



# EFMHA

## news

Committee Report  
Research Needed  
Impact of Therapeutic Riding

A Special Interest Section of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc. (NARHA)

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## Understanding the Psychotherapeutic Implications for Equine Senses, Behavior & Grooming

### PART I OF III

By Katherine Job Zilboorg

Winston Churchill is often quoted as saying "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man." When mental health professionals and therapeutic riding instructors join with the horse to create a therapeutic team, they do so because of the knowledge that it is the totality of the horse that positively influences the mental health of humans. Beginning with the idea of horse and all the images that have come to be of horse, and coming to know the reality of the species of horse, can have a profound connection with the human psyche.

Understanding the psychotherapeutic implications of the equine senses, behavior and grooming begins with understanding that these three arenas are interconnected levels of knowledge and awareness that we humans can begin to relate to those four legged wonders known as equines.

The equine's sensory apparatus, its nervous system, has a great deal in common with the human nervous system. Spinal cords, neurons, receptors, brain cells, sensory organs (eyes, inner ears, olfactory structures, taste buds, skin) exist in both species. It stands to reason that with similar nervous systems, both equines and humans have similar capacities to feel, to experience, to be aware of self, other, and the environment. At the same time, significant differences exist in the actual performance capacity of the equine sensory apparatus and the human. These differences have implications in the subsequent behavioral, mental, and psychological functioning and abilities that have evolved for each species.

The similarities, differences and the interactions that occur between equine and human encompass an environment rich with the potential for emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and spiritual growth and healing, particularly for humans who must bear responsibility for the well-being of the equines we ask to work and play with us.

In bringing the equine into the realm of participant in a program that is intended to facilitate the mental health and well being of a human



being, the very first arena of psychological functioning modeled for the client is the capacity of the human professionals to create a "holding environment" that accounts for the physical and emotional needs of the client AND the equine. Herein lies the basis of opportunity to facilitate the bio/psycho/social development of individuation, mutuality, boundaries, foundations of building trust, and empathy. In order to develop any kind of relationship with an equine, a human needs to come to an understanding of how the equine's senses of smell, taste, hearing, sight, and touch will be important factors in the human-equine experience.

The sense of smell is significant for its role in the establishment of relationships among equines. Upon meeting, equines will greet one another with a breath into the others nostrils. Dominant animals tend to snort, subordinates respond with softer blowing. Identification and unchallenged ranking can be quickly established.

The physiology of the tongue and mouth and the ability of the equine to discriminate different food stuffs and textures may have greater impact on our connection to the equine than we currently give credence to. Horse lovers are well aware of the equine's propensity for goodies; it is something many of us relate to—both positively and negatively. Given the structures and sensitivity of the mouth and tongue, our use of bits, nosebands, and cheekstraps, and emphasis on "frame" impact the equine's sense of well being at its most basic level.

The equine's reliance on its ability to hear is vital to its sense of security. The physiology of the ear, its size, shape, ability to swivel, and be held in different positions reflects the ear's importance as receptor of information and as a communication of internal states. While we can't know for certain how the equine interprets and processes what it hears, we do see the result of that processing (reasoning?). The equine ear is quite

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## EFMHA Vision Statement

EFMHA is a globally-recognized organization that promotes health by bringing people horses and other equines together in mutually beneficial ways.

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The Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA) is a section of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). EFMHA promotes work with horses in the treatment of people with emotional, behavioral, social, mental, physical and/or spiritual needs. Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy is an experiential treatment approach that provides the client with equine experiences designed to promote self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-responsibility. EFMHA has its own board of directors and bylaws and operates within NARHA guidelines and standards. EFMHA Newsletter editor seeks unsolicited material. Send to Boo McDaniel, Horse Power, 848 Webster Hwy, Temple, NH 03084 USA. Membership in EFMHA is \$20/year and requires membership in NARHA \$40/year. Contact 1-800-369-RIDE for address changes and membership requests.

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### president's letter

Donkey culture is really very different from horse culture in spite of their apparent abnormalities.

When I give people a task to complete with the donkeys, most people respond in one of two ways: they assume the donkeys are like horses and treat them as such, or they respond to them based on all the negative stereotypes they learned through stories and movies. For example, if I ask a group to lead a donkey through an obstacle course, they tend to try to lead it from the side in proper horse fashion. The minute the donkey stops and refuses to move the group immediately quips that the donkey is stubborn. They then try all sorts of chasing, waving and arm flapping techniques to move the donkey forward.

