Minta: Hi, and welcome back to the Fourth Annual Online Conference for Moms Fighting Autism. We are so lucky to have with us today Alicia Kershaw. Alicia is the executive director of GallopNYC, a therapeutic horseback riding stable in New York. GALLOP stands for Giving Alternative Learners Uplifting Opportunities, Inc. You can see GallopNYC on YouTube and Facebook. Thank you so much for coming down today, Alicia.

Alicia: You're very welcome. I am having a little bit of a technical delay in getting some photographs up to show people what therapeutic riding is like, but before I'm finished talking, I'm sure that they will be up. Therapeutic horseback riding is probably a little bit out of the ordinary for many people. The kinds of questions we get are why would riding a horse be beneficial to someone with autism? Let me tell you a little bit about myself, and about Gallop first, and then I'll try and answer that question.

I myself grew up on a farm, had horses, and rode horses until my...
teens. Then later in life, I learned about therapeutic horseback riding and got very interested in it. I was extremely impressed by the benefits I saw to the children participating in it. I was living out of the country at that time, and came back to New York and started volunteering with a small program. Then we decided that there were a lot of people in New York that could benefit from therapeutic horseback ridings, so we decided to start GallopNYC. We now offer therapeutic horseback riding services and hippotherapy to 150 riders every week at three locations in New York City. Most of those riders have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.

Therapeutic horseback riding is, essentially, teaching people to ride a horse. Learning to ride a horse, learning what a horse is like, and developing a relationship with a horse has a tremendous amount of benefits. We are seeing more and more research and evidence that these benefits are there. At Gallop, we see it in the arena pretty much every day, but we are also now seeing more formal research proving that there are tremendous benefits to this. Exactly why, the research hasn't quite gotten that far.

One somewhat technical distinction I'd like to introduce here, because it will come up, as I know there's some questions on things like IEPs, therapeutic horseback riding is a way of teaching riding to people with disabilities conducted by people who are certified as therapeutic riding instructors. Typically, these people do not have any specialized skills at the level of a physical therapist or an occupational therapist, but they are experienced with handling horses and they have taken special hands-on training to learn how to use that horsemanship experience to help people with disabilities. There's also something called hippotherapy, where a physical therapist essentially uses the horse as a physical therapy tool. At Gallop, we have therapeutic riding, horseback riding, and we
also have a hipootherapist who works with us and provides physical therapy.

I'm still looking for our pictures, which I don't see quite yet. When a child comes to ride at GallopNYC, the first thing we do is talk to the parents and collect some information to try and understand what the particular concerns are of the parent for the child. In some cases, the parent is simply looking for the child to have an enjoyable experience. In other cases, the parent is looking for the child to develop very specific skills, which could be socialization skills, speech and communication skills, attention span, and focus. Then we work with the child to teach them horseback riding, with, I would say, an eye to those goals and those skills.

We take a very gradual approach. We've had children who aren't actually willing to even get on the horse for quite a few sessions and we just take our time. When the child is actually riding the horse, there is one person leading the horse and one person walking on each side of the rider to help them stay on the horse and to help them stay focused. I see I've now got some photographs. The rider is escorted at all times and the horse is under control of a horse leader at all times. Some of our riders do progress to ride more independently, but it's something we really take our time at.

Assuming people can see these photographs, I have a lovely picture of a boy in a bright red shirt with a great smile on his face. You can't see much of the horse, but you can see that there's a person leading the horse and two people walking on each side. In this case, they're holding onto the rider, which we do for as long as we feel that would be beneficial to the rider. Then we back off or use a less physical hold as the rider becomes more advanced. Our riders do become quite advanced.
Now, thinking specifically, I'm looking now at a picture of a man with cerebral palsy, although I think he may have an autism spectrum diagnosis as well. Now, I'm looking at a picture, and I hope you are too, of a boy brushing the side of a pony. This pony’s name is Snickers. When we look at kids on the autism spectrum, one of the things we work very hard at doing is building a bond between the horse and the rider.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with Temple Grandin. She talks in her books about the ability of people to bond with horses. We find that people with autism do specifically bond with horses. There seems to be something special about the relationship. Temple Grandin talks about it too.

There seems to be similarities in the way horses perceive the world and people with autism perceive the world, in the sense that some people with autism have a, could we say, hypersensitive way of perceiving the world. Horses also are very sensitive to outside noises and people. Many people who have worked with horses will find that the horse is reacting to something that we didn't actually notice, some sound, some bag flying by, or something. Horses and people with autism do seem to have a very sensitive way of perceiving the world. Horses are mute, as are some kids with autism. Horses are very responsive, so a child with autism that is working with a horse can very quickly get a read from the horse. It's very clear and very immediate. When an instruction is correctly given, a horse will quickly respond to it. When it's incorrectly given, the horse will not.

You can see this picture of the child grooming the horse is in here to make the point that we don't just put children on a horse and have them go around in a circle. We work very hard to build a bond between the child and the horse. We have had riders with quite serious autism get off the horse and kiss it, hug their horse, ask for a specific horse. They often know the names of
their horses. That bond does develop quite clearly.

This girl does not actually have autism, but this is another example of a rider bonding with a horse. This is just one of our ponies.

Let me go back to the kind of paradigm picture of our rider. This young man is a rider with autism who comes to us in a school group. There have been research studies now looking at the effects of therapeutic riding for children with autism. These studies are showing, and you can find them on our website, that therapeutic horseback riding has measurable benefits for kids on the spectrum in attention span, focus, desire, communication, socialization, and speech. We see this every day.

We work with school groups. This particular rider I'm looking at now is in a school group. Teachers tell us that the kids that come to us in these school groups for therapeutic riding are more focused when they go back to the classroom, are more interested in socializing, and will write more willingly and more extensively about their experiences in riding. Not only do we see benefits in the arena, but parents also tell us that we see these benefits in the classroom later, even days later, weeks later, and also at home.

Horseback riding seems to have a calming effect on children and adults with autism. Personally, I think that is one reason why it's beneficial. This is really not a scientific comment, but my own personal experience is that watching children with autism ride, they are able to calm down, they are able to reduce some of the stimming and similar behaviors that can get in the way of learning, and they are able to focus on commands.

The word we use at Gallop is connect. After riding, usually four to
six weeks, we see our riders really connect to what they're doing on the horse. Then, as I was saying, our teachers and our parents tell us that the sense of connection carries through outside of the arena.

