

# Improving Lives...

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2017



# One Stride at a Time

# About Special Strides

## Our Mission

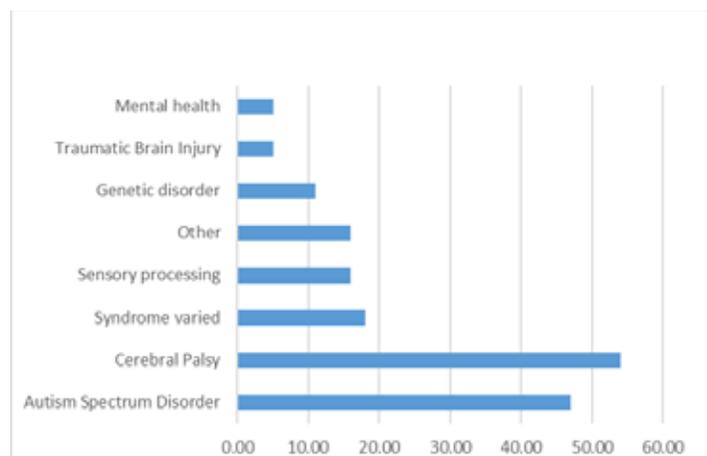
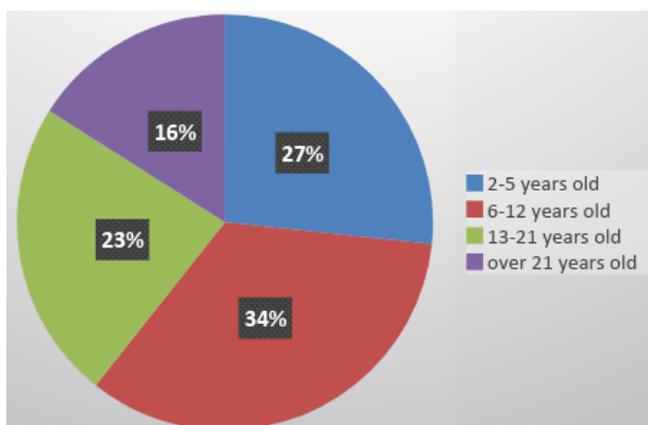
Special Strides is a non-profit organization devoted to improving the lives of individuals with special needs. With a unique combination of therapy, horses and the natural environment, individuals achieve goals for therapy, education and recreation. Special Strides provides all individuals an opportunity to “improve lives... one stride at a time”, regardless of financial status.

## Our Quest

In 2017, we provided approximately 3,700 physical therapy, occupational therapy and psychotherapy sessions, riding, driving lessons or educational sessions for our 140 clients with a variety of disabilities and life challenges. Special Strides is a PATH Premier Center featuring a variety of programs and services for individuals with special needs, financial needs, community service needs and occupational exploration.

Special Strides is blessed to make its home on an amazing equestrian center named Congress Hill Farm. The farm is located in central NJ on 200 acres including paddocks, an indoor riding arena, outdoor arenas, a track and acres of trails. Our 21 horses, our partners, join us on a pathway for reaching potential and building community. Clients enjoy interacting with farm animals such as goats and chickens as well as our sensory playground, created by our therapy staff, and is made possible because of donors like you.

## Ages and Primary Diagnosis of Individuals Served by Special Strides



# Why The Horse?



**“The outside of a horse is good for the inside of man.”**

*Winston Churchill*

Horses give a sense of empowerment and accomplishment leading to many “firsts” in life. For our clients this may be their first experience of independence. At Special Strides, we recognize the power of the horse to change lives...one stride at a time.

- During **physical and occupational therapy**, the movement of the horse provides information for the brain, nerves and muscles improving motor skills, communication and emotional well-being.
- During **Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EAP)**, the horse helps reflect ones true emotions and helps foster confidence, self-esteem and responsibility.
- During **Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL)**, the horse helps individuals who learn differently to integrate new concepts through multiple sensory pathways.
- During **Adaptive Riding**, the horse helps build a client's confidence, teaches respect for others, and fosters communication through exercise and recreation.

## FOUNDING DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

# From Then... 1998



Twenty years ago, the right time, the right place: a pencil in my hand, a farm to explore, a therapist's calling, people in need and a community with open arms.

These are the humble beginnings that began two decades of service for those in need. The spark that ignited action were the stories of two young preschoolers. One, who did not speak or move, visited Congress Hill Farm on a field trip. I gently collected her fragile body and placed her on a horse. Sitting up she began to recite "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star". Two, a boy afflicted with Cerebral Palsy; unable to walk without assistance from a walker. With curiosity and a driving desire to heal, "Please come visit the farm and ride my horse every other day". After two sessions, the boy no longer required a metal walker and was truly independent and free!