I often see EFMHA and its activities as the donkey in a group of therapeutic riding instructors and mental health professionals. EFMHA is tasked with developing a method of practice in a new field, the incorporation of horses in mental health treatment. The group negotiating the obstacle course with EFMHA often makes assumptions about the field of mental health, assuming it is similar to the field of physical disabilities. When there is hesitation to move forward, it can be misunderstood as reluctance or lack of direction.

But like the donkey, the practice of incorporating horses into mental health practice has its similarities to other fields as well as some significant differences. Developing a curriculum in a new field is much like moving a donkey through an obstacle course, requiring patience, persistence and a clear path. The supporting group must be open and tolerant of the need to move one step at a time. Donkeys insist on being more than sure of their footing before proceeding, as their homeland is high ridges and mountain passes where little mistakes can be fatal. EFMHA is working hard at developing a solid footing, despite pressure to offer quick fixes.

When donkeys hesitate or stop, it is usually because they are unsure of the footing or don't have enough information to move forward. EFMHA has taken time to gather information and is finding

that there is much more to learn. Horses and mental health are not simple; it is not a weekend workshop; it is not a quick video tape. You, the members, practitioners and instructors have taken



A Root PhD

the time to give us information, to share your successes, and clarify your concerns.

I think in this issue you will read of the ways the group of therapeutic riding instructors and mental health practitioners has come together to give us the support, the foundation and the expertise to move forward. The curriculum is in development with leaders in the field. The BOD has provided a footing for the leaders to work and our members are providing strong guidance. We hope you will join us in the creation of a dynamic new learning process.

Warm Wishes,

*Maureen Frederickson,*

*Director, Animal Systems*

*Is also home to three donkeys*

*(as well as many other critters)*

[Animalsystems@mindspring.com](mailto:Animalsystems@mindspring.com)



A Root PhD



### editor's letter

I hope this EFMHA Newsletter finds you well and happy in your work. The massive amount of winter snow that we got here in New Hampshire did finally melt about mid-April and happily summer is here with all its green glory. I send good wishes to you in all your endeavors.

It is my fervent hope that you will find this newsletter to be helpful, relevant and of value. I continue to love putting this material together so that we may all stay professionally connected. I want to thank the many people

who have contributed information, pictures, time and talent to making this newsletter. I also urge that you consider what YOU might contribute in the future. We need articles from people who are brand new to our field, as well as from those who have been with us since the start. Begin thinking now about what you might want to contribute. The next deadline is September 1st. I sure would love to hear from you about what you could add or what you need to have in our association newsletter. Together, we can advance our emerging field and help a lot of people while doing it!

For the first time ever, this newsletter includes a listing of professional development opportunities that might be of interest and value to our members. This is something that I would hope will grow with each newsletter. If you are hosting a workshop or clinic, send me your dates, a brief description and

a contact person. This is a professional courtesy we will extend to our membership at no charge. Because we are a non-profit, we can not have advertising in our newsletter, but we can be of service in this way. The more educational opportunities we have to offer, the better we will all be.

We are also always looking for great pictures. If you have a beauty, please do let us use it in this newsletter. Pictures are indeed worth 1,000 words. Help us to make our newsletter great. Remember that we do need a photo release to accompany the picture.

Happy reading and have a great summer.

Warmly,

*Isabella (Boo)  
McDaniel, M.Ed.*

Founder of Horse Power

Newsletter Editor

[www.horse-power.org](http://www.horse-power.org)

## EFMHA IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE



the donation of \$5,165 to be used by the curriculum development committee. This donation was made by Ann Alden and her daughters, Jennifer Parker and Alexa Alden, in memory of their extraordinary horse, Bex Passadi, a handsome, mahogany bay Purebred Arabian. "Saadi" died last year at the age of 27 after spending 24 years with Ann, Jennifer and Alexa, and two different NARHA Centers educating children and adults about all facets of horsemanship and life in general. In 1998, he was NARHA Region 10 Therapy Horse of the Year as well as one of the Top Ten Cosequin Exemplary Equine Award winners.

Thank you Ann, Jennifer, Alexa and Saadi. If you would like to commemorate one of your special horses and help EFMHA, please send your donation to NARHA with a note designating the donation for EFMHA.



