

HORSES AS THERAPY ANIMALS

MEG'S STORY – My Experience with Horses

By Marguerite “Meg” Phillips

As I look back on my life I am able to see that I have naturally or maybe I should say; supernaturally evolved into this god given gift of working with children and animals and being able to bring healing to both parties through the development of mutual respect, by nurturing kindness and trust. I have come to find that both the animal kingdom and the human race want to serve when they are considered, cared for and trust has been developed.



My background with horses started at the very tender age of about 5 years old, when my brother was given a horse for passing the Common Entrance Exams with a full scholarship. This horse was the first animal of pleasure to arrive on our farm where my parents had small crops and raised cattle: a few goats, a pig or two and of course the chickens, pigeons, rabbits, dogs and cats. Our life on the farm was great but with lots of responsibilities for each member of the family, requiring some of us to get up very early before departure to school to perform these duties and again at the end of the day upon our return home. The horse however, brought a new dimension to farm life; one of pleasure and recreation rather than work, and here is where my bond with the horse began.

But as God would have it, at the age of 5, I was soon to find out that I was a slow learner academically, so school was difficult and traumatic for me. For the most

part I was always a year or two behind my age group, and was advanced only because of my age, which caused me to be shy and introverted suffering from low self-esteem. On top of this my home life was shattered (by about 9 years of age) by the dissolve of my parents' marriage and the splintering of my siblings' as we were all sent off to different boarding facilities. My parents soon became involved with new partners and somehow I had no one to express my fears, struggles and pain with, so my animals (in particularly the horse) became my confidant.

As I look back on my life I realize that it was through the connection which I made with my horse that I was able to begin the healing of my wounded soul. Not only this but because of the pain of rejection and inferiority which I had suffered through school and then through the dissolve & splintering of my family life, there was a sensitivity that developed in me that enabled me to understand the pain of others and to be able to bring healing by motivating and empowering my clients through positive reinforcement and acceptance, using the tool that had worked for me – that being the horse.



Soon after I graduated from school I started my own horseback riding school, and it was here that I came to realize just how powerful that skill of handling and molding my students was. I took some of the most difficult, disruptive and undisciplined kids and transformed them into helpful, cooperative and functional young adults, many times by knowing which horse to assign to individuals to achieve optimum results.

While running my riding school I was also approached by a school/nursery that catered to special needs children who were all physically impaired, mostly with multi dysfunctions. Requesting that we enable the children to interact with the horses, and it was with this exposure that I came to understand just how powerful



a healer a horse can be when placed in the hands of a skilled horseperson. All the children without exception lit up on just the mere sight of the animals, wiggling excitedly and uttering squeals of joy at a mere touch. The shared joy that could be seen as they began bouncing up

and down and laughing as they were put to sit on the horse is beyