

Research Project Abstract - The Development of a Therapeutic Riding Therapy Service for Children and Adults with Physical, Sensory and Intellectual Disabilities in a Remote Rural Setting in the West of Ireland.

This Research Project was conducted by Jill Carey, Karen Mannion and Jean Mullan.

Introduction

International evidence shows that people with a disability living in remote rural areas have less choice and access to therapy services than their city based counterparts (Dew et al., 2013) with equity of access only achieved when it considers the needs of remote communities and the adequacy of the specialist base (Gruen et al., 2002). Despite the challenges remote rural communities can demonstrate local innovation in a number of areas (McMahon et al, 2014).

This project is located in the remote area of Connemara with a weak infrastructure and poor connectivity, posing many challenges for the people living there. Its low level of demographic vitality (12 persons / km² - less than a quarter of the national average) and a narrow economic base make it even more difficult to ensure that everyone in the community has an equal 'quality of life' chance. This project aims to provide a community-based Therapeutic Riding (TR) Service for children and adults with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities in a remote rural setting in the west of Ireland while promoting the indigenous Connemara Pony as an ideal equine for this therapy.

Method

A working group including *Paving the Way* (local support group for people with disabilities and families), *Connemara Pony Club*, *FORUM Connemara* (LEADER Company) and the *Connemara Pony Breeders Society* collaborated in securing funding from the Rural Development Programme for Ireland 2007-2013 (LEADER programme). Funding supported delivery of an accredited Therapeutic Training Programme to 11 people from Connemara. A strategic media communications programme targeting disability groups, health professionals and families took place promoting the value of TR services.

Results

11 Therapeutic Riding Coaches graduated in July 2014. Additionally, 2 Open Days promoting TR were held. Of significance was the establishment of 2 new TR services.

Conclusion

This case study shows that despite the challenges faced by those living in a remote rural area that a collaborative community approach can enhance the quality of life for people with a disability through the provision of a therapeutic service of Therapeutic Riding. The involvement of the Connemara pony greatly enhances the innovative aspect of this project.