

STAT History and Vision

Catherine Markosky is the mother of 5, having 2 children with special needs. After researching and trying many alternative therapies, she found that Hippotherapy (equine-assisted therapy) ultimately helped her son to walk. Mason, now 9, and Mason's parents were told by medical professionals that he would require a wheelchair and would never be able to walk independently. Not willing to accept that or to even use a wheelchair, Catherine enrolled Mason, at age 3, in Hippotherapy at Stable Movements where he spent weeks riding his favorite horse Rusty. By the time Mason was 8 years old he was walking independently! At first he learned to sit independently, then to bear weight on his legs, using a pediatric gait trainer (walker), and finally walking without assistance. "Mason still has a long way to go to be able to 'walk down the street' but Hippotherapy allowed him to heal in many ways both physically and emotionally," says Catherine. Prior to Hippotherapy, the majority of Mason's car trips included going to hospitals for surgery and doctor's appointments where he would be prodded, held down, have blood draws, and other painful experiences both emotionally and physically. With each car ride, he would panic and have severe tantrums causing much distress to his parents and self inflicted injuries. To slow down at a stop sign would throw him into an attack. After just ten trips to the barn, he completely stopped having his attacks! This was a huge quality of life improvement for the entire family.

Hippotherapy brings families together in a healing environment that is both therapeutic and recreational.

Soon after Mason turned 3, Catherine had another child, Max, now 6, who was diagnosed as Autistic. Having already experienced amazing benefits from alternative therapies with Mason, Catherine enrolled Max in an equine-assisted therapy called Therapeutic Riding. Max, a non-verbal toddler, began to vocalize words while riding; such as: "ball" and "horse"! Now, Max can make verbal requests "I want ball please." Before her eyes, Catherine witnessed her children make leaps and bounds improvements and has brought much hope and healing for their family.

Mason and Max also receive other alternative therapies including biomedical, nutrition, music, and art therapies with very positive results. "The non-traditional or alternative therapies have helped my children ten-fold compared to *any* traditional method. I have seen much faster results and we have so much more fun! Typically when you are working within an alternative protocol, the parents' full participation is required – helping the child and parent to heal and to build a tighter bond together. Unfortunately, you will not find insurance coverage or Medicaid reimbursement for these treatments and many families find it cost prohibitive." states Catherine.

To make alternative therapies available to families who have children with special needs, Catherine founded STAT in 2007, to raise money (and awareness) so children throughout the Southern Tier who have disabilities can participate in these beneficial programs without families having to go to the "poor house". STAT is a 100% volunteer organization – where every dollar goes to the programs and families.

Now, as 2009 ends, STAT raised almost \$30,000 and gave 480 "scholarships" to families throughout Broome and Tioga Counties. 2010 will be bigger and better – with many fantastic fundraisers planned and new grants-in-aid. STAT plans on doubling the number of scholarships and starting a new program called the ProMISE Project as well as additional professional training seminars, parent workshops, and an ASD Resource Guide!

We thank everyone who has supported STAT's vision and hope that you see us through the New Year and beyond. We are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of families with special needs and will work toward our ultimate goal to design, erect and dedicate a new alternative therapy / education center in Broome County by 2020.