LINDA TELLINGTON-JONES, on T-Touch, her acclaimed technique for calming and healing horses



### REGISTER NOW!

[www.narha.org](http://www.narha.org) or through Fax-On-Demand at 303-457-8496, document number 27. See you there!

## THE 2001 NARHA CONFERENCE & ANNUAL MEETING EXPLORING NEW DIRECTIONS

Tacoma, Washington • at the Sheraton Tacoma  
OCTOBER 29 – NOVEMBER 4

- Multiple Mental Health Sessions
- Health and Ed. Committee Forum
  - EFMHA Annual Meeting
  - Demonstrations at the Horsefair
- Networking opportunities with colleagues from all over the world
- Equine Facilitate Mental Health Special Session

#### WEDNESDAY OCT. 31ST:

Exciting EFMHA pre-conference workshop: *Building and Enhancing Therapeutic Relationships at Your Barn*

#### SUNDAY, NOV. 4:

Two special sessions intended for audience members who already have a general understanding of Equine Facilitated Mental Health and Equine Experiential Learning.

#### Session A: 8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.

Chiron: Accessing the Wounded Healer in Clients, Horses and Therapists - Linda Kohanov

#### Session B: 10:15 a.m.-12:15p.m.

Healing Minds with Manes and Tails: Planning for the Sexually Abused Client - Laurie Rovin LMSW

...continued from cover page

expressive of its emotional/mental state—interest, excitement, fear, anger and relaxation. Understanding this helps humans appreciate the equine's use of ears, head, and body to pinpoint location of a noise. It can provide opportunities for clients to explore alternative meanings for behavior, to learn how different beings respond in different ways to the same stimuli (volume, pitch, tonality).

The vision of the equine has evolved to suit the lifestyle of the grazing animal. With its nose down, the equine's vision encompasses approximately 320 degrees of a circle. With eyes on opposite sides of its head, each eye has a different view of what is going on, and the equine is unable to see anything that is close to the center of its face. Since the ability to focus its vision has to do with its head position in relation to the object of interest (as opposed to our focusing occurring as a result of internal eye structure), the ability to freely move its head is likely to be important to the equine. While we are not totally certain, equines are probably near-sighted, color-blind, and depth perception tends to be rather flat.

Thus equines probably see the world in a very different way than humans do. It is therefore extremely likely that their behavioral responses will be different and not what we "expect." The chance to experiment with what it might be like to have divided sight, a blind spot, and difficulty focusing while interacting with others can further the development of the client's ability to put oneself in another's shoes. It can facilitate learning to accept and respect differences in abilities, function, and opinion. From there, one can work on developing the internal and external skills of accommodation, negotiation and resolution or compromise of differences.

The sense of touch in the equine is highly developed. From the tiniest of the ponies to the giants of the cold-blooded breeds, ability of the equine to sense contact with its physical self is considerably more keen than that of the human animal (i.e. thus the experience of thinking an aid and the horse responding). From the time it is born, the equine derives much physical support and mental comfort from the contact of its body with its mother and then its herdmates. Physical movement and connection is important to the

overall well being of the equine.

The equine's sensitivity to touch, its learning curve to understanding and following through with the taught aids of the human, its response to the sensitive communication of the experienced rider/-handler versus its response to the insecure and unbalanced rider/-handler is rich with experiences and lessons in communication styles, volume and intensity of communication, differentiation of self and other, empathy, mutuality, responsibility (personal/moral/-spiritual), and boundaries.

Equine behavior arises out of the input of its five senses interacting with its physical needs and mental and social attributes. The physical needs include food, water, sleep, exercise, grooming, and space. The mental and social attributes include its memory, comprehension, sex roles, gregariousness, fears, curiosity, playfulness, boredom and frustration.


The primary defense mechanisms of the equine involve heightened arousal and flight. Evolutionary baggage has left all equines with fears of given stimuli (sudden noises, quick movement, weight on its back) and then life has left individual horses with their own specific fears. Learning to appreciate the survival background of these responses and behavior can aid mental health clients in greater acceptance and appreciation for their own survival based fears, awareness, and behavior. Being involved in the process of educating a horse to be ridden or driven has natural parallels to changing undesired stress responses to functional actions.

