Equestrian Training Program

What is Special Olympics New York Training?
Special Olympics New York provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-style sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. Success in sports leads to success in life. Athletes build athletic skills and character traits that help them both on and off the field. Special Olympics New York offers the opportunity to showcase their talents and to change the negative stereotypes and misconceptions about people with intellectual disabilities.

What can you expect from Equestrian Training Sessions?
During trainings athletes will be instructed by trained horseback riding instructors in the basic to advanced skills in equitation in preparation for the culminating regional horse show. This may include riding skills on horseback in the ring or on trail or ground work in horsemanship. The general rules, etiquette, and protocol for the equestrian sport and horse showing are also addressed. Athletes may vary in skill from beginner riders requiring assistants to advanced riders able to perform independently at the walk, trot, and canter. All athletes that train during the training sessions are required to participate in the regional horse show. More information available at: http://www.specialolympics.org/equestrian.aspx

Is Special Olympics New York Equestrian Training the same as Therapeutic Riding?
No. Although training sessions may be taught by a certified therapeutic riding instructor, the training sessions are not therapeutic riding lessons. Therapeutic horseback riding utilizes horses and equine-assisted activities to provide physical, mental, emotional and spiritual fulfillment and meet individual goals. Special Olympics New York training is preparatory sessions for competition. The athletes that participate in Special Olympics training must be appropriate, behaviorally and physically, for riding activities in a group setting. Athletes that demonstrate inappropriate behaviors or have physical limitations/involvement that jeopardizes the safety of the rider, peers, staff, volunteers, or equines will not be permitted to participate in the training sessions.

What can come from competing in the Special Olympics New York regional horse show?
Every year riders who compete at the local horse show qualify for the Fall State Games Equestrian competition against riders from all over the state of New York. Riders that pin at the top of their division could be invited to advance in competition to World Games with Special Olympics athletes from all over the globe. Chris Donohue, a rider at HorseAbility and Special Olympics New York athlete, never imagined competing with Special Olympics New York would be such a defining time in his life…

“Chris had been riding with HorseAbility for many years, before participating in the Special Olympics New York program. In 2001, he competed at the regional horse show for Special Olympics New York. Chris placed well and was proud of his accomplishment. Little did he realize that his participation in that competition would enable him to compete in the 2003 Special Olympics World Games in Dublin, Ireland. In June 2003, after his Fall State Games performance, he received a letter inviting him to be a member of TEAM USA as part of the Special Olympics Equestrian team. What an amazing journey! He boarded a bus to Boston with his fellow competitors and flew from Boston to Ireland for a two week adventure of training and touring. The opening ceremonies were attended by 100,000 people who viewed the parade of athletes and famous performers. Chris competed for three days, winning first and second place ribbons in his classes. This was an experience of a lifetime. He made long lasting friendships and continues to reminisce about his World Games experience, while continuing his love for horses and horseback riding at his weekly lessons.”