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## Occupational Therapy student gains invaluable experience in Equine Therapy while volunteering in Argentina

21-year-old Julie Yaroni, a current student at Boston University, decided to come to Argentina during her summer vacation to volunteer at the Projects Abroad Equine Therapy Project. Julie is not new to the unique work of Equine Therapy, as she has been volunteering in her home state of New Jersey doing similar work in a private equine therapy center since 2007. "I wanted to compare how it is done in Argentina, as well as learn new techniques and share some of my own knowledge."

The Equine Therapy program in Córdoba works with children and adults of varying physical and mental disabilities to improve their lifestyles by doing physical therapy while on horseback. Julie's daily responsibilities at the center included cleaning the stables, grooming the horses and preparing them for the lessons. After the students arrive, she would step in to help with the classes. Sometimes Julie was up on the horse with the student assisting the lesson, or walking alongside helping to guide the horse and provide support. "Working as a team with the other volunteers was

key. Veronica, the director, gave us a lot of responsibility and freedom. It showed that she trusted us, which was really an honor. It was a lot of hands on work; more than I thought it would be."

With the given freedom, Julie has been able to use some exercises that she learned at home with the children here. Recently she did an exercise with the children which focused on using fine motor skills. "It was very rewarding to see the kids doing the exercise that I taught them," she says, "though I don't speak Spanish, I was able to communicate with hand gestures and movements so that they could understand the exercise."

"After my experience in Argentina I have become a lot more confident in what I am doing. I have learned how to direct lessons in Spanish and learned not to be intimidated by not knowing the language. Throw yourself in there and if you don't understand something, ask!"

Julie has made many memories during her one month's stay in Argentina –

traveling with other volunteers, exploring Córdoba and many great experiences at the Fundación Cordobesa de Equinoterapia. "My most memorable experience would have to be the first time riding on the horse with the students, as I had never done it before. I was sitting up there helping with the exercises and seeing the students smiling, laughing and just so happy."

Her experience in Argentina, along with her extensive experience working with people with severe disabilities, has solidified her goal to make this a career. After returning back to Boston University this fall, Julie plans to begin her studies for her Masters' degree in Occupational Therapy with some solid practical experience behind her.

