

Julia here.

You may have noticed that one of our fall sweater stories, [Dressage](#), was photographed at a riding stable, TROtt, the [Therapeutic Riding Association of Ottawa-Carleton](#). Thanks to our model, Leslie, who was familiar with the good folks there and the wonderful work they do, we were able to spend the day, meet the horses, and pick up after ourselves and, uh, others.

My own son has benefited from therapeutic riding at a New Hampshire stable near where I live, so when Kate told me this was the work they do at TROtt, we thought it would be an opportunity to share my own enthusiasm for the practice with Twist readers, and to explain a little about why it's an important tool for so many people.

Therapeutic riding is a kind of physical therapy with a specially trained physical therapist that uses horses as equipment. The natural rhythms in the saddle of a walking horse requires the rider to focus their mental and physical attentions, and with practice, develops both muscle strength and concentration in the rider. Therapeutic horses are also especially gentle animals, particularly talented and tolerant of frustrations and outbursts their riders can be prone to because of their own personal challenges. The horse is also a calming presence for the rider, and the empathy the rider has for the horse reinforces a willingness to do the work, something that can't be reproduced in a traditional therapeutic office setting with swings and yoga balls.



Children and adults with all manner of challenges and disabilities can benefit from work in the

saddle. I have seen grown adults hoisted out of wheelchairs to ride enthusiastically, children with cerebral palsy trot giggling around the ring, and kids with anxiety disorders climb up on horse's back with hard-earned trust. The experience is often liberating and unique in the rider's life, and an invaluable tool in their therapeutic development.

TROtt has served the Ottawa, Ontario area for over 30 years, offering therapeutic riding lessons to children and adults with disabilities. TROtt instructors, all of whom are certified with the [Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association](#) (CanTRA), give lessons to dozens of students each week with disabilities ranging from learning delays to paraplegia to multiple sclerosis. Twelve specially selected and trained horses currently work at TROtt and as we found out during the photoshoot, therapy horses make excellent models! Sam and Monty, both featured in the photostory, couldn't have cared less about the cameras, props, and constant clothing readjustments going on around them.

TROtt relies on the help of over 140 volunteers to make lessons available and affordable to their riders. If you're in the Ottawa area, you might consider helping out--you don't need horse experience to volunteer. For those readers who live elsewhere, you can find a local therapeutic riding center through the [North American Riding for the Handicapped Association](#) (NARHA) or CanTRA.

Thank you Nancy Reid and Paula Rolfe for the work that you do at [TROtt](#), and for the day we got to spend with you.