

# REHABILITATING DREAMS: INTERSECTORAL STRATEGIES THROUGH HIPPO THERAPY

*REABILITANDO SONHOS: ESTRATÉGIAS INTERSETORIAIS POR MEIO DA EQUOTERAPIA*

*REHABILITAR LOS SUEÑOS: ESTRATEGIAS INTERSECTORIALES A TRAVÉS DE LA HIPOTERAPIA*

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## ABSTRACT

To describe the experience of the implementation of the Rehabilitating Dreams project through Hippotherapy in the municipality of Madalena/Ceará. This is an experience report on the process of implantation and implementation of an Equine Therapy service in the Unified Health System of Madalena, Ceará, Brazil. The study was carried out based on the experience of managers, who participated in the process of implementing the service, based on experience reports and field diaries. A solid intersectoral link established during the construction phase of the project is evidenced, involving effective collaboration between the Municipal Health Department, the Municipal Administration and private sector partners. During 2022, 252 Hippotherapy sessions were held, serving 35 children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, behavioral disorders, neuropsychomotor development delay, physical disability, multiple disability and cerebral palsy. This study indicates that the insertion of an Hippotherapy program in the context of the Unified Health System is an effective approach to the rehabilitation of children with various disabilities. Substantial benefits have been noted for the promotion of comprehensive and comprehensive care for these children.

**Descriptors:** *Horse-Assisted Therapy. Children. Unified Health System. Cross-sectoral collaboration.*

## RESUMO

Descrever a experiência da implementação do projeto Reabilitando Sonhos por meio da Equoterapia no município de Madalena/Ceará. Trata-se de um relato de experiência sobre o processo de implantação e implementação de um serviço de Equoterapia no Sistema Único de Saúde municipal de Madalena-Ceará. O estudo foi realizado a partir da vivência de gestores, que participaram do processo de implementação do serviço, com base nos relatos de experiência e diários de campo. Evidencia-se um enlace intersetorial sólido estabelecido durante a fase construtiva do projeto, envolvendo a colaboração efetiva entre a Secretaria Municipal de Saúde, a Administração Municipal e parceiros do setor privado. No decorrer do ano de 2022, foram realizadas 252 sessões de Equoterapia, atendendo a 35 crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista, distúrbios comportamentais, atraso no desenvolvimento neuropsicomotor, deficiência física, deficiência múltipla e paralisia cerebral. Este estudo indica que a inserção de um programa de Equoterapia no contexto do Sistema Único de Saúde constitui uma abordagem eficaz no que tange à reabilitação de crianças com deficiências diversas. Notaram-se benefícios substanciais para a promoção do cuidado abrangente e integral a essas crianças.


**Descritores:** *Terapia Assistida por Cavalos. Crianças. Sistema Único de Saúde. Colaboração Intersetorial.*


## RESUMEN

Describir la experiencia de implementación del proyecto Rehabilitación de Sueños mediante Equino-terapia en el municipio de Madalena/Ceará. Se trata de un relato de experiencia sobre el proceso de implementación e implementación de un servicio de Hipoterapia en el Sistema Único de Salud municipal de Madalena-Ceará. El estudio se realizó con base en la experiencia de los directivos, que participaron en el proceso de implementación del servicio, a partir de informes de experiencia y diarios de campo. Hay evidencia de un vínculo intersectorial sólido establecido durante la fase de construcción del proyecto, entre la colaboración efectiva entre el Departamento de Salud Municipal, la Administración Municipal y los socios del sector privado. Durante 2022 se realizaron 252 sesiones de Equitación Terapia, atendiendo a 35 niños con Trastorno del Espectro Autista, trastornos de conducta, retraso en el desarrollo neuropsicomotor, discapacidad física, pluridiscapacidad y parálisis cerebral. Este estudio indica que la inserción de un programa de Hipoterapia en el contexto del Sistema Único de Salud constituye un abordaje eficaz con respecto a la rehabilitación de niños con diversas discapacidades. Se observaron beneficios sustanciales para promover la atención integral e integral a estos niños.

**Descritores:** *Terapia Asistida por Caballos. Niños. Sistema Único de Salud. Colaboración Intersectorial.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1988, the Federal Constitution enacted the process of implementing the Unified Health System, with the State having the obligation to guarantee the right to health<sup>1</sup>. Thus, through the advent of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and the most important international pacts, treaties and conventions on the human rights of the child, the guarantees of the fundamental rights of the child are established in our country, as a result of these commitments, as well as collective efforts for the construction of actions, programs and projects developed in the social areas and, in particular, those related to women's and children's health<sup>2</sup>. This policy focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the entire service network of the Unified Health System<sup>3</sup>.