When working with equines, it is often easier for some people to empathize with their own or

others normal but not necessarily comfortable responses to trauma, memories of trauma, and fear. Learning to perceive and recognize natural responses to the stimulation of the equine sensory organs can be developed into the abilities of understanding cause and effect, predicting likely outcomes of actions (both self and other), learning how to impact behavior, making choices based on circumstances, responsiveness and depth of relationship desired.

Grooming between equines is an expression of emotional bonding and a means to increased physical comfort and health. Mares groom their foals to clean them, to deepen the social and emotional bond, and to aid in the foals developing kinesthetic and body awareness. Peers groom each other, relieving each other's itches. Self grooming by rolling in mud, sand or dust seems to be a highly prized occurrence among equines.

Grooming can be a wonderful way to build the equine-human relationship. Grooming can teach nurturing and self-care skills. It can be a way to learn how to appropriately express affection and build sensitivity to individual preferences. Grooming can be a tool in the process of building rapport, confidence, and trust between human and equine.

The positive psychotherapeutic benefits that can be nurtured and harvested in the joining of the human and equine are numerous. Finding answers to the questions of "what makes a horse tick?" and "what makes me tick?" will involve a process of discovery and delight that will enhance the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well being of all participants. 



In late April the EFMHA board met jointly with the NARHA and AHA board in Denver

## EFMHA INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION & CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Your EFMHA Board of Directors and Curriculum Development Committee have been hard at work! We are delighted to report great progress on both Instructor Certification for EFMH therapeutic riding instructors, and curriculum development for a specialty EFMH Instructor Certification.

The 35 member committee brings a wealth of expertise and credentials from a variety of sources. This large group has been broken down into three sub-committees to equally represent the field: Equine Management & Horsemanship, Instruction & Teaching Methodology, and Mental Health and Learning Disabilities. Under talented leadership, each sub-committee has taken the existing NARHA Registered Level Criteria and explored how it might be modified to include EFMH students. They have also taken a serious look at the horsemanship part of the "horse experience", trying to include the many programs for whom riding is just a small part of the treatment. They are looking at groundwork, stable management, vaulting and driving.

Each committee has worked hard to tease out the core competencies that are truly pertinent to people who are instructing Equine Facilitated Mental Health and Equine Experiential Learning. They are closing in on the significant items that need to be added to the existing NARHA Registered Instructor Certification Process. It is their intent to have the instructor certification

workshop, examination and video tape process apply to someone who teaches EFMH and EEL students.

An excellent two day meeting with the NARHA Board of Directors, Staff and the Instructor Certification committee took place in April at the NARHA office in Denver, Colorado. At this time, the goal was set to include 10 mental health terms, 5 learning disabilities and additional horsemanship skills to the existing Registered Instructor Examination. The wording will be fine tuned between now and the end of October, 2001. It was decided that an official presentation of the recommendations of each sub-committee will be made at the NARHA Conference in November, 2001. The committee will present at the EFMHA Annual Meeting, as well as at the Instructor Certification Forum. Ample informal opportunities will be made available for the EFMHA membership to have input into the decisions.

Following this series of meetings, the committee will finalize their input for the NARHA Instructor Certification Committee. This committee will be revising the Registered Instructor Certification Examination, as well as the NARHA Registered Instructor Workshop Manual, in February of 2002. This revision will include the recommendations of our EFMHA Instructor Certification Committees, resulting in an entry level Examination and Certification Process for all of our EFMH and EEL Instructors! This is great news and a huge amount of work to be accomplished in a short period. Congratulations and salutations to everyone involved.

The second stage of this project will be to work toward a specialty EFMHA Therapeutic Horsemanship Instructor Examination be similar to the existing NARHA Therapeutic Driving

Instructor Certification, the Board Certification in the Clinical Specialty of Hippotherapy or a Vaulting Instructor Specialty Examination. This specialty examination would be part of a NARHA sponsored EFMHA Instructor On-Site Workshop and Instructor Certification Process. The committee would determine the content and curriculum of a two to four day teaching clinic. These clinics will be pilot tested at five NARHA accredited therapeutic riding centers who specialized in EFMH and EEL students. It is the hope of the committee to have the five pilot test centers be located in different parts of the country so that travel and expenses would be held to a minimum.