We started with a borrowed horse, no salaries, a notebook (no computer), a push button phone, 4 clients and a lot of enthusiasm!

Our board began to guide and support 3 passionate therapists on a journey to learn about the science of equine movement, horses, business, philanthropy, community outreach, volunteerism, personnel and expertise.

The phone began to ring and newspapers began to write. Clients made physical and emotional changes faster than in clinics! Special Strides began to grow rapidly. The power of therapy on a farm combined with the powerful movement of our special horses was infectious. We began to grow our herd of horses and in turn we needed to grow our bank account. In the early years, Square Dances, Casino Night and speaking engagements to share our success brought in the dollars to survive. To help our clients thrive, we began a financial aid fund, The Steven Werthan Memorial Fund. Our mission included providing equine assisted activities and therapies to all those who enter.

Friends, community supporters and corporate sponsors have aided our journey and allowed us to help make a difference for hundreds of clients, their families, staff and volunteers.

With gratitude and a song in my heart, I thank you for supporting Special Strides and my life passion!

"And as we wind on down the road  
Our shadows taller than our soul  
There walks a lady we all know  
Who shines white light and wants to show  
How everything still turns to gold  
And if you listen very hard  
The tune will come to you at last  
When all are one and one is all  
To be a rock and not to roll  
And she's buying the stairway to heaven" The Rolling Stones

**LAURIE LANDY, OTR/L**

*Founding Director*



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE:

# To Now... 2017



"No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another."

– Charles Dickens

Long ago someone asked me if working with children and families with extreme challenges in life made me sad. I have never been sad a day at Special Strides. It is a place that fills me with wonder, challenge and joy. It is a place where I can truly make a difference in people's lives and they make a difference in mine. I learn from every child, every parent, every student, every volunteer, every staff member - every time I am challenged, I learn. Special Strides is a place of challenges and therefore a place of learning and growth.

What started with 3 therapists, 3 clients and a 3 ring binder is now 11 therapists, 4 instructors, 11 support staff, 140 clients on a yearly basis, 7 computers and countless volunteers and financial supporters.

The leaps that we have made as an organization are staggering, however, they pale in comparison to the gains that our clients have made over the years: First words, first steps, first blue ribbon, and first time trying a new food, new skill, or new interaction.

We have grown beyond a center for physical therapy and occupational therapy into an organization that can see a child through a trail of success; from occupational therapy to adaptive riding to volunteer to employee. We have also aged in that we are no longer just about children. Our "children" are now adults and adults are finding their way to Special Strides too.

Our impact in the local community is so pervasive that I cannot move through it with a Special Strides shirt without someone stopping me to inquire about services, volunteering, donating or a general curiosity. Our impact in the educational community is equally impressive. Over the past 19 years, we have trained 30 student physical therapists, 14 student occupational therapists, 10 exercise science interns, and helped many more young individuals find their occupational calling. Special Strides is an international center for learning the fundamentals of the strategy of hippotherapy; hosting therapists from around the world, educating PT students in the classroom, exploring (dis) Abilities with adaptive riding instructors and presenting original work at international conferences.

Our THEN was impressive but our NOW is top notch.

Thank you for helping us reach the pinnacle of success for all.

Fondly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susie Rehr".

**SUSIE REHR, PT, HPCS**

*Executive Director*

"Clinical Educator of the Year Award" Northeastern University



# Inspirational Impact

## A Family Affair



*Manu's Family is Very Grateful for  
Special Strides and  
for All Those  
Who Have Made this Experience  
**POSSIBLE***

Raising a child with special needs is often a family affair and Special Strides has become family for many of our clients. Manu, who is turning 17, has been at Special Strides since she was 4 years old when her parents were concerned that she was not meeting her developmental milestones. Her speech pathologist at the time recognized the influence of the horse for building core stability, gaining confidence, and learning a new skill. Although Manu loved many of the things that typical 4 year olds love, like swimming and water play, her sessions at Special Strides had a long lasting and inspirational impact on her and her family's life. Every time she comes to the farm, she helps her instructor, Charlene, with chores after her adaptive riding session.

The Krishnan family exemplifies this concept of "It's a family affair". Manu's older sister, Sharada was so influenced by her experiences at Special Strides that she is pursuing a degree in occupational therapy. Manu's father, who is employed by Goldman Sachs, wanted to give back to Special Strides and organized a team of "Community TeamWorks" members to do community service including painting and creating props for use during riding lessons and therapy sessions. Latha, Manu's mother, says she cannot even consider ceasing their weekly lessons and is amazed at how the program has grown over the last 13 years. Everyone who knows Manu says "She is such a happy child" and makes those around her happy too. Manu's family is so grateful for Special Strides and for all those who have made this experience possible for their family.



# How You Help To Make A Difference

## Trent's Dream

Trent's mother Kim is grateful to the entire team at Special Strides. "They treat Trent and I as if we were part of their family and the most important people in the world". Each client is supported individually and specific plans are created for the best possible outcome for each individual. This unique feeling of belonging drives Kim to be active in fundraising for Special Strides. These fundraising activities help families like hers get the best for their children, by raising funds for financial assistance.

Trent, featured on the cover, is an energetic 3 year-old preschooler who loves the things that many boys his age love- friends, animals and, his mom and dad. Trent dreams of becoming a zoo keeper or leading safaris looking for elephants and giraffes. While he is at Special Strides he gets to explore his dreams with our goats, chickens and horses. Trent was diagnosed with Duchene Muscular Dystrophy at the age of 10 months. This information sent Kim and Trent down the path of "early intervention" and various therapies.

Kim was aware of Special Strides because of her work as a Special Ed teacher, but did not think that a child as young as Trent could participate. After searching for alternatives, Kim discovered that Trent was indeed old enough to participate in and benefit from therapies offered at Special Strides. Because of Trent's passion for animals, Trent does not realize that he is receiving physical therapy as he works on his core muscles while riding Snuffy. Trent's motor skills and vocabulary have exploded during the 2 years he has been at the farm- he often takes the time to point at the baby goats on the farm and exclaim.... "they are mammals and not reptiles like a snake!"



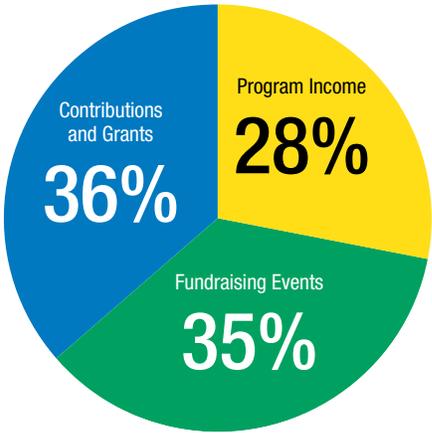
# 2017 Financial Highlights

It costs almost one million dollars per year to operate Special Strides.

More than 70% of those funds were contributions from you, our donor, to help cover costs for individuals and equines.

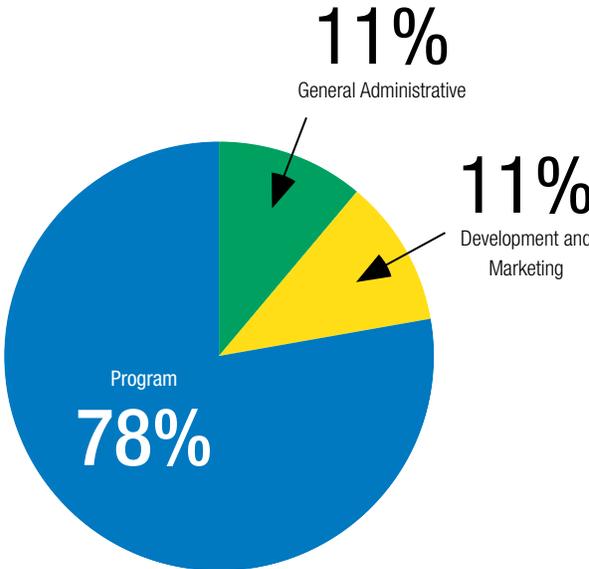
## Revenue

Program Income	\$ 317,981
Fundraising Events	\$ 392,002
Contributions and Grants	\$ 405,843
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 1,115,826</b>



## Expenses

Program	\$774,326
General/Administrative	\$ 112,180
Development and Marketing	\$110,641
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$997,147</b>
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 118,679</b>

