For more information about The Shea Center, please visit www.sheacenter.org.