The calmness, the connection, I think another reason is that when our kids ride, they very quickly get a very positive feedback. You see children with autism, and all children really, can sometimes get into a negative attention vicious cycle. They will do behaviors that attract attention, even if that attention is negative. I feel that therapeutic horseback riding, when the child gets on a horse and is able to do something immediately very successful, as the very fact of riding a horse is a very positive, successful thing, and begin to get praise for those successful things, that can create a virtuous cycle where children begin to seek praise for these successes and continue to build on these successes.

I think the bond with the horse that children develop is another element of it. They enjoy the riding, they enjoy the horse, they feel comfortable with a horse, and they feel safe with a horse, so they're happy to achieve.

Our school groups tend to be mostly, not all, boys ages 8 to 11 who are nonverbal. In every group, and we've probably had 15 now, one of these so-called nonverbal children has started to speak. Now, they may have been misdiagnosed as nonverbal, or they may be developing so that they are becoming more verbal, I'm not going to overstate the role, but I have experienced repeatedly parents, teachers, our staff standing in a room tearing up, because a child has spoken for the first time. It doesn't happen with every kid and it sometimes takes quite a while when it does happen. They're not turned into gifted orators instantly, but the ability to communicate can really be enhanced by therapeutic horseback riding.
It's fun. Kids enjoy it. It's a source of pride and pleasure. It's also physically beneficial. It builds core strength and flexibility and balance. A lot of riders come to us with an autism spectrum diagnosis, but have a lot of related physical problems, or just because the fact that they're not able to participate in everyday sports, they don't have the physical strength and fitness that other kids might have, so horseback riding is way to help them build that physical strength as well.

I think that's probably enough of an introduction. I should say this picture of this man hugging a horse is one of our volunteers. I included this picture in this presentation pretty much just to say that we have great volunteers who really love our horses. This man and this horse kind of stand for the wonderful people that work at Gallop. We have a very small staff, but we have hundreds of volunteers who show up every week to work with the children that we work with. This picture is a picture of our horse show, and you can see some of our volunteers assisting one of our riders at our horse show. Again, back to our picture of our kid grooming. With that, unless you want me to elaborate on any particular detail, I'm happy to answer questions.

Minta: Fantastic. I want to remind the callers at this time that if you are dialing in, you can ask Alicia a question by dialing *2 and you will be connected to her directly. If you have a question for Alicia, just get on your phone, *2, and I will see that you want to speak with her, and we will get your questions answered.

In the meantime, let's go to the questions that have been emailed in. Our first question is from Mack Bronick from North Tonawanda. He says, "How might this be written into an IEP and considered a related service? How would this be measured into the definition of progress towards academic mastery? How can this service be
provided during school hours, as the IEP is only related to those times?"

Alicia: Well, this is a complicated question. This is one reason why I made the distinction at the beginning between the hippotherapy and therapeutic riding. I don't claim to be an expert in the IEPs. When we work with our hippotherapist, she brings kids who have an IEP that requires physical therapy. Some kids come to her privately, but some kids are showing that they're not able to get that therapy at their school, and therefore they can be reimbursed for that therapy in another location. I think that it's not specifically for therapeutic horseback riding or hippotherapy, but it is for physical therapy that she provides. One way she provides it is through our program.

As far as getting time out of school hours, what we do is work directly with the school. The schools bring their riders to us essentially as field trips for 10 or 11 weeks. The best way to do that would be to ask the school to consider getting involved with a program like ours. We have many schools that are happy to bring their kids to us during school hours. We've also had some good experiences with afterschool programs, but as I'm sure everybody on this call knows, kids on the autism spectrum have so much therapy and activities that sometimes that's a little harder to organize as a group. That's pretty much the best I can say about that one.

Minta: Thank you. I'm glad that you mentioned that. I hope you don't mind that I mentioned that. My son, Kyle, is the reason why I know about Gallop. I wouldn't know about you if my son... You were working with my son who last year was in a District 75 program. For those of you who are in New York, you may know that District 75 may not have much funding. I love the fact that Gallop works as a non-profit organization and does these reachouts to schools. He was in a program that, and this relates
to the next question, I think it was an eight-week program?

Alicia: Eleven. Well, it may have been eight in the fall if he was in Brooklyn. We try to do 11 weeks, but we had to do eight in the outdoor space that we like to use, so he may have been in an eight-week program.

Minta: Yes. Eight in the fall and eight in the spring semester. I have to say, while we're waiting, please call us. Call in with your questions. Dial *2 and speak to Alicia directly. I'd love to hear from the audience. If you don't mind, Alicia, I'd like to give a little bit of my experience with that. Kyle didn't always want to go to school, but if it was on a Tuesday, which was the day that was horseback riding, I would say to him to get him out of bed, "Kiddie, you're riding the horse." With his eyes still closed, he would hit the floor. He loved going to school on those days.

The most direct effect that I could see was, before that, we don't have any animals because my husband is terribly allergic, so when we would go to in-laws and friends' houses and family's houses that had animals, he was a little afraid of the animals. If he would touch them, he would touch them inappropriately. He would grab their tail or their ear. As a direct result, I believe, from Gallop, he looked at animals differently. After he started the horseback riding, after maybe the second or third week, if he would go to his family's house where there was a dog, he would sit down, he wasn't afraid of the dog, he would touch the dog more appropriately. He seemed to connect with the dog much more easily after having horseback riding therapy. I wonder if you've heard any other stories like that.

Minta: Well, we just got a lovely letter from a school teacher in a public school in Brooklyn, also a District 75 program. Unfortunately, those of you who are in New York know quite
acutely that we had a school bus strike this winter, which disproportionately affected kids with special needs. Our school groups were unable to get to us for about six weeks. When we contacted the teacher in the spring and said, "We're ready to go," she wrote us this lovely letter and she said that every Tuesday during that bus strike, the kids would go and get their coats, get ready to ride, and start talking about riding. She just hated having to tell them every week that they weren't able to get to ride.

Now, again, these are nonverbal kids that are about eight or nine years old. This particular group has been riding with us for about a year I would say. They definitely had had a chance to get in the groove, but I really felt that it was just remarkable and sort of sad that they were that aware that it was the riding day. We've had many experiences like that.

We had a young man, a young adult, who his dad told me really was not terribly interested in the outside world, but always knew when it was the day to ride, was up and ready to go, and always interested. We've had many stories.

We had this lovely boy named Malik who also was in a public school, just a sweet boy, but he had a lot of absenteeism at his school. They noticed that when it was a riding day, he was always there. They were able to build on that with the school, and say, "Malik, if you're here five days a week, we'll make sure you go riding." It was really a wonderful motivator to get him to school.