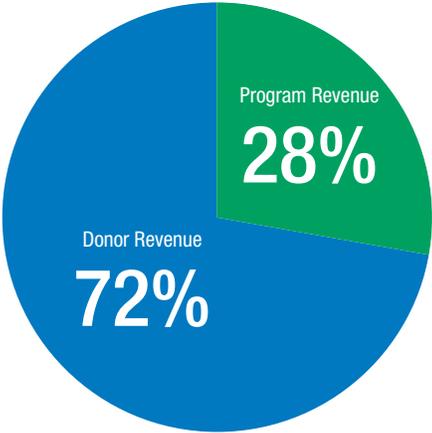


# Donor Dollars Impact Annual Revenue

“We have witnessed firsthand the magic that happens at Special Strides. This is why we have chosen to support this extraordinary program. The cost of maintaining a clinical facility on a farm is staggering. However, their results are undeniably miraculous. We want to help as many individuals as possible have access to these remarkable services. Knowing that these horses are unique in their jobs drives us to support Special Strides and these awe-inspiring animals. That is why we sponsor Snuffy-the special pony with a stripe.” Gary and Joan Fox- board member, volunteer, cherished donor.

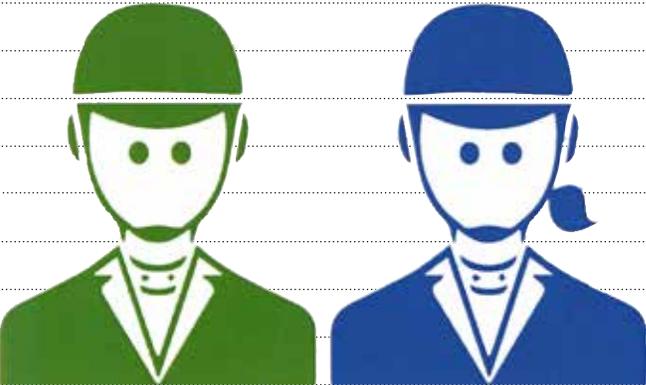


Snuffy with Joan Fox



- 28% Program Revenue
- 72% Donor Revenue

# Donor Dollars Impact Individuals



- 50% Individuals paying full fee
- 50% Individuals Receiving Financial Assistance

The Steven Werthan Memorial Fund, lovingly named after the child of our founding board member, provides financial assistance to individuals who would not be able to experience our services and programs due to financial situations. This fund, and our Fund-A-Child sponsorship program, provides financial support directly to our clients and hold the cost of services and programs to the lowest possible amount. Our fundraising committee has over 25 individuals supporting our barn dance fundraiser held every fall and our junior committee, with over 300 teens from local area schools, raise funds for fund-a-child during our annual color run.

# Our Community of Donors

Special Strides is grateful for all of your gifts of time, talent and treasure received during the 2017 Fiscal Year.

It is only with your significant contributions that we have been able to serve our clients this year. We are deeply appreciative of your support.

## Victory Strides (\$5,000+)

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## ***Thank You***

To The Joy in Childhood Foundation-Dunkin' Donuts and Baskin Robbins for providing grant money for our new therapeutic playground equipment.



Kevin, Michael, and Carol Decker  
Dunkin' Donuts Franchisees  
Monroe Township  
and Spotswood, NJ

## Our Volunteers

Volunteerism is integral to the functioning of all services and programs at Special Strides. Volunteers assist as therapy aides, horse leaders, office administrators, and fundraisers. Over one hundred individuals are trained annually to perform direct services (therapy aides and horse leaders). In 2017, more than three hundred teenage young leaders learned philanthropy and event planning and helped raise over \$120,000. Organizationally, this requires a volunteer coordinator, volunteer educator, and teen fundraising supervisor. Special Strides volunteers are not only our bridge to the community to fulfill community service requirements, but also to provide future occupational experience/exposure through our mentorship.



# Our Support Team



Top Row - left to right: Amanda Sowa, Charlene Skwara, Karen Goldberg, Beth Miller  
Front Row - Megan A. McFadden, Susie Rehr, Laurie Landy, Jane Burrows

## Our Support Team

**Laurie Landy**, OTR/L and Founding Director  
**Susie Rehr**, PT, HPSC and Executive Director  
**Karen Goldberg**, Director of Marketing and Events  
**Marge Kennedy**, Administrative Assistant  
**Beth Miller**, Development Assistant  
**Jane Burrows**, PT, DPT  
**Alexandra Brzenckowski**, OTR/L  
**Lindsay Clark**, PT, DPT

**Charlene Skwara**, Barn Manager and Adaptive Riding Instructor  
**Amanda Sowa**, Equine Trainer, Therapeutic Driving and Adaptive Riding Instructor  
**Dina Parrello**, Adaptive Riding Instructor and Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning

**Meredith Gebel**, PT, DPT  
**Deanna Gebele**, PT, DPT  
**Jen Majdosz**, OTR/L  
**Megan A. McFadden**, MSW, LSW  
**Andrea Rehr**, PT, DPT  
**Emily Moscoe**, OTR/L  
**Maureen Rubin**, PT  
**Lori Simon**, OTRL

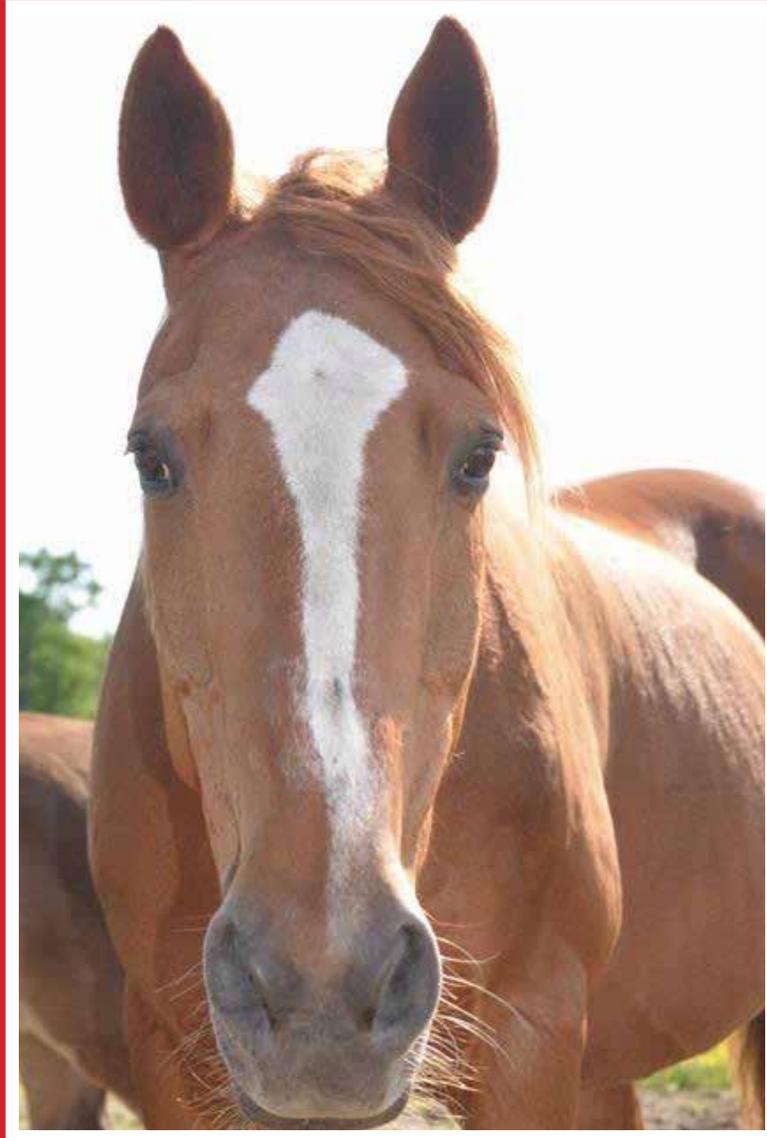
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Daniel Goldstein  
Zachary Gross  
Neal Herstik  
Rob Kash  
Laurie Landy  
Samuel Landy  
Celia Mastbaum  
Allison Nagelberg  
Susie Rehr  
Carol Werthan

500+ volunteers including side-walkers, horse handlers, office assistants and Junior Committee Leaders And our equine partners: AJ, Barry, Chubby, Dreamer, Iris, Johnny, Juliet, Magic, Milo, Molly, Pretzel, Prince, Romeo, Snowy, Snuffy, Summer, Sunny, Templeton, Ticonderoga, Tucker and Yankee

# *“In Loving Memory of Prince”*

Last year we had to say good bye to our beloved Morgan/Standardbred horse Prince. Twenty-seven years ago we were blessed with a surprise! Laurie Landy's riding Morgan, Dandy, gave birth to a handsome colt, "Sudden Surprise" aka Prince. Prince became a beloved 4H horse and then a grand champion hunter jumper at many local horse shows. He taught both able bodied and disabled riders how to ride and how to form a relationship with a horse. He embodied his name as a noble, charming, generous, steadfast, dependable, honest friend who will always be embedded in the hearts of those that touched him.



## **EVENT DATES**

Color Glow Run 04.21.2018

Horse Show 05.06.2018

Summer Concert 07.20.2018

20th Anniversary Barn Benefit Dance 10.06.2018

**Special Strides** | 118 Federal Rd. , Monroe, NJ 08831

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