In recent years, the Brazilian health system has made advances in the definition of concepts and in the combination of new technologies aimed at the organization of care in Health Care Networks, as they are configured as an organizational process of health actions and services that use different technological densities, through the integration and articulation of health services and other resources in the territory in the care of people with temporary or permanent disabilities. progressive, regressive or stable, intermittent or continuous<sup>4</sup>.

As a result, the municipality of Madalena, which belongs to the Sertão Central Health Region, is permeated by a care gap regarding the care of children with disabilities, given the absence of municipal and regional services that can serve this population, thus making it laborious to guarantee the principles listed in the National Policy for Comprehensive Child Health Care<sup>5</sup>.

In the demographic, social and economic context, children face the territorial challenge of living conditions and limited opportunities in society in all their age groups, especially in early childhood in relation to the demands for public services, although significant advances have been made.

Thus, the Municipal Health Department of Madalena started the project "Rehabilitating Dreams" based on the premise of comprehensive care for children with disabilities, in order to minimize the potential impacts, in the present and in the future, on the lives of these children, because in the municipality, about 7% of the population has some type of disability, and in early childhood the appearance of 60 children with some type of disability is evidenced.

The large accumulation of people in need of the service, the lack of financial and human resources, point to a limitation of implementing rehabilitation practices beyond the traditional one. Thus, the project presented here as an Equine Therapy service that offers a therapeutic method that uses the horse within an interdisciplinary approach in the areas of health, education and riding, seeking the biopsychosocial development of people with disabilities in early childhood<sup>6</sup>.

This project was conceived from the speech of the mother of a patient during a rehabilitation service, she reported "I would like so much to offer a service to my son, where he could live with horses. He's passionate about horses." This speech was accepted by the professional who attended him, and from then on, concerns began to be generated so that it would be possible to make this child's dream come true and in fact materialize this need. Corroborating Maslowe, man is motivated by the desire to satisfy many needs. Thus, the theory of human motivation considers a hierarchy of basic human needs. This theory is based on the principle that every human being has common needs that motivate his or her behavior in order to satisfy them, according to hierarchical levels<sup>7</sup>.

To this end, Hippotherapy provides a stimulus to the development of practicing children, making it possible to identify the improvement of postural aspects and also providing improvement in interaction, speech and locomotion, constituting a complete therapy, in view of its interdisciplinary approach<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, this study aims to describe the experience of the implementation of the project "Rehabilitating Dreams through Hippotherapy in the municipality of Madalena/Ceará.

## METHODS

This is a descriptive study, of the experience report type, carried out from the experience of managers of the Municipal Health Department of Madalena who participated in the process of implantation and

implementation of the Hippotherapy service in the Unified Health System. The municipality of Madalena is located in the state of Ceará, in the Northeast of Brazil. It is located in the Sertão Central Mesoregion and in the Quixadá Microregion.

This experience report was carried out in May to July 2002 and was initiated by the formation of a situational diagnosis and an analysis based on the local workforce and the potential of the territory.

To describe this project, field diaries were used, where the authors' observations and experiences in the construction of the project were recorded. For Altheide (2009), a field diary is a useful tool for researchers, students and anyone who wants to keep a record of their activities. They serve to track the progress of a project, document events, or simply record your ideas and thoughts<sup>8</sup>.

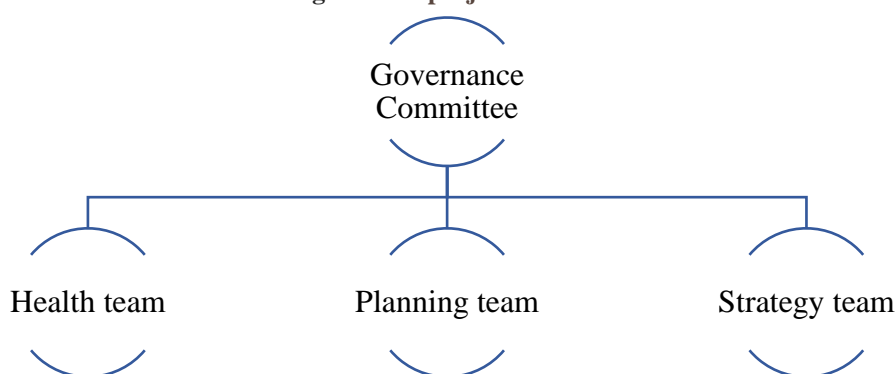
To this end, this project will describe the constructive process of the project focusing on the intersectoral articulations carried out for its implementation and implementation, through the systematic proposal of Holliday<sup>9</sup>, as it logically favors the organization of the elements that constitute the phenomenon already experienced, allowing the identification, problematization and understanding of the implantation/implementation of the Hippo-therapy service.