The kids, as I said, it usually takes about four or five weeks for you to see this connection, but once they begin to connect to riding and really plug into it, it's something that they very much enjoy.
I have this wonderful story that one young boy wrote about how he wanted to take his pony home and he was going to keep it in the backyard. I have no idea why, but he was going to name it Nails. He had this whole thing all worked out about how he was going to take his pony home. It was really a lovely moment.

Alicia: What isn't lovely about horseback riding? I love the work you do. I have a question from Jennifer from Orlando. She says, "My son is currently participating in a therapeutic horse program. I have two questions. Do you know where to find a list of the types of therapeutic aspects horse therapy can achieve? Basically, the kinds of therapy goals achievable." I guess that relates probably back to the IEP.

The second question is, and I'll repeat this one by one, "The program my son is involved with is an eight-week course. Is that the standard duration for these types of program?" I think you answered that one.

Do you know where there is a list of types of therapeutic aspects horse therapy can achieve? Basically, the kinds of therapy goals that are achievable.

Alicia: Yes. That's a great question. First of all, I don't think there is a standard length of time. I think most therapeutic programs do seem to use 8 to 12 weeks, mostly because we tend to follow academic type calendars. We do see that you need four to six weeks for you to really start to see the benefits. Some kids you instantly see benefits, but typically... I remember when I first started about four or five weeks in, thinking, "Maybe it's not going to happen this time." Then, inevitably, it did after about five weeks. The kids would just start to really click in.

By the way, one more thing on that. We try and continue kids more or less indefinitely, because we find the benefits continue past
the eight weeks. If you can continue into a second eight weeks or whatever, I do think that is good.

As far as the therapy goals, our website has a bibliography. Actually, I was questioning that because we just updated out website and I'll have to make sure that it's on there. You can email me through our website and I will get it to you if we don't. We have a bibliography, which has extensive references. In addition, there's a national accrediting organization called PATH International. They have quite a bit of information on therapeutic riding, its benefits, and they will have bibliographies and research reports. Those are two resources that you can look at.

There is one paper by a woman named, I think it's Katherine, but her last name is Violette, which is specifically focused on hippotherapy, and is just an excellent summary of the benefits of therapeutic riding. She breaks it down by issues or disabilities or goals that you would want to address. It's a really good way of seeing how it works for a specific issue or disability. That's what I myself have found very useful.

Minta: That's very helpful. Thank you. I didn't see the slides. Can you tell us your website, once again, where people can find this information?

Alicia: Just Google "GallopNYC." The site is www.GallopNYC.org, but if you just Google "GallopNYC," you'll find it. Then the other one is PATH, and they abbreviate "international" to "Intl." On that site you can find a therapeutic riding program in your area. They have a locator that will help you find a therapeutic riding program in your area.

Minta: Oh, wow. That's so helpful. Is this across the United States or...
Alicia: Yes. They do have some international programs, as well, but yes, it is nationwide.

Minta: That's beautiful. I'm so happy they do that.

Alicia: I think it goes by state. You put in your state and it will give you a list of programs. It will also tell you exactly what services they provide. There's also a, what's it called... Sorry, I'll look it up while we're talking. There's a type of therapeutic riding that focuses on mental health. That's a different organization, but I will find it for you while we're talking and give you that site too.

Minta: Oh, great. Thank you so much. I want to remind the audience, if you are dialing in, this is a wonderful opportunity to speak with an equine therapist expert. May I call you that?

Alicia: I guess. I'm a therapeutic riding instructor.

Minta: Therapeutic riding instructor. There are so many benefits to this type of therapeutic riding. How would you know if your child might be a good candidate for this?

Alicia: You're asking the wrong person because I think anybody would be a good candidate for this.

Minta: No, I think that's the right answer. Who wouldn't love to ride a horse? I want to come to Gallop.

Alicia: At Gallop, we say it's therapeutic for everybody, including our volunteers and our staff. I'm just finding that website for you. Equine Facilitated Mental Health. If you Google "Equine Facilitated Mental Health," you will find another type of working with a horse that's focused more fully on mental health.
We do mental health as well, but that's their mission.

I think to be a little more serious in answering your question about who would benefit, we have been working actually on a project to identify the goals of our program. Our ultimate goal, as we've been working through this process with our staff, is to help our riders engage more fully in life. Our mission statement is that we help people walk, talk, behave, learn, focus, and connect, so that they can live life as fully, productively, and independently as possible.

Any person who needs some help in engaging in life can benefit from therapeutic riding. It might be needing a boost in self-confidence, it might be needing a boost in socialization, it might be needing a physical boost, it might be a boost in communication skills. Of course all these things that I'm ticking off are things that we tend to see as a need with someone on the autism spectrum, who might need help with these particular skills. I do feel that anybody with an autism or, I guess it's no longer relevant, Asperger's diagnosis can benefit.

If I could just run on for another minute, I would like to say also that thanks to Autism Speaks, we have developed a program of transitional job skills training, and we were able to work with a group of 18 in groups of 6, but a total of 18, young adults on the spectrum. Here in New York, I'm sure this is true elsewhere as well, the schools are required to develop programs and plans and training to help kids move from school into employment. We were able to put together a job skills program built around therapeutic horseback riding.

What we did was we brought these young people in, mostly young men, and we put them through our regular therapeutic riding program,
but with a lot of attention to the job skills that we were trying to build, like addressing questions appropriately, taking criticism, taking responsibility, taking initiative, even things like starting and ending conversations appropriately. We had a list of about 15 job skills. Then once they had gone through our 11-week program, we had them come back as stipend interns working with our riders who were younger kids on the spectrum.

It was a tremendous program. These young men, not only did they learn these very specific job skills, but they became very cooperative with each other, very close to each other, where they had started out kind of not really relating to each other. They couldn't have been more wonderful with these young riders, more sympathetic, more encouraging, more gentle. It was just fabulous to see it.

Also on our website we have a lot of information about that program. We're looking for funding to run it again. We don't have it running right now. Autism Speaks likes to fund the pilot, and then asks you to find the funding for the rest. Unfortunately, we don't have it active at the moment, but we do have all those resource materials on our website. It really was a terrific program.

Minta: Fantastic. I was just about to ask you about that. I think that job transitioning program is one of my favorite aspects of Gallop. You do have several people on the autism spectrum employed there through this program, do you not?

Alicia: Well, at the time we had that program, we had 18 people. Employed is probably something of an overstatement, but they came as interns and they had a stipend. We wrote them all references explaining that they had a paid internship with us, which of course has given them a boost in their job search.
Minta: Oh, my. That must have been so thrilling for them and so good for their resumes too.

