

SADDLEBACK VALLEY News

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Thursday, July 7, 2022 AN EDITION OF THE REGISTER

ocregister.com/local-news

OUTDOORS



PHOTOS BY MINDY SCHAUER — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Olive Rippes, 5, does exercises during Shea Camp while volunteers stay close in San Juan Capistrano on June 22.

THIS SUMMER CAMP'S JUST FOR HORSEING AROUND

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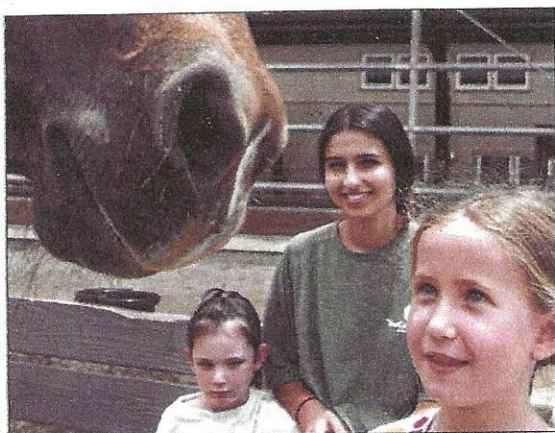
Nestled beneath the hills in San Juan Capistrano, the J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center treats 840 clients each year, with diagnoses ranging from autism to cerebral palsy, genetic disorders to head injuries, and more.

But for several weeks during summer — June 20 through July 29, along with a few days in August — the riding center operates Shea Camp, which is all about fun and horseplay, as it hosts kids with and without disabilities.

"Kids are divided by age, not disability," Sarah Booth, the communications director, said.

It may be the first time some campers encounter someone with a disability, she added.

But no one seemed to care. On a recent June day, five children sat together and laughed as they watched a horse named Huckle-



Natalia Eggleton goes face to face with Easy during Shea Camp in San Juan Capistrano on June 22.



draft-cross horse to the right minute and 43 seconds, compared with Huckleberry's 13 min-

Horsing

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other horses like Boog, a one-eyed Amish pony.

And of course, there is the horseback riding.

Five-year-old Olive Ripps wore pink cowboy boots and a horse-themed Tshirt while counselor Ellie Hughes used courtesy titles to address the children: “Miss Olive, what do we do with our eyes and our head?”

Ripps’ mother, Rachel, said her daughter, who has autism, “adores camp” and has been memorizing the horses’ and staffs’ names.

Although camp is about fun and not therapy, the two sometimes intersect.

“Horses don’t have a prefrontal cortex,” Booth said. “They respond very authentically. They mirror back and help us understand emotions.”

Camper Olivia Miller knows this firsthand. She is also in the center’s Stars and Stripes Military Program that offers riding lessons to veterans and their families.

“I feel a lot more calm on a horse. It’s like therapy,” the outgoing 10-yearold, who has been riding for three years, said. “It’s like we’re a team. I have to work with the horse and the horse has to work with me.”

Her father, Bill Miller, said it’s a “mitzvah” for Olivia to be around kids with disabilities.

“It teaches her how lucky she is in life,” he said.



Shea Camp certified instructor and counselor Ellie Hughes forms a rope line so campers can walk Easy back to the stables in San Juan Capistrano on June 22.

MINDY SCHAUER — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER