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“Look Mum, No Hands!”: The effects of increasing opportunities for choice-making and independence for children with disabilities when using a Riding for the Disabled programme.

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ABSTRACT

Many non-disabled people take for granted their ability to choose when they receive help from others. Those with disabilities are often denied this choice, having minimal control over their lives. Increasing literature and research advocate that children with disabilities should be allowed choice-opportunities, as this is an essential component of becoming self-determined. Increasing access to choice has many benefits, including increasing enjoyment, confidence, assertiveness, motivation, and performance. Furthermore, it has been shown to decrease challenging and undesirable behaviour. The current project investigated the effects of providing choice to children with disabilities while participating in riding sessions at the Riding for the Disabled. Furthermore, it investigated whether the children could become more independent when completing riding related tasks. The mastery of two routines (mounting and dismounting) was analysed. All participants improved in their mastery of routines, and thus their independence increased. The hypothesis that with the provision of choice and increase in independence, the children would express higher levels of enjoyment was supported. Those who see providing choice as a deleterious concept fear that children with disabilities will make poor decisions. The project investigated the effect of choice opportunities on the level of risk that the children engaged in when performing riding activities. It was found that the children did not expose themselves to any unnecessary risk despite the increase in control they experienced while riding. An alternating treatment design was used for eight single-case studies. Dependent variables measured were expressions of enjoyment, inattention, undesirable behaviour, level of risk, mastery of routines, number of prompts needed, and incidents of crying.

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**“There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the
inside of a man”**

Winston Churchill

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Quote.....	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	1
1.1 Personal Prologue.....	1
1.2 Working with Children with Disabilities.....	2
1.3 Choice.....	4
1.4 Independence and Autonomy.....	11
1.5 Risk.....	13
1.6 Routines.....	14
1.7 The Riding for the Disabled.....	15
1.8 The Present Study.....	18
CHAPTER 2: METHOD.....	20
2.1 Design.....	20
2.2 Recruitment and Selection of Participants.....	20
2.3 Participant Characteristics.....	21
2.4 Measures.....	24
2.5 Procedure.....	27
2.6 Interobserver Agreement.....	30
2.7 Ethical Considerations.....	30
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	32
3.1 Trevor.....	32
3.2 Helen.....	35

3.3 Sally.....	38
3.4 Jane.....	39
3.5 David.....	41
3.6 Harry.....	42
3.7 Daniel.....	43
3.8 Lisa.....	45
3.9 Comparisons across Participants.....	47
3.10 Graphed Representations of the Data.....	48
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION.....	58
4.1 Summary of Results.....	58
4.2 Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice.....	60
4.3 Limitations of the Present Study.....	62
4.4 Implications for the RDA.....	63
4.5 Recommendations for Future Research.....	64
4.6 Conclusion.....	65
REFERENCES.....	67
APPENDICES.....	71
Appendix A- Information Sheet to the RDA.....	72
Appendix B- Information Sheet to Riders.....	75
Appendix C- Information Sheet to Parents.....	77
Appendix D- Information Sheet to Schools.....	80
Appendix E- Information Sheet to Volunteers.....	83
Appendix F- Routine Record.....	85
Appendix G- Confidentiality Contract for Research Assistants.....	86

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Trevor's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	48
Figure 2. Trevor's frequency of incidents of inattention.....	48
Figure 3. Trevor's mean level of risk.....	48
Figure 4. Trevor's mastery of routines.....	48
Figure 5. Helen's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	49
Figure 6. Helen's frequency of incidents of inattention.....	49
Figure 7. Helen's mean level of risk.....	49
Figure 8. Helen's mastery of routines.....	49
Figure 9. Mean number of prompts needed by Helen.....	50
Figure 10. Sally's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	51
Figure 11. Sally's mean level of risk.....	51
Figure 12. Sally's mastery of routines.....	51
Figure 13. Jane's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	52
Figure 14. Jane's mean level of risk.....	52
Figure 15. Jane's mastery of routines.....	52
Figure 16. David's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	53
Figure 17. David's frequency of incidents of inattention.....	53
Figure 18. David's mean level of risk.....	53
Figure 19. David's mastery of routines.....	53
Figure 20. Harry's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	54
Figure 21. Harry's frequency of incidents of undesirable behaviour.....	54
Figure 22. Harry's mean level of risk.....	54
Figure 23. Harry's mastery of routines.....	54
Figure 24. Daniel's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	55
Figure 25. Daniel's frequency of incidents of inattention.....	55
Figure 26. Daniel's mean level of risk.....	55
Figure 27. Daniel's mastery of routines.....	55
Figure 28. Lisa's frequency of expressions of enjoyment.....	56

Figure 29. Lisa's mean level of risk.....	56
Figure 30. Lisa's mastery of routines.....	56
Figure 31. Mean number of prompts needed by Lisa.....	56
Figure 32. Lisa's frequency of incidents of crying while riding.....	56