Alicia: It was interesting. I thought initially that the stipend would be the most important part. We’re talking pretty minimal amounts of money. I think it was $20 a week. At the very beginning, they were very excited about the money, but by the end of it, it became very clear that the money was really not important. It was the sense of responsibility, inclusiveness, and having some meaning in having these internships, having some meaning in their lives that was really important.

We work at other commercial stables and that limits us somewhat in our ability to employ people with disabilities. We do have quite a few people with disabilities that volunteer with us and who we mentor as volunteers and interns. That's always been a very rewarding aspect of what we do. Of course, they learn to handle a horse, so they get the horsemanship aspects of it. Though they don't ride very often, they do ride occasionally.

Minta: Looking at the pictures on the website, because they're leading the horses, you can see some of the... These pictures, you might have shown some of these. It shows. It's very evident on their face, the sense of self-confidence and belongingness, if that's a word.

Alicia: It is a word.

Minta: Sense of belonging. I have pet peeves about that. I just made that word up.

Alicia: That was a good word.

Minta: You can see in their face how proud they are and how happy they are to do that.
Alicia: When we have our horse show, which we do in Central Park, we want people to see just how able our kids are. Quite a few parents don't get to see their kids ride because they come during the school day. The most common comment from parents is, "I can't believe my kid can do that," which is a great thing. The kids are very proud.

Actually, this picture of the boy in the red shirt, the man leading him is a male with a disability, although I don't believe it's autism. He's an example of a volunteer with a disability who worked with us for a couple of years and actually ended up winning an award from New York State for his service with us, which was really sweet.

Minta: That is the picture. I'm thinking of his smile and this look on his face, to have a sense of not only belonging, but usefulness.

Alicia: Exactly.

Minta: And social interactions, my goodness. I just want to mention also that this carries through for the students too. I don't know if you send this home with all the students, but Kyle came home with a blue ribbon and a certificate.

Alicia: Oh, yeah.

Minta: My goodness, it went right up on the wall. He was so proud of this blue ribbon for riding horses.

Alicia: Everybody gets a certificate saying, "Kyle is certified as a Gallop Equestrian," they get a blue ribbon, we take pictures, and it's a very happy day when they get their certificates. They earn them because they have really accomplished a lot.
Minta: I'm proud of it too. It's still on the wall. It's a beautiful big blue ribbon, like you would win a state fair. It's fantastic. It will be with us forever. I just love what you do, Alicia.

Jennifer from Orlando has another question. Now, of course, all good things must come to an end, so she asks, "I have another question. Thank you. With children on the spectrum, have you seen major transitioning issues when horse therapy ends? I worry for my son, since transitioning can be quite an issue for him. He has become very attached to the horses already."

Alicia: I wouldn't see it because they're not with us at that point. You can certainly ask the program that your son is with, Jennifer. What we do is allow kids to come back and visit, and visit their horse. I shouldn't say I have favorites, but one of my favorite kids is a 12-year-old boy who literally fell in love with this pony, Genie. Actually, even during the summer, when we were on break, he would come and visit Genie. When his mom decided, we didn't decide, it was time for him to experience other things, we did arrange for him to come say goodbye to Genie. We made it clear that he was welcome to come back and see Genie pretty much any time.

Your program may want you to call ahead. I don't know. I don't want to encourage you to just drop in. I think most programs would be more than happy to take some steps to make sure that transition is as easy as possible. Of course, I feel that learning to deal with transitions is part of what we need to teach all of our children, so it's a good growth experience for them to go through, though sometimes it's a bit painful. I'm sure your program will be happy to help you manage that.

Minta: That's a very good point that you bring up. That is part
of life when something ends to help our children to deal with that and deal with issues of flexibility, like this was wonderful, but it is over now. I think that it ending is actually more beneficial than if it's kept on and on because it wouldn't... They're learning a very important life skill, how to enjoy something and let go. That's fantastic.

I want to remind the audience, if you are dialing in, you can press *2 to speak to Alicia herself. I have one more question here. I'm not sure. I just try to get to everybody's question. I know that this is really not quite the same thing, but Donna from Illinois is asking, and maybe you can just make a comparison of sorts, "Is this similar to what Temple Grandin is a proponent of?"

Alicia: Oh, yeah. Temple Grandin rode horses as a young woman. We've had Temple Grandin come speak at Gallop. She's really quite amazing. I know quite a bit about her. I've met her personally, heard her speak, seen the HBO film, and read her books. She was not, as far as I can tell, participating in a formal therapeutic horseback riding program, but as a young girl, she was sent by her mom out to her aunt's horse ranch. She rode all the time and fell in love with horses and all animals there. I think Temple Grandin would say that you don't need to be in a formal therapeutic horseback riding program to enjoy a relationship with a horse, but I think she would also recognize that for most people, going out and living on a ranch is not really realistic, and that if you get into a therapeutic program, you're going to be working with people who understand autism and other disabilities.

I hope this doesn't come across as a little impolite, but I have seen riding instructors who do not have training in disabilities try and work with people with disabilities. Some are fabulous, but many do not really understand the patience required and the
affirmation required. It just does take a different frame of mind, which people that are certified in therapeutic riding instruction are trained to have, and to understand why a child does not respond immediately to an instruction, how long you might have to wait, why noises in the arena might be disruptive or disturbing to a child with autism, why a child with autism is stimming, and whether and when and what you might do about it.

As I say, we're not physical therapists or incredibly expert in disabilities, but we have had training and experience in working with kids with disabilities. We bring to it a sympathy, an understanding, and experience that you don't see outside of a therapeutic program. While I would say any riding is going to be good, if you can find a therapeutic program in your area, that would be the best way to go in most cases.

Then some kids do move from a therapeutic program into a riding program that's not aimed at people with disabilities. We love it when that happens and we think that's great, but often it's best to start in a more therapeutic setting.

Minta: Fantastic. Callers, please email your questions. Call in by pressing *2 and we'll wait for your questions. While I'm waiting for another question, you're such a great speaker, Alicia. I'm wondering if you can give us an anecdote or a little story that people might want to... Do you have any? If you don't, that's okay, I'll move on to the next question.

Alicia: No, I have a million stories.

Minta: All right. Well, please share.

Alicia: Well, I don't have a million, but I probably have about 500.

