

Health & Wellness Focus Group Finalist: UCP of Sacramento & Northern California
Project: UCP Saddle Pals

UCP programs help clients and their families to live a life with increased independence, productivity, and self-confidence. UCP ensures that clients of all ages and income levels can learn new skills. Because of UCP, many clients feel more connected to the community, have increased confidence, and experience more independence. Each month, UCP serves nearly 3,100 individuals with autism (48%), intellectual delay (25%), Down syndrome and/or epilepsy (17%), and cerebral palsy (10%). UCP provides 14 programs through four divisions - Family Respite, Transportation, Adult Programs, and Recreation.

UCP's Saddle Pals program is an equine therapy program where children and adults with developmental disabilities learn to care for and ride horses. Participants build confidence and abilities while learning how to interact with horses and learn the basics of horseback riding over an eight-week program. They increase their riding capabilities on the Saddle Pals Sensory Trail where they perform structured tasks that will help with coordination and motor skills. This provides a multi-dimensional challenge in an environment outside of their familiar ones.

UCP Saddle Pals was a long-standing program prior to the mandated COVID lockdowns and in 2020 was shut down for the safety of clients, staff, and volunteers. The shut-down has allowed UCP to redesign and relaunch the program in a more convenient location. Impact100 dollars will fund site upgrades and preparation such as grading, fencing, ADA bathrooms, and classroom space. Additional work is required such as recruiting and training new staff and volunteers, securing horses, and community promotion.

UCP is moving UCP Saddle Pals to the Sacramento Horseman's Association (SHA). SHA has welcomed UCP and provides space to host programming and collaborates on fundraising for site improvements. The tenants at SHA are excited for the partnership with many already raising their hands to volunteer and allow UCP to use their horses.