It is the goal of the committee to have these pilot clinics held in the spring and summer of 2002. The feedback from participants and evaluators would then be processed at a September 2002 meeting to finalize the curriculum that would be taught at future workshops. This curriculum would be presented to the EFMHA membership and the NARHA Instructor Certification Committee at the 2002 NARHA National Conference. Following input and acceptance of the basic curriculum that would be taught to EFMH and EEL instructors, it is the hope of the committee that a grant would be awarded that would provide the funding for an outside "testing" group to set the examination requirements and procedures. This would provide great objectivity and credibility for our association. It is simply too hard to be objective when we are so passionate about what we do. The Instructor Certification Committee is committed to providing a valid, objective, numerical and

substantive examination process that will stand up to anyone's scrutiny.

It is my great hope that you are pleased with the results of this hard working and dedicated committee. It is also my sincere desire that YOU feel part of the process. If you have something you wish to contribute, please contact us. We want this to be a membership driven and approved process: we welcome and encourage your input. The following people are eager to hear your ideas and will incorporate them into their planning. 🐾



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Respectfully submitted,  
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**Leslie Moreau, LMSW-ACP**  
*Co-Chair of EFMHA Instructor Certification Committee*

# THE NEED FOR RESEARCH IN THE EFMH FIELD

By Richard Cutler

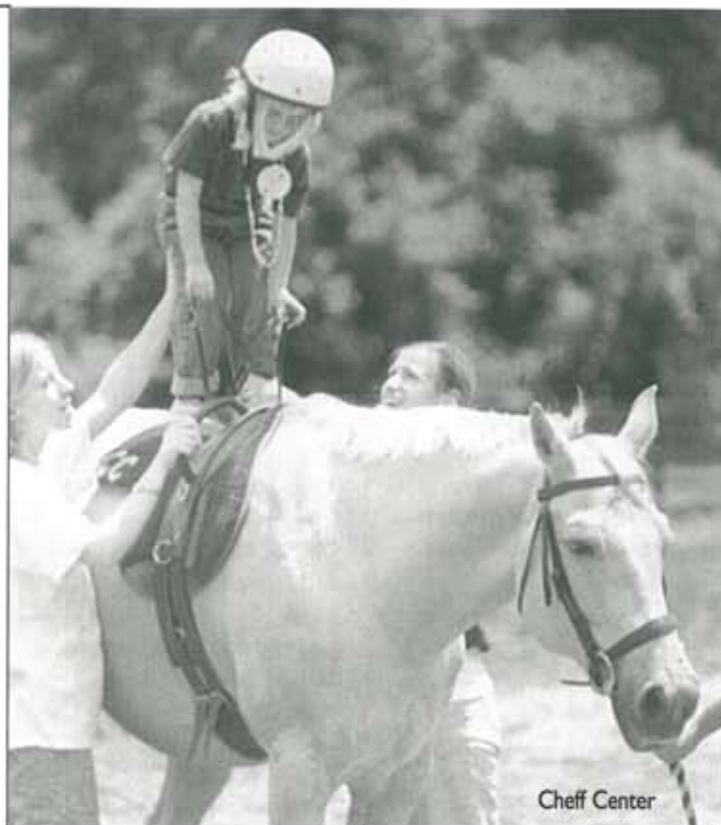
At the 10th Annual Conference on "Horses & Healing" the post conference seminar included a Research Summit. It was attended by participants from the academic world, therapists and program directors and was facilitated by Philip Tedeschi, NARHA Master Instructor, Cheff Center graduate and Director of Clinical Services at HandUp Home for Youth, Inc. Various types of research were discussed including a clinical study exploring the links between animal abuse and family violence, research needed for doctoral dissertations and the evaluation of a six-week pilot program funded by a foundation. The seminar also included a dialogue on the resistance to research, how to bridge the gap from the academic world to horse programs and ways to improve research.

Everyone agreed on the importance of research and that there is a lack of it in the field of equine facilitated mental health. One of its key benefits is to help secure funding from foundations and government agencies. It helps respond to the challenge of "Prove It," raises credibility and earns respect in the world of mental health professionals. But research

can contribute much more within the field of EFMH. By knowing what activities are and are not working and what works best for each population we can help design better programs. Through research we can share knowledge within our profession, and this exchange of information allows us to better serve the interests of our clients and horses.