Minta: Would you please share an anecdotal story with us that we
Alicia: This winter, we actually had two lovely stories develop. One is, there's a family with three children with autism, two boys and a girl. I think they're about six, eight, and 10, or maybe a little older. Our manager was chatting with the mom this winter. They take their lessons together and our instructor encourages a lot of interaction. She said that before they started therapeutic riding, they didn't really play together in any way. They were very much in their own worlds. They would be in the same room, but they didn't really communicate or cooperate in any way. Since they started therapeutic riding, that has changed. They have begun to relate to each other and play together more and enjoy each other more.

Now, I never want to overstate it. Kids are developing all the time and these kinds of behaviors will develop, but she's completely convinced that it was therapeutic riding that helped these kids relate to each other better. I'm sure we had a role in it. I think it's a wonderful thing. I just love hearing stories like that.

The other story is that we have a boy who's about 16. One of the stables that we use offers birthday parties. They have pony rides, you can bring a cake, and just hang out. The parents came to us and said that they had not had a birthday party for this boy in at least 10 years because social events are difficult for him and they never found anything that he really would enjoy. Some kids want to go bowling, a movie night, paintball or whatever. This kid never really had indicated anything that they thought he would enjoy enough to be a theme for a birthday party. Since he's been riding with us, he enjoys horseback riding so much that they decided that they could have a party at the stable.
Not only did they have a party for this boy, they invited his siblings and family, but they also invited some of the other kids that he rides with and that ride just before and after him, so that they as a family have gotten to know. They had this terrific little party. I thought helping a family experience what's a pretty normal event for most families, a birthday party, but for them had been a very difficult thing to do. That was just a wonderful story to hear about, so we were delighted to hear that.

Minta: I'm sure there are so many parents out there that can relate to that. What a happy success story. Another Jennifer from Canton brings up a good point. Now I was thinking this too. There are probably some parents out there who are a little worried for the safety of their children. Our children, they're not always predictable, and Jennifer Johnson from Canton wants to know, "Are there safety issues we should look for at barns offering therapy?"

Alicia: PATH International, which is the accrediting organization that I referred to a while ago, does maintain safety records. Those records show that therapeutic riding is very safe. We use very quiet horses and each rider has a person walking along each side of the horse, who is trained to keep the kid on the horse or, if the child starts to come off the horse, to catch them basically. Also, there is someone leading the horse. At Gallop, all those people are trained, with hands-on training, orientations. We make a big point of safety. Having these volunteers help is a major factor in the safety, as well as making sure that the horses we use are very quiet.

Having said that, horses are animals and animals can be unpredictable, so we have had situations where kids have slipped off. Also, we try to challenge our riders so that if a rider loses a little bit of balance, that's not a bad thing. We want
them to regain their own balance and occasionally, we miscalculate, and the rider starts to slip too far, but there is a person alongside of them to catch them. I feel it's safe.

To be very frank and open about this, the risks that are there are more that a kid would get a little nip from a pony or possibly have their foot stepped on. That happens extremely rarely, but it does occasionally happen. That's usually a pretty minor event, but those are the risks that you would be most concerned about.

You want to look for a program that is a member of this accrediting organization or a similar organization, because those organizations will set out standards for the riding. If you are unsure about whether they're a member or you think they're a member, but you're not sure they're following the standards, you want to know a little more about the standards, you can look on this PATH International website.

One of the key things to look for is use of a helmet. It should be a horseback riding helmet. Bicycle helmets do not work. No child should be anywhere near a horse without a helmet. Another key safety factor is the type of stirrup. The stirrup is the piece of metal that the rider's foot goes in that's attached to the saddle. There's a safety stirrup that allows the person's foot to come out of the stirrup if the person starts to come out of the saddle. That's a key piece of safety equipment which every rider should use, but certainly every therapeutic program should use.

You should also expect that the program and hope that the program wants to know things about your child. There are certain physical conditions that are really not appropriate for therapeutic horseback riding. Uncontrolled seizures, stims, those are the two that come to mind immediately. If the program
isn't asking questions about your child, then they're not going to understand how to match a horse with your child and what kind of safety precautions need to be taken. You're going to have a little red flag if they just say, "Yeah, come on in. We'll throw him on a horse." We want someone who will understand your child, talk to you, and understand what your goals are.

Then, you're going to get into things that you can see. One of our barns I will say is extremely rundown and probably would not pass this standard I'm about to hand out, but you want a barn that is clean and well-kept. The horses look healthy, they look shiny, they're well-maintained, they seem to have a reasonable amount of energy, and they're not kind of being dragged around. You want a place where the horses are being cared for properly. A horse that is not cared for well is likely to have bad habits and act out in a way that you really don't want to see.

I think making sure that the instructor... I don't want to be too much of an advocate for the PATH organization. That's not the only way to become experienced, but you certainly want to know if the instructor is not PATH certified that they have experience dealing specifically with people with disabilities, and hopefully, in this case, we're talking about autism, but hopefully in the disability that your child has. Again, talking to them and finding out what their experience is and what they recommend is going to be a really important part of it.

Then lastly, what's your gut? Do you feel comfortable? Does your child feel comfortable? If you feel the child is being pushed to do things they don't want to do or take risks that you don't think they should take, then stop. Go with your gut on these things. Like with everything as a parent, you need to listen to yourself. If some bells are going off in your head, there's something wrong.
Of course, in that situation, it's usually a very good idea to talk
to the instructor or the program and they may have an
explanation that can reassure you. For example, we have had
situations where we have allowed riders to get unbalanced,
because as I said, we want them to use their own balance to get
back up. If a parent didn't realize that that was deliberate,
they might feel the child was in danger of falling off. The
child isn't in danger of falling off. We're just letting them
find their own balance. When we have an opportunity to explain
that to the parents, they're always reassured, and on we go. It
gives the program a chance to explain what they're doing, but if
you don't feel comfortable, that's a danger sign that you should
be listening to.

Minta: That is a very insightful answer. Yes, communication is
key. We have somebody on the line right now from Bakersfield,
California. I don't have a name, but Bakersfield, California,
are you with us? Great. There we are. Bakersfield, California,
are you with us? Let's give them a moment. They had their hand
up a moment ago. Bakersfield, are you out there? Well, we'll go
back to you later. It looks like we missed that window. That's
okay.

If you do want to call in, just be patient if I don't call on you
right away. Please just stay on the line. Bakersfield, please
call back. We do want to hear your question.

In the meantime, we have Del from Perth. He says, "Good morning, from
all the way over in Perth, Western Australia. We have quite a
few not-for-profit riding programs here, not specifically for
kids with autism, but for all children with additional
abilities." Thank you for sharing that with us, Del. I actually
thought there was a question.

Alicia: Well, therapeutic riding started in Germany, I believe, but was
developed extensively by the Brits. They call it there Riding for the Disabled. I'm aware of some very effective programs in Australia and New Zealand, as well as in Britain. In fact, I just visited two in London a few weeks ago. I'm not sure about Australia, but I believe they would be under the auspices of something called RDA, Riding for the Disabled. You can check that out. I don't know if it was a standards question or just a general question.

Minta: Great. Keep your questions coming in. This is one of the therapies that is not so well known. I'm surprised because when I think about the benefits and hear you talking, it seems to be available but something that the public doesn't really know very much about. I'm glad to have you on the show to raise awareness for equine therapy.

Please call us, especially, Bakersfield, California. Don't be impatient. Dial in *2 and I will call on you. Please call us with your questions. Please email in your questions. While we are waiting for some questions, you said you had two stories, and you gave us that one beautiful story of the siblings and the birthday party. Do you have another anecdote you could share with us?

Alicia: I'm sure I do. Let me just think for a second. Let me just comment while I'm thinking on the fact that it's not terribly well known. Therapeutic horseback riding has been around for quite a while, I think about 75 years, but because we're dealing with horses, it tends to be in rural areas and smaller communities. I think it is gaining more and more awareness, particularly as this research is starting to show that this really is very effective for people with all disabilities. The earlier research was really on cerebral palsy. It is kind of easier to see the physical benefits in a way than to see the more emotional and cognitive ones. We are also getting to see
research on the cognitive side. We have so many stories.

Minta: Can I interrupt because Bakersfield is back. I'm sorry.

Alicia: Bakersfield has come back.

Minta: Bakersfield, can you hear me? We must have a problem here. I'm sorry to interrupt you. We must have a problem with the connection. Please call in. I saw a hand up, but we must be having technical difficulties. While I deal with this technical difficulty, can you please finish your story?

Alicia: Well, just virtually every day we have a wonderful moment with a rider or their family. I was just talking to a parent whose son is about 17 now. He has been riding with us for about four or five years. When he came to us, he was angry and aggressive. He was hitting the horse and he was hitting the people walking alongside. Sometimes this happens. We have hair pulling and hitting and spitting at times. We have techniques of discouraging that behavior. We were able to work with the child in getting past this hitting, mostly by making it very clear that he couldn't continue to ride if he kept up with the behavior. At the time, he was nonverbal. He's since become more verbal. He was able to understand that if wanted to ride, he had to stop hitting.

From then, he rides pretty much independently now. We don't always have a leader. He's able to steer. He's one of those kids who always knows the riding day and is very happy to come. His father was telling me that he feels that the riding has opened up a lot of opportunities for his son that he wouldn't have had otherwise. The boy is now getting himself to school on his own and doing a number of activities that the father feels they wouldn't have even considered trying unless they had seen him succeed at horseback riding.
It's another example of how what we're really trying to do is help our riders engage in life more fully. This is a dad who has made it very clear that his son is engaging in life more fully because he has been able to experience therapeutic horseback riding.

Minta: Absolutely. Sorry about that. It's bath time for my son. Please, folks, call in. You can raise your hand. I think we've solved our technical difficulty, so please do not be discouraged. I would love to hear from you. It would be nice to hear from our audience now.

I was about to say in commenting on your story that one of the best things that we can do for our children who have special needs is to introduce them to new experiences. Horseback riding has to be something that is incomparable to any other experience that they've had. Our children today, they're cooped up in their little... They're all into the video games. They're all into indoor activities. I know that I live in New York City, and probably the rest of the country, their children get out more because they have backyards, but there's something about not only the fresh air but the movement. I'm thinking of from an occupational therapy point of view, from the movement point of view, that the horse has a specific gait that seems to resonate with people on the spectrum. Can you elaborate on that?

Alicia: Some people do believe that the rhythmic motion of the horse is beneficial for brain development. I've attended lectures by physical therapists and neuroscience experts. I'm not sure how expert, but people who have expertise in neuroscience. They point out that when we have infants, we rock them, and that that rocking motion is beneficial to brain development. There are people who think that that movement of the horse, that that rhythmic rocking movement is part of why it's effective. That
really has not been proven, but may yet.

One thing that has been proven is that people's heartbeats slow when they're riding, in a good way. People calm down. Of course, we know that for many people with autism, anxiety is really a lot of what's causing the behaviors that interfere with their ability to engage in life. It's anxiety in reaction to over stimulus and that sort of thing. If we can calm our riders down, then we can open up their ability to process information, instructions, and connect to life better.

Many parents and the riders who are able to articulate their experiences talk about horseback riding being a calming experience. I think the motion is part of what makes it calming. Now I'm getting back in the area of kind of personal observation, speculation, not proof, but there is proof that it does lower people's heartbeats. Just being with the horse lowers people's heart rates, so that part is science. The rest is my own observation.

Minta: It has to feel something like being in the womb I would think. I have not had that experience, unfortunately, but yeah, it makes me want to just run over to Gallop tomorrow.

Alicia: Yeah, come over.

Minta: You offer afterschool programs or do you only work with school programs?

Alicia: No, we offer private rider programs as well, but unfortunately, we have a pretty big waiting list. Get in touch with us and we'll see if we can fit you in.

Minta: I'll get on that list for sure. I have a question from Mandem Booth from Los Angeles. He says, "Our 15-year-old son had
surgery on his lumbar spine and has chronic pain in that area. He can walk but uses a wheelchair for sitting in comfort. Would the movements of the lumbar area while riding be too painful for him?" That might be hard to answer, but what do you think?

Alicia: I think you'd need to speak to a hippotherapist about that specifically, but the physical benefit of horseback riding is that it strengthens the core. For many people with back problems, strengthening the core can be very beneficial. We've had people that use wheelchairs. In fact, there's one in those pictures that I had. When they first began riding, because they'd spent so much time in a wheelchair, this man could not sit up. It used to take two people on each side to hold him up while he was riding. You can see that he now can sit up on his own. That is purely because the riding has helped him develop his core strength.

Now, I have heard people say that horseback riding can cause jarring in the spine, so it's something that you'd really want to explore very carefully with a physical therapist or a hippotherapist. However, I think that when you're walking on a horse, you're not going to be doing a lot of jarring. I think most of that jarring comes in at the faster gaits.

I've been told by physical therapists that when you are sitting on the horse and the horse is walking, your upper body is doing exactly what you would be doing if you were walking. If your child's physical therapist feels that walking is good for your child, then I would suspect that horseback riding would be good for your child. It's something you need to explore in more detail with his own medical professionals and with the therapeutic riding program that might consider taking him in.

