



Healing Therapy for Children

By Mary Minor Davis

It was a comfortable silence that held the group of families together in a circle as the sun settled over the Tucson Mountains on a July evening in 2009. Young children laughed and moved about their parents, curious as to what enjoyment the next activity would bring.

From the outside, an observer wouldn't recognize the struggle these families face as they deal with the devastating cognitive and physical special needs of the children at play. Watching the group, there was a relaxed feeling of camaraderie, a sense of belonging – something many of them had not

ever felt before.

These families were part of the first-ever integrated retreat for children with special needs. With a focus on child and whole-family healing, it was held in 2009 at Stallion Ranch.

Six families came from around the country for the long experience, which used therapies such as acupuncture, storytelling, laughter therapy, meditation, nutrition, equine therapy and the best that Western medicine has to offer. Children with cancer, Down syndrome, ce

continued on page 35

continued from page 34

palsy, autism and other special needs attended. Both they and their parents were taught to experience and learn new methods for coping with chronic and acute illness.

Claudia, a single mother, attended the 2009 pilot program with her 8-year-old conjoined twins, Anna and Tattie. "I thought we were coming here to Tucson for therapy for the girls," she said. "But I found so much more."

What she and many others found was a sense of belonging — some for the first time in their lives.

The idea for the program came from Shay Beider, founder and executive director of Integrative Touch for Kids. Beider, a graduate of UCLA's School of Public Health, specializes in pediatric massage and hospice care. She says the more she worked with children in a hospital setting, the more she realized that her work needed to go beyond traditional pediatric massage techniques.

The world of pediatric integrative medicine, which includes the best of Eastern and Western medicine, was just emerging. Using both conventional and complementary approaches to healing the mind, body and spirit, Beider worked with healing art practitioners to tap into this trend and create a first-ever healing retreat program that is now serving as a model for the practice of this new form of medicine.

"When a child has special health needs, their family has special health needs," Beider says. "Our work in the field of pediatric integrative medicine is helping to change the way people think about health and healing for children."

Since the launch of the first retreat, ITK hosted a second in 2010 at Rex Ranch and will hold another this July

at Hacienda del Sol. In addition, ITK recently added a smaller retreat for local families in Tucson, and is hoping to add more in other cities around the country. Beider says they have had great response in the Chicago area, and have already hosted several fundraising events there with plans for a mini-retreat in 2011.

Families are selected to attend the retreats by writing a letter to the organization on how they feel they would benefit. The retreat is free to attendees, who only have to cover travel expenses to get to Tucson.

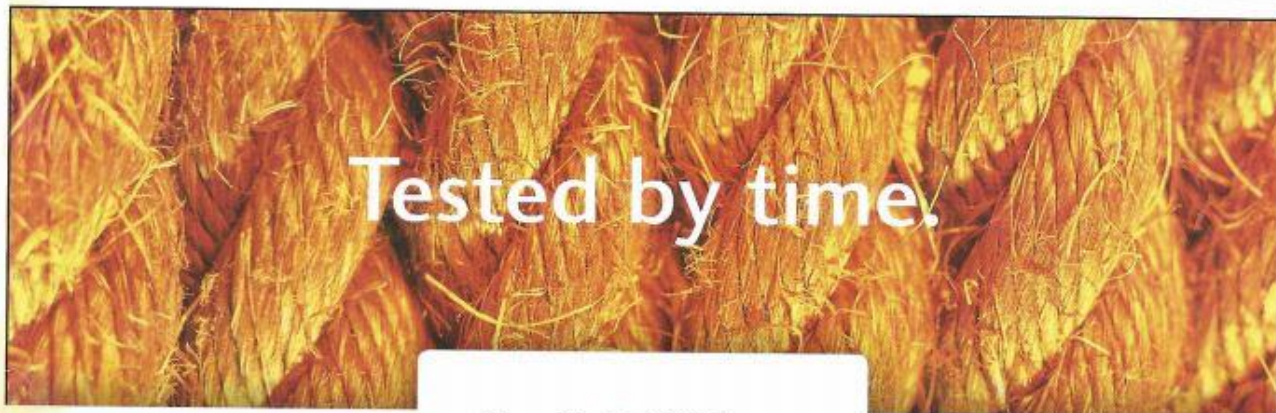
Long term, ITK would like to build its own healing retreat center in Tucson that will host children from around the country and the world for week-long healing retreats.

"This center will be a wonderful resource for children with special needs and a significant addition to Tucson's role as a center for integrative medicine," said Dr. Sandy Newmark, a local physician and an advisory board member for ITK. "We are beginning an exciting process with children with special needs and their families to learn more about the nature of healing and what it means for them."

Beider believes that what families are responding to most with the program is the love that is shared during the retreats, and between families as they connect in the program. "We're seeing suffering and we're responding to it in a very human way," she added. "We make the impossible possible for many of these families."

Biz

To learn more about Integrative Touch for Kids, visit their website at www.integrativetouch.org.



Tested by time.

Snell & Wilmer

L.L.P.
LAW OFFICES

Straight talk. Sound counsel. Practical solutions. At Snell & Wilmer, some things never change.

www.swlaw.com

DENVER | LAS VEGAS | LOS ANGELES | LOS CABOS | ORANGE COUNTY | PHOENIX | SALT LAKE CITY | TUCSON