



Mini Therapy Horses is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity that visits over 50,000 children and adults in need each year across the United States, bringing joy to those who need a positive experience — patients, veterans, crisis victims and others.

COURTESY PHOTOS



The teams of Mini Therapy Horses love participating in the annual New Year's Day Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. This year's theme is The Power of Hope.

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Small but Mighty

VICTORIA NODIFF-NETANEL AND HER MINI THERAPY HORSES GIVE BACK IN LARGER-THAN-LIFE FASHION AT CHILDREN'S AND VETERAN'S HOSPITALS



Victoria Nodiff-Netanel was accustomed to giants. An accomplished and lifelong horsewoman, she competed in Intermediaire Dressage atop 17-hand powerhouse horses, relishing in their hypnotizing movements and exhilarating drive. While her passion was dressage, Nodiff-Netanel's life took an unexpected turn while visiting the Alamo Pintado Equine Medical Center some 100 miles north of her home in Los Angeles. She had been to the clinic many times for her horses, but on this day in particular, she looked for something to occupy her time while she waited. Just down the road from Alamo Pintado Equine she found Quicksilver Miniature Horse Ranch. That was it. A casual visit with her young daughter that was designed to occupy their attention for a few hours completely changed the course of Nodiff-Netanel's life's work. Mini

Therapy Horses was born, and she had suddenly found a purpose that surpassed her wildest dreams. She was meant to do this, to make a difference in the lives of children and veterans who desperately needed the calm, positivity and pure joy delivered by these intuitive and tiny creatures. Her miniature horses have since become partners, beloved pets and tools for her and her volunteers to initiate change.

At first glance most people may question the place of a miniature horse as a therapy animal. In reality, Nodiff-Netanel's horses are quiet, quick to emotionally connect with people and the epitome of expertly kept and cared-for animals. They have an immense desire to please and

hearts that seem to go well beyond their tiny bodies. Nodiff-Netanel and her team recognized early on the healing power of these incredible animals, and set out to impact the lives of children and veterans in need of their kindness and comfort. "We spend a great deal of time at children's hospitals and working with Ronald McDonald Houses," says Nodiff-Netanel, who also does extensive work with VA hospitals around the Los Angeles area and Shriners' Hospital for Children Medical Center. "These horses know what patients need, and they're there to deliver such a special form of love, calm and happiness.

These children are sick, they've been injured, or they simply need emotional support to give them hope or a happy distraction, or to add a positive and joyful



by Jessie Bengoa
Platinum
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"We spend a great deal of time at children's hospitals and working with Ronald McDonald Houses," says Mini Therapy Horses founder Victoria Nodiff-Netanel, who also does extensive work with VA hospitals around the Los Angeles area and Shriners' Hospital for Children Medical Center.

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Victoria Nodiff-Netanel
Mini Therapy Horses Founder



Victoria Nodiff-Netanel and her team recognized early on the healing power of these incredible animals and set out to impact the lives of children and veterans in need of their kindness and comfort. Mini Therapy Horses have eight mini horses and twenty-four volunteers that make this program a success.



note to an otherwise very difficult day."

Nodiff-Netanel doesn't have to do this, yet she and a compassionate group of volunteers spend countless hours and most days of the week driving their miniature horses around the greater Los Angeles area to do good. "When I see the light in a child's eyes when they touch and pet the horses, it always leaves me thinking, 'Why would I do anything else with my time?' " She insists that she gets more out of her important work than those that she serves, but this is typical of Nodiff-Netanel. She has trained her minis to do tricks as both a way to connect with people and to entertain the children. The horses are keen observers, and they recognize when a child or veteran simply needs to stroke their furry head and connect with them. "These horses are so intuitive, it amazes me," says Nodiff-Netanel. "We often don't give animals enough credit, but they pick up on emotions and are able to read it and react in a way that fills my heart."

In addition to her work with hospitals and the court system through the Department of Children and Family Services, Nodiff-Netanel and her minis are a part of the Los Angeles Mayor's Crisis Response Team, where they go to work calming victims and families on the scene of a disaster. It's not easy work, but she and her team consider it a privilege to make an impact in the lives of those who need it. The minis have special gear that changes depending on the environment, whether that be a hospital or the scene of an active crisis. Significant attention is paid to the care, diet and comfort of the horses, with a volunteer team keeping the minis in excellent shape and bathed at all times. "Our horses don't look like most people's vision of a miniature horse," says Nodiff-Netanel. "We make sure they maintain an ideal body condition through exercise and the right nutrition. We've used Platinum Performance formulas as an important part of our care program since 1996," she says. "A lot of attention is paid to keeping our horses healthy and happy, because if they're not healthy and fulfilled, they can't do their job, and it's a very important job."

Nodiff-Netanel has found her life's purpose together with the stunning miniature horses that continue to capture her heart and those of all who encounter them. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons she personifies is her drive for action. She didn't just recognize her desire to give back — she dove in with an immense passion and changed her life in order to change countless other lives. She and her team continue their work of healing and support on a daily basis throughout the Los Angeles area. If you ever find yourself on the 405 freeway and see a van emblazoned with photos of miniature horses, know there's likely precious cargo on board, and they're headed to do good things. U

Mini Therapy Horses teams of highly trained miniature therapy horses visit over 50,000 children and adults in need each year across the United States. Mini Therapy Horses is an all volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity. All of the minis are registered volunteer therapy horses with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and are on-call 24/7 as members of the Los Angeles Mayor's Crisis Response Team.

To find out more, visit MiniTherapyHorses.com.