A question was asked at the seminar as to why there is often resistance to research and one reply was that they felt it took the "magic" out of working with horses. I'm sure we all have touching stories of how horses have helped clients and the difference they made in their lives. These are anecdotal data that can be an integral part of a research report. They may not have the qualitative or quantitative measures to back a premise but they can certainly touch the heart of the reader and add an emotional and powerful element to a clinical study.

Many therapists and program directors often feel overwhelmed with the prospect of executing a research program, but evaluating a program does not have to be intimidating. Evaluation is an important tool in determining the effectiveness of a program.



It also helps therapists and program directors understand what is and is not working in order to improve programs. To evaluate a program you require a questionnaire form and the following are some suggestions in developing an effective one:

- Before writing a questionnaire outline your target population, the goals and objectives of the program, the activities that relate to the objectives, the type of information you want to collect and what you want to be held accountable for.
  - Determine the best method or combinations of methods for collecting the information (i.e. mail, interview in house).
  - Decide the types of questions for your survey. For example closed-ended (yes/no or point scale) or open-ended questions. Most questionnaires are com-
- posed primarily of closed-ended questions but it is advised to have at least one open-ended question.
- Only ask questions for the information you want or need.
  - Ensure your questions relate to the topic, are applicable and interesting to everyone and do not bias the response.
  - Ensure your questions and directions are clear and brief.
  - Include a question or questions that ask if any programming is not working.
  - Group questions around a similar topic together.
  - Ensure your questionnaires are aesthetically pleasing (i.e. leave enough space to easily read, put questions in lower case and responses in upper case, connect questions to answer choices by a dotted or straight line, demon-

strate meaning of scales).

- Ensure that participants know that the survey continues on to the next side or page and repeat directions at the top of each page.
- Finally thank participants for their responses and ensure them of confidentiality.

The OQ (Outcome Questionnaires) Test is another way to measure clinical outcomes. Information about the OQ Test can be found at [www.oqsystems.com](http://www.oqsystems.com). This web site also discusses the patient "fit" (is the population under investigation suitable), measured reliability and validity (are you measuring what you intend and is it consistent) and functionality of the instrument (i.e. methods of collecting data).

A clinical research program starts with a proposal that is very similar to a grant. The proposal begins with an abstract that is like a mission statement. Next is the introduction that includes background information, statement of the problem, purpose, objectives, hypotheses, definition of terms and scope of the study. Then the proposal includes a review of the relevant literature that justifies the study, an outline of the methodology and a listing of supporting references. For more information on how to write a research proposal check out *The Beginners Guide to the Research Proposal* at [www.health.ucalgary.ca](http://www.health.ucalgary.ca) or *Proposal Writing and Research Development* at [www.umass.edu/research/ora/dev.html](http://www.umass.edu/research/ora/dev.html).



Prancing Horses

Several doctoral candidates (therapists and scholars working on their doctorates) are writing their dissertations on the effects of working with horses but are having their own set of challenges. A key factor for them is finding the program with the right type of subjects who will also participate in a study. Frequently the best program is not geographically close to the candidate and therefore it is difficult to collect data. A suggestion at the seminar was made to possibly train therapeutic riding instructors and/or program directors on how to collect research data.

To achieve the amount of research we need to receive outside recognition and funding, we must start collecting data now in our own barns and practices. Waiting for someone else to pick up the reins could stop the growth of our industry and leave us in our tracks. The good news is that there is a growing interest in this field with programmers and professional organizations. NARHA and EFMHA in particular are committed to encourage and expand clinical research and act as a resource center for their members. 🐾

**QUESTION:**  
How is equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) helpful for adult clients?

**ANSWER:** EFP is helpful to adults in much the same way it is for children... it provides a safe and stimulating place for people to learn about themselves. As with children, the equines provide feedback, affection, and challenges to adults seeking growth and healing. Individuals with problems ranging from severe depression to most adjustment problems can benefit and have reported dramatic changes in self-confidence, personal resources, social skills, and overall happiness and well-being.



Green Chimney

## PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF THERAPEUTIC RIDING:

### A PILOT STUDY

By Carolyn M. Gatty, MS-OTR/L

Much literature exists that supports the use of therapeutic riding and hippotherapy for improving a child's physical well-being; however, mostly only anecdotal reports support the positive effects that this form of therapy can have on a child's emotional well-being. This dilemma inspired a group of four occupational therapy students and their advisor to investigate the impact that two therapeutic riding programs in Southwestern Pennsylvania had on five riders' self-esteem.

