

Edinburgh Napier student offers equine help for autistic children

Autistic children could soon receive the benefits of equine therapy from the comfort of their own home thanks to a unique chair design by an Edinburgh Napier student.

Fourth year Callum Hunter has designed 'U Rock' – a therapy chair that replicates the movement of a horse when walking – as part of his final year project at the University.

The 21 year-old has designed a prototype of a chair that could be used to take equine therapy into the home for children that are affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).



Equine therapy is considered an effective treatment for children with autism, with the rhythmic motion of riding a horse helping calm and soothe those affected by the condition.

Callum's chair features a saddle-like seat fixed upon three wooden legs which combines springs with a half circle mechanism to allow a child to gently move side to side, similar to the movement created when riding a horse.

It is faced with soft felt and is finished in a soothing colour of green to help create a sense of calmness when in use.

Callum was inspired to design the chair, which is one of hundreds of exhibits at Edinburgh Napier's More Than A Degree show at Merchiston campus until 28 May 2017, after seeing the positive effect that equine therapy had on children affected by autism.

However, having been made aware of the challenges faced

by families when travelling to centres, many of which are located in rural Scotland and northern England, he decided to pursue his own plans of bringing the therapy into the home.

He said: "As part of my research, I visited an equine therapy centre and saw first-hand the positive benefits that this brought in helping calm and relax children whilst they ride. However, I was also aware of the challenges that are faced by families when travelling to the centres so I came up with the idea of designing a chair that brings most, if not all, the benefits of the therapy closer to home.

"The chair follows the rhythm of motion you get from riding a horse in an effort to relax a child when they use it – just in the same way that cradling a young baby does. It's faced with soft material. In equine therapy they often use sheepskin saddles as it helps store heat from the horse better than leather as warmth adds to the comfort of the experience. I've tried to make it as realistic a representation as possible.

"The chair is designed with autistic children in mind but it is suitable for all. There is nothing worse than a child being made to sit in a 'special chair' so producing something that was inclusive was essential to the project."

Callum himself was brought up in Stow in the Scottish Borders which is still home to his own horse, Oscar. He has gone riding since he was young, something that he believes has helped shape his project from the off.

He added: "I've always been around horses, ever since a young age, and I've seen first-hand the benefits they can bring to people's livelihoods.

They really are great companions for people.

"However not everyone enjoys horses so the chair I've designed could also act as a first step towards equine therapy for those affected by autism. For young children especially, it could be the practice they require before mounting a horse

for the first time.

“I wanted to design something that helps families live with autism. Little things can make a massive difference to someone’s day-to-day life and hopefully the chair can do just that.”

Edinburgh Napier’s More Than A Degree Show is an annual showcase of the creative talent of new and emerging designers, photographers, film makers, journalists, creative writers open to the public until 28 May.