Minta: Good answer. I didn't even think about that. Bakersfield, I see your hand going up and down. Please press *2 and wait.
Every time I see Bakersfield’s hand up, I just want to pick right up, but Bakersfield is kind of... I don't know if you're changing your mind, but please, we'd love to hear another voice and get some more questions. If you are dialing in, please press *2 to get us your questions. If you are emailing in, it's not too late. We still have a good 20 minutes left, so please ask questions. We have an expert here on therapeutic horseback riding. Alicia Kershaw, thank you so much for being here.

Now, with that being said, OT and PT, we've talked about the occupational therapy aspects and we've talked about the physical therapy aspects. I've heard sometimes when children are engaged in something they are loving... I remember from a speech therapy point of view, I remember reading a story once, an anecdote from a parent, that a nonverbal child who went to a Nets basketball game and got so excited that he started speaking. He just had all this spontaneous language. You hear about that because the speech center of the brain is closely connected to the emotional center of the brain. It makes sense. You want to communicate what you're feeling. I'm happy to say that the New York Nets now have their Barclay Center here. Props for the Nets. They gave the child's family season passes.

Alicia: That's a great story. One of the Nets players has a son with autism. I don't remember which one.

Minta: That might be related. Have you had any experience with a child having some more, not just out of the blue speaking, but do you find that it encourages language for children who have trouble speaking?

Alicia: Yes. First of all, we encourage a lot of nonverbal communication. One of the things that we think we’re able to do to help people with is to, and it's a bit of a jargon word, have more agency, to have more choice and control in their own lives.
Even for riders who do not speak, we have various signs that we teach them. For example, we teach them to tap on the horse's neck when they want to move forward. We spend quite a bit of time encouraging kids to communicate.

When you're riding the horse and you're using the reigns to steer the horse, you're using your legs to make the horse go, and you're using the reigns to make the horse stop, you're communicating with the horse. The horse is very responsive, so you get a very instant reaction to this mode of communication.

We do see kids speak that were considered nonverbal. We do see kids who have limited verbal ability speak more. Personally, again, this is a little more on the anecdotal side than the research side, but I think it will come. I think what's happening is that because of the calming effect, because of the focusing effect, kids are actually free to process information and to respond appropriately. They're able to speak because they're calmer and the anxiety is lessened, and then they are motivated to speak, so that, I think, is another part of it. We definitely see kids that aren't talkers, talking and kids that aren't communicators, communicating.

Minta: That's so beautiful. That's an interesting that you bring out, that it's calming so it allows children to talk. It's also for some children exhilarating and exciting, so it causes them to talk. There could be nothing wrong with therapeutic horseback riding. It seems to be beneficial on so many levels.

Hold on a second. Callers, please, we would love some more questions for Alicia. We have just about 20 minutes left or so. I'd love to hear from you. I'd love to hear from the audience.

While we're waiting for some questions to come in, do you operate in the wintertime or is it a summer program? How do you operate in
this temperate zone here with four seasons?

Alicia: We operate on an academic year basis. We'd like to do more. We'd like to do summer programs, but the barns that we use are very busy in the summer so it's difficult for us to get the horses that we'd need. We do have programs pretty much all day. Two weekend mornings. I'd like to do more weekends. We have school groups in the mornings, and then we have what we call independent riders, riders that don't come in groups in the afternoon. We have a mix of riders.

I should also mention, it's not quite so relevant for your audience now, but we work with kids with emotional problems, we work with veterans with PTSD, we have adult riders, so we have quite a variety of programs going in addition to our sort of classic therapeutic horsemanship.

I imagine some people might be curious about the cost. We charge $500 for a series of 10 lessons, but we subsidize or provide lessons free of charge for two-thirds of our riders. I'm happy to say we have not yet turned away anyone for money, although we are only able to do that through our ability to raise funds, so there may come a day when we don't have the funding to do that. We have a financial application form. Our eligibility criteria are geared to the school lunch eligibility. We have a sliding scale. Our school groups don't pay anything, but we ask our riders that come independently to pay something. Then we have a couple of price points for our fees. Our fees are less than our costs because that's just the way non-profits work really.

Some people are able to use, I think this is a New York state unique thing, but we have something called the Medicaid waiver program. Some riders are able to use the family reimbursement component of that for therapeutic riding. In some cases, hippotherapy is covered by a health plan or a flexible 125 reimbursement plan,
or sometimes by the Board of Ed if parents aren't able to get appropriate physical therapy at the school. We've also been able to find a few funders who will fund therapeutic riding for individual kids and we help parents find and apply for that funding.

There's a combination of ways to make it affordable. I think compared to a lot of other things kids with special needs do, we're quite reasonable. Most therapeutic riding programs, I think, are priced in the same basically similar levels. You might find in rural areas it would be less expensive, but I think it's quite a reasonable cost compared to other activities focused on kids with special needs. Then when you look at how effective it is, I think it's very worthwhile.

Minta: I totally agree. That is half the price that a typical sensory gym would charge for an hour. Fifty dollars a session, that's very reasonable. I'm so glad that you mentioned the Medicaid waiver. You'll be seeing my son Kyle very soon then. I didn't think about that, so Kyle's coming back to horse riding. He'll be so happy.

Alicia: Well, apply anyway, because even if he's not able to take the waiver, if we can find a room for him and we continue to have financial means, we will definitely get him in the program. And any other child. I'm not offering her anything special.

Minta: No. I only know about you through your work with the District 75 program, which I admire. I'm sure that the Department of Education is not paying you a fortune for that, so I think it's fantastic work that you do. Not only working with the school districts but your job transition programs. I think it's tremendous.

I have another question from Jennifer Johnston in Canton. She says,
"My son has Asperger's syndrome. What therapy methods are used to help with this form of autism spectrum disorder?" Now, you'd mentioned earlier that the lines are becoming very blurred with Asperger's. It's not even going to be a diagnosis criteria anymore. It's going to just be considered... I'm missing the right words here.

Alicia: They've taken it out of the DSM. It's not considered separate from autism anymore.

Minta: This is a controversial thing.

Alicia: Oh, yeah.

Minta: Especially for people with Asperger's who can advocate for themselves. She asks... I just lost it. Give me one second.

Alicia: I think she asked what approaches we would use for kids with Asperger's.

Minta: Well, let me read the question to you one more time. No, I got it right on my screen refreshed. She says, "My son has Asperger's syndrome. What therapy methods are used to help with this form of autism spectrum disorder?"