#### BACKGROUND

Riding for the handicapped began in Scandinavia after Liz Hartwell won a silver medal for dressage in the 1952 Olympic games despite being handicapped by polio. Hartwell's experience inspired a Norwegian therapist, Mrs. Boothker, to establish a riding group for children with disabilities. Therapeutic riding centers were first established in the 1960's in both the United States and Canada with the formation of the NARHA in 1969.

Physical benefits of therapeutic riding may include gains in balance, posture, and mobility. Muscle spasticity and paralysis make walking difficult or impossible for some individuals. In some respects, a person's gait is similar to that of a horse; therefore, many riders are able to experience this type of normal movement for the first time while on a horse. Exercise equipment, traditionally working only one muscle group at a time, cannot produce body movements in a natural, rhythmic, and progressive manner.

Improvements by expanding balance may be attributed to the fact that stimulation and muscle massaging received during a ride improves the patient's nerve impulses and muscle tone. Additionally, postural improvements have been noted due to an increase in strength of stomach and back musculature.

"Exercising the spirit is as important as exercising the body, and the horse provides an enormous boost for people with mental, and emotional handicaps." Park quoted one founder of a therapeutic riding program, Barbara Christan, "The confidence and self-esteem that comes from being able to control a powerful, 1,000 pound animal is just immeasurable." In 1994, Cawley, et al, ran a quasi-experimental study of 23 adolescents aged 11 to 15 years with special educational needs that yielded a slight increase in overall mean self-esteem after subjects received 8 weeks of riding instruction; however, the increase was not a statistically significant one.

Self-esteem can be defined as the way individuals feel and think about themselves and the degree to which one's self-perception is positive, self-respecting, and self-accepting. Levels of self-esteem fluctuate in positive and negative directions, influencing the individual in all things he/she does both actively and mentally. With proper assistance, guidance, self-esteem can be developed to a higher level, thereby enhancing one's development and ability to experience success.

#### THE STUDY

Although this study answered three main research questions, only one is highlighted in this article: To what degree did mean perceived self-esteem scores significantly differ among disabled children and adolescents before and after a therapeutic riding program? Five

children and adolescents, aged 8 to 13 years, volunteered, with parental consent, to complete pretest and posttest surveys measuring self-esteem. Four of the participants were girls and one was a boy. The children had diagnoses including congenital hypotonia, learning disability with dyspraxia, cerebral palsy, spastic cerebral palsy, and non-verbal learning disability.

A revised form of the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, for children in grades 3 through 12, was used to measure the riders' perceived self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 items and is normally completed in 5 minutes. It is rated on a 4-point scale of "strongly disagree" (1), "disagree" (2), "agree" (3), or "strongly agree" (4). The wording from the original survey was minimally revised on 7 of the 10 items to make it easier for this study's subjects to understand. For example, "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others" was revised to "I feel that I am just as important as other people." The survey was administered to each child on the first and last day of the therapeutic riding programs.

Each survey was analyzed such that an average rating of "4" indicated the highest level of self-esteem score possible. Average scores before the therapeutic riding program (3.32, SD=.22) were compared to average scores after the therapeutic riding program (3.64, SD=.33). These mean values demonstrated a significantly positive increase in self-esteem of the riders through a Wilcoxon signed-ranks test ( $T=2.03$ ,  $p=.02$ ) with  $\alpha=.05$ . Figure 1 demonstrates increases in mean perceived self-esteem ratings for each subject following participation in the therapeutic riding program.

As expected, disabled children and adolescents who participated in these therapeutic riding programs



reported significant gains in self-esteem. These findings were consistent with past studies; although, this was the first to yield a statistically significant increase. Therapeutic riding may have contributed to the significant changes in perceived self-esteem. Positive influences on self-esteem may have resulted through the development of unconditional bonds with the horses, confidence gained by "controlling" an animal 10-20 times their size, and a sense of physical improvement. This pilot study did not include a control group, therefore; a treatment effect can not be conclusively drawn, as there are many extraneous factors that may have affected the subjects' self-esteem. Furthermore, due to sampling methods, these results cannot be generalized to all disabled children and adolescents participating in therapeutic riding. Where do we go from here?

Repeat this study using a greater number of riders.

Design a study that includes a control group; this group of disabled children would either not receive any treatment or would be engaged in traditional occupational or physical therapy programs.