It was necessary to go through five stages to systematize the experiences as Holliday advises: starting points, initial questions, recovery of the lived process, deep reflection and the points of arrival. As this is an experience report, there is no need to appear ethical, since the description was based on the authors' personal experiences.

## RESULTS

Our starting point for the implementation of this service came to complement the health care of children with disabilities, aiming at the possibility of resolving health inequities.

**Figure 1 - Construction flowchart of the Rehabilitating Dreams project.**



Source: Prepared by the authors.

In figure 1, you can see the path taken. Initially, a governance committee discussed the implementation of the Hippotherapy service. The Committee was structured in three major instances: Health Team (representatives of the municipal health department and technical team dedicated to health, assistance and health surveillance activities), planning team (representatives of the municipal departments of health, education, social assistance and finance dedicated to the technical and financial planning of the project), and strategic team (responsible for strategic decision-making and discussion and direction by the health teams). health and planning), in which one leader from each of the two teams above, were part of the strategic team.

The health and planning teams worked at the operational and technical level, so that decisions could be taken to the strategic team. Aiming at attention to all levels of society, a support team formed by the Center for Permanent Education in Health (NUMEPS) and representatives of social control were working with the governance committee.

After this planning phase, articulations were made between the Municipal Health Department, Haras Zé Vaqueiro and a professional training process was initiated. The patient admission processes follow a sequencing, as shown in the figure below:

**Figure 2 - Flowchart of admission of patients of the Rehabilitating Dreams project.**



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Patient admissions comply with the principles of the Unified Health System and the criteria defined by the governance committee and the products developed by the team professionals during the training process. In this process, the Secretariats of Social Assistance and Education presented a technical report on the social assistance and educational situation of the patients, which included an analysis of the Continuous Provision Benefit, conditions of school attendance.

The children undergo an individual assessment with professionals from Social Work, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy, Medicine, Psychology and Occupational Therapy. After this multidisciplinary evaluation, technical opinions are issued and the medical professional issues an opinion to start the activities.

Soon after this phase, functional evaluations are applied in order to verify the goals of the rehabilitation process and the development of a unique therapeutic project together with the family members.

The instruments used for the evaluation were constructed during the project planning process and all of them are scientifically validated instruments and comply with the International Classification of Functionality.

In addition to the clinical assessment instruments, the Quality of Life instruments - WHOQOL-100 (assess domains: physical, psychological, level of independence, social relationships, among others) are applied; Denver Motor Development Test II (Evaluates four areas of development); and the motor development scale (fine motor skills, global motor skills, balance, body schema, spatial organization).

The sessions last 30 minutes and are monitored by the multidisciplinary team. Currently, the project has 35 patients. In 2022, 252 sessions were held. This line of treatment for rehabilitation does not discard traditional treatments, but rather works in complementation.

The "Rehabilitating Dreams" project is an important initiative that is bringing significant benefits to children and adolescents with physical, intellectual and sensory disabilities in the municipality of Madalena, Ceará. The project serves a group of 35 patients aged between 3 and 18 years, most of whom are female (60%).

The pathologies treated with Hippotherapy are diverse, including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, myelomeningocele, amputation, Down syndrome, autism, mild intellectual disability, visual impairment and hearing impairment.

The benefits brought by children include: improved motor coordination, balance, posture, muscle strength, flexibility, cognition, self-esteem and socialization. The movement of the horse promotes sensory

stimuli that activate the central nervous system, contributing to the development of motor, cognitive and social skills.

## DISCUSSION

The development of the health professional's practice has as its main objective the promotion of human-centered care. The project being described here is a direct response in the light of the Social Determination Theory of the Health-Disease Process<sup>10</sup>.

The main motivation to promote health care arose from active listening to a narrative that involved a personal desire in the context of a rehabilitation process. An individual desire stimulated the discussion about the creation of a service that could complement the conventional rehabilitation process.

According to the National Association of Hippotherapy, Hippotherapy activities should be carried out by multidisciplinary teams that operate in an interdisciplinary way, covering as many disciplines as possible in the areas of health, education and horseback riding.

The benefits of Hippotherapy are vast and can be observed both in the physical sphere and in the mental and social aspects. From a social standpoint, practitioners perceive themselves as part of a group and experience a sense of belonging. In the children who received this treatment from the project, the physical and social improvements were remarkable, which are significantly enriching the quality of life of the patients.

In this sense, Hippotherapy, as it is considered a complementary therapy, can be administered in conjunction with other forms of therapy, such as Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy. It can be an effective alternative for children and adolescents with disabilities who do not respond to traditional treatments.

The scientific article entitled "Hippotherapy in the Unified Health System: a systematic review", developed by Farias and his collaborators, offers a detailed analysis of the existing literature on the benefits and importance of hippotherapy in the context of the Unified Health System. The authors concluded that this therapy is effective and safe, and can contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. In addition, the inclusion of this public service represents a fundamental step in ensuring access to this treatment for all Brazilians who need it<sup>11</sup>.

According to substantial scientific evidence, the benefits and relevance of Hippotherapy for individuals with disabilities are supported. The incorporation of Hippotherapy within the scope of the Unified Health System represents a measure of paramount importance with the purpose of ensuring access to this treatment to all Brazilian citizens who need it.

A study conducted in Brazil by Santos et al. analyzed the process and effects of hippotherapy on children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The results of the research demonstrated significant improvements in motor coordination, balance, muscle strength, and flexibility in these young people. In addition, this technique has also been shown to be beneficial in raising self-esteem, reducing stress and fostering socialization of participants<sup>12</sup>.

These investigations corroborate the results demonstrated with the children who are being treated, as it has already been possible to observe that this therapy promotes the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities and those in situations of social vulnerability, being based as a tool of unique relevance in the promotion of social inclusion and in the improvement of the quality of life of patients.

This report describes the implementation of an Equine Therapy service in the interior of the State of Ceará, but identifies challenges in relation to its development. Given the onerous nature of this service, the project required a series of steps that involved intra- and intersectoral articulations, since its operations are relatively expensive, requiring qualified professionals, trained horses and appropriate facilities.

Therefore, it is imperative to carry out more comprehensive studies for a more complete description of its implementation in other regions. Despite these limitations, it is possible to see the activities of Hippotherapy as a complementary therapy that offers effective actions in the treatment of children.

The project "Rehabilitating Dreams" emerges as an example of how Hippotherapy can be an effective tool to foster inclusion and improve the quality of life of children with disabilities. The results of the research show a series of benefits in the physical, cognitive and social spheres, contributing substantially to the improvement of the quality of life of these individuals.

Therefore, this study is of relevant significance for public and collective health, since it demonstrates that Hippotherapy is a viable therapy to be made available by the Unified Health System. Hippotherapy can effectively contribute to the promotion of social inclusion and the improvement of the quality of life of children and adolescents with disabilities, who are often marginalized in society due to their limitations.

## CONCLUSION

The "Rehabilitating Dreams" project is an innovative initiative that has the potential to improve the quality of life of children and adolescents with disabilities. The study provides evidence that hippotherapy is an effective therapy for this group. However, further studies are needed to confirm these results and evaluate the long-term effects of hippotherapy.

The comprehensive approach to the integral development of children involves the implementation of continuous, dynamic and progressive actions. The children assisted by the project have demonstrated functional improvements, advances in learning and improvement of psychosocial aspects.

This realization was only possible due to the collaboration between various entities in the local network of services and the formation of a political and administrative alliance that was based on the comprehensive care of people with disabilities.

In order to substantiate this endeavor in a scientific manner, we plan to conduct studies involving the participating children and their families. The purpose of this research is to generate scientific knowledge about the benefits of Hippotherapy in this specific group. Such investigations aim to explore the effects of human-animal interaction on health, develop new therapeutic approaches, and evaluate the efficacy of hippotherapy in various clinical settings.

The actions of this project are an example of how hippotherapy can be an effective tool to promote the rehabilitation and social inclusion of people with disabilities. The project has the potential to improve the lives of many children and adolescents, contributing to the construction of a fairer and more inclusive society.

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