Alicia: Well, what we do is when a child's parents approach us for therapeutic horseback riding, we collect some basic information about the child. That information is designed to make sure that the child can benefit, and also to try to find an appropriate... Most of our kids ride in groups of three, so we try and fit kids into an appropriate group of compatible kids. We don't always do that. Sometimes if they're with a very mixed group, it actually works out kind of well. We would try and put a child with Asperger's in with other kids with Asperger's.
Then, when the child comes for the first lesson, the instructor and often our program manager spend some time with the child and, depending on the age of the child, the parents discussing what the goals are for the horseback riding. For kids with Asperger's, typically they're very verbal and communication is not the issue so much as social awkwardness and perhaps attention span. I think the diagnosis of Asperger's doesn't really tell you that much from the point of view of what goals you want to work on. We would look at the child as an individual, and see what the child and what the parents want us to help that child develop. Often, for kids with Asperger's, it's self-confidence and a feeling that they are appreciated for the skills that they have. The point I'm trying to make is that it's very individualized for each rider.

We don't go after these goals in a competitive or stressful way. All of our children are taken through a pretty standard set of horseback riding skills, but we attempt to design the lessons and work on those skills in a way that would work towards those skills. For example, if we have a group of kids whose parents feel that they just need to relate better to other kids or socialize more, the lessons would include a lot of games where they do communicate with each other and might even include situations where one kid mentors another kid. Or where one kid serves as a leader in the class, leads the exercises, or decides what exercises might be. We have a lot of ideas and techniques that we use to work on particular skills, again, without kind of overdoing it and being competitive about it. I think often the kids don't even realize why we're doing what we're doing. We teach our lessons with an eye to these goals and these goals are very individualized.

We at Gallop, and I think most programs do something similar, keep track of every lesson. We have a pretty sophisticated system of tracking what happens in each lesson. At the end of the 11
weeks, we look at the goals that we had set and how the rider has done compared to those goals, again, not in a judgmental way, but just so we can have a sense of how far we got and what we still need to work on. Then we write a brief message to parents explaining what the goals were, how well we did, and what we'd work on in the next set of sessions. We also try to remain open to parents' input at the moment in the lesson as well, so kind of a constant level of communication with our parents.

Minta: I really love that idea. I love that you involve the parents. I really love the way that you would tailor... I love the individuality. I love that you look at each child as an individual, because each child, not only are they an individual, but the relationship with the horse is individual too. I love that you keep the parents on board. I just love what you do. I have so much respect for what you do. Thank you very much.

I think some parents have some concerns. When you have a child who’s aggressive, impulsive, I know some parents who might be like, "Oh, my god. I'm not going to put my kid on the horse. He'll pull his hair. He'll pull his tail." Do you have any experience with that happening? Can you give us any advice for parents that might play into it?

Alicia: I think I was telling the story about the kid that was hitting. We've had kids throw the helmets off. We've had kids run around. We've had jump off, what we call a voluntary dismount, kind of decide that they're going to get off the horse. Again, we have extremely calm horses and trained volunteers. No child is ever unattended. If we have a problem like that, we do try and work with the child. There have been one or two cases where we just felt we could not safely work with the child. We have the flexibility, for example, even if we're working with a school group, if there's a child that does tend to bolt, we will work
with that child on their own. Really, what happens is most kids enjoy this so much that the behavioral problems just disappear. We rarely have a child that does not start to behave well when they're riding. That's just apparently because they enjoy it.

We try and be a little patient. We try and be very safe. I've definitely had moments where I've just had to grab a kid to keep him from running off, but we have people there to make sure that the child is safe. Then we have found that if we just hang in there a little bit, usually those kinds of behaviors stop.

I can give you an example. One thing we do is we figure out is, say we have three kids in a lesson, who's the kid who really can't wait? We had one kid who used to start to get excited when we would put his helmet on, so we would wait and put the helmet on at the last minute. Or the kid that just really can't wait, we will get on first.

We had one kid who really had a hard time standing on... We have a little stepstool, basically, a mounting block that they stand on to get on. This kid would get on the mounting block and he would just get so excited that he couldn't stand it. Small child. Rather than going through the whole mounting block and stuff, we would just walk him in, pick him up, and put him on the horse. No more mounting block problem. We just got past the whole thing. He rode happily. Then over time, he was able to be calm enough that he could get on the mounting block. He could wait. He could get on the horse appropriately.

There's often a very simple little thing we can do to make sure it's safe and continue to encourage the kid to ride. I can think of maybe two kids out of, I would say, at least 400 that we've worked with that we've really had to say, "This is not working." I think that's a pretty good statistic.
Minta: That’s very good statistics. Parents out there, if you’re thinking your child can’t handle therapeutic horseback riding, it sounds like you’re so sensitive to the children. I’m so happy to hear that you had the child work through that and didn’t just make it easy by just plopping him on the horse. You actually taught him these skills of waiting and calming down. That’s just so beautiful to hear. We need more people that in this world to work with our children.

We have just about three minutes left, so if you have a question for Alicia, please call in by dialing *2. We have time for just about one more question. You can email in your questions.

We are short on time, Alicia, so I would like to ask you if you have anything... You shared such wonderful stories with us. Thank you so much for being here. I want to know if there’s some information that you want to share, if something bears repeating, how can people contact you, or is there any last things you would like to say to the audience before we run out of time?

Alicia: Well, I would encourage everyone to consider therapeutic riding, to look at the PATH International website, at our website and the resources there. What I’d really like to say is that in my work at Gallop, what I’ve come to is a profound respect for parents of children on the spectrum and how much love and care and hope they bring to their children. At Gallop, we so appreciate the trust that parents put in us in allowing us to work with their children. We so enjoy seeing their children succeed. I hope that those parents that are listening to this now or later will try and find a therapeutic place where they can give their child this opportunity. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Minta: Thank you, Alicia. It's been a pleasure to have you as our
guest. Alicia Kershaw from GallopNYC. Thank you for being with us. How can people contact you with questions?

Alicia: It's Alicia@gallopNYC.org.

Minta: Great. If you have any questions, if you did not get to call in, or if you're listening to this later, and you have a question for her, that's very generous of you to offer, you can email her at Alicia@gallopNYC.org. Thank you once again. Thank you so much for your time. It's beautiful what you do and thank you for sharing your knowledge with us and our audience today. Thank you so much, Alicia, for being here.

Alicia: It's my pleasure. Thank you very much.

Minta: Thank you, audience, for listening. Have a great night. Thank you from Moms Fighting Autism.