Do a study that determines how physical benefits relate to psychosocial benefits of therapeutic riding.

Ask the riders open-ended questions to determine what factors relate to improvements in self-esteem. ■

## IMAGINE VAULTING

By Terry Myers & Gayle McCampbell

Satisfaction, pride, and exhilaration...just a few of the feelings that occur when we meet new challenges we set for ourselves. Whether as an instructor or rider, striving toward new goals will continue to keep our equine interest sparked. Therapeutic vaulting, as a program within your existing program or by itself, is an activity that stretches the mind, body and spirit into realms outside traditional riding activities.

Consider the simplicity of starting a vaulting program: the right horse, a competent lounger/instructor, and relatively few pieces of equipment—lunge line, whip, bridle, pad, surcingle and a vaulting barrel. It can all take place within and around a 60-meter circle. With these few basic ingredients a vaulting program can offer much to many people.

Opportunities to stretch the body are abundant! Take for instance a basic vaulting position called the "flag." Balancing on one hand and knee, with opposite arm and leg outstretched, requires strength, balance and flexibility. Imagine the level of concentration and focus necessary to keep your body in a position while the platform you are on, the horse, is in rhythmic motion.

Taking it down a notch, just lying supine with head on the rump, arms extended downward and legs astride the walking horse is a wonderful way to loosen and relax the entire body. Inherent in these simple activities is a chance to deepen a trusting relationship with the instructor and the horse. Moving the body out of the traditional seat and into alternative contacts with the horse intensifies the awareness of the horse's movement—the movement that we in the industry accredit with so much power.



G.Rhodes

Another possibility for physical stretch during a vaulting class is the vaulting barrel. Providing a site for skill practice and problem solving, the vaulting barrel is also an excellent prop for interaction and team building. Like a jungle gym, the barrel invites a cooperative playfulness that isn't always possible on the back of the horse. As long as safety and concern for horse and rider remain a priority, activities in vaulting are limitless. There are endless ways to engage the entire class with simultaneous activities on the barrel, the horse and the ground. This can multiply the communication, the motor planning and the fun!

When was the last time you really stretched your imagination? Well, try visualizing the various groups who could benefit from a vaulting class. Vaulting has been shown to be valuable as an adjunct to psychotherapy for individuals with eating disorders and a history of sexual abuse. Many adults, especially women, are looking for alternative ways to be active and stay in shape. A class may team up with a yoga instructor for a combination of a yoga warm up, followed by a strength and flexibility class, all on the back of a horse. Students involved in other riding disciplines often find that

vaulting will improve their riding seat. And believe it or not, there are some people who are just not interested in riding, but will find enjoyment, relaxation, camaraderie, exercise and more in a vaulting class. A creative component to vaulting can be music. Who more than a teenager loves to put on their favorite song and move to its beat? Combine this with more kids and a horse and the fun really begins!

The idea of stretching the spirit is a little harder to articulate but it is real. Putting control of the horse in someone else's hands allows for deepening trust in the horse. And the resultant freedom can be liberating. Imagine riding hands-free while moving in synchrony with the horse at a trot. Consider the satisfaction and pride that one would feel while confidently standing tall on a walking horse. The tremendous sensory input inherent to vaulting heightens body awareness. It provides a great opportunity to "tune in" to one's physical self as well as emotional state. Cooperative communication between vaulters on the horse or the barrel offers a unique experience for friendship and respect.

Is it time for a stretch? Give vaulting a try. 🐾

## Book Review

By Kat Zilboorg



**BOOK:** *Equestrian Instruction: An Integrated Approach to Teaching and Learning*

By Jill Hassler-Scoop; published by Goals Unlimited Press ©2000

ISBN: 0-9632562-6-2

"Equestrian Instruction" is a must-have for anyone interested in expanding their knowledge and abilities to know the how's and when's of teaching and learning. Written in a style and manner that can be utilized for teaching the mechanics of any discipline, Hassler-Scoop looks at how riders learn, what resources and encumbrances they bring into the arena and lesson with them, and how to identify and build on those resources to create a supportive and effective learning environment for each individual rider and horse team. While her focus is on the human learning process it is clear that Hassler-Scoop values the well being and comfort of the horse. Presenting theory, case studies, and practical application, Hassler-Scoop has created a highly readable text that belongs in the library of all equestrian activity instructors and therapists.