Lovelane is a therapeutic horseback riding program that has a dramatic impact on the physical and cognitive development of children with special needs through its holistic approach and unique, supportive environment.

Years ago, Debby Sabin had the opportunity to help coach the Special Olympics horseback riding team. The experience made her appreciate the powerful relationship between horses and children with special needs. This fueled a dream and while training as an occupational therapist, Debby began to work with a few disabled children in a borrowed barn in Weston. After completing her degree she never lost sight of her vision and founded Lovelane Special Needs Horseback Riding Program.

In 1992, Lovelane was incorporated as a non-profit and it grew to become one of the most respected therapeutic riding programs in the area. Following a successful capital campaign in 2004, Lovelane moved into a permanent home in Lincoln, MA designed exclusively for the special needs population. The facility includes both indoor and outdoor arenas, therapy room, office space, horse stalls and access to outdoor trails. The program more than doubled in size enabling more children to receive services.

Today, the program is a testament to the dedication of the Lovelane families and supporters and the hard work of the children whose lives are so impacted by the therapy they receive. Today, 12 specially trained horses, 19 staff members and more than 150 volunteers work with over 140 students from throughout the Greater Boston area. Primary diagnoses among Lovelane students include, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, genetic disorders, autism, cancer and a host of physical disorders and developmental delays.

Therapeutic horseback riding has harnessed the respect of the medical community for its remarkable success with a broad range of physical, emotional, and developmental disorders. Based on the movement of the horse, the therapeutic riding uses that movement to work the muscles of the rider and sessions focus on occupational, physical, and/or speech therapies with the goal of maximizing the student’s independence and enhancing their quality of life. In addition, tasks and exercises that can seem like a “chore” in traditional therapeutic settings can seem like fun for a child who is often excluded from other activities.

For 25 years Lovelane has helped change the lives of its students through one-on-one, personalized lessons, focusing not only on physical, occupational and cognitive goals but by attending to the "whole child." Lovelane’s supportive, caring environment has had a far-reaching impact on both its students and their families and caregivers. Every success, whether big or small, is cause for celebration at Lovelane. Students often come to Lovelane because they are limited in the scope of their activities and the world focuses on all that they cannot do. Student come through the door at Lovelane and get up on a horse to ride, no matter how much or how long they have struggled with their disability. The message they hear at Lovelane is a resounding and limitless "Yes you can."
Therapeutic Riding

What’s It All About?
Therapeutic riding utilizes the horse and the horse’s movement to address improving the cognitive, physical, communication, emotional and social well-being of people with disabilities.

Physically:
It is the horse’s movement that has a dynamic effect on the rider’s body. The horse stimulates the rider’s pelvis and trunk in a manner that closely resembles a human’s normal gait. This, in turn, helps improve an array of areas including balance, strength, tone, and endurance.

Sensory:
The movement, as well as the multi-sensory opportunities on the horse can help with a variety of sensory integration issues. A smooth-gaited, consistently-paced horse provides needed input to help a rider establish rhythm. A rough-gaited horse may provide a rider with the stimulation to help organize and integrate sensory input. Movement exploration while on the horse helps improve overall body awareness.

Emotionally:
The impacts are vast – success of overcoming fear and anxiety, the ability to achieve independence, master a riding skill, control and attend to an animal – all help a rider to realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. The relationships that develop between riders, volunteers, horses and staff are integral to the positive emotional experience at Lovelane.

Cognitively:
The horse’s gait helps organize the nervous system of the rider and thus is a perfect place to work on educational goals such as letter recognition and sequencing while riding. The alternative setting and movement aspect also provides many riders with the motivation to learn new things.

Benefits:
- Trunk control, balance, muscle tone, and strength
- Range of motion and joint mobility
- Fine motor coordination
- Sensory integration and concentration
- Spatial awareness and perceptual skills
- Cognitive skills
- Speech and language skills
- Self-discipline and self-awareness
- Confidence, pride and self-esteem

To learn more about Lovelane go to www.lovelane.org or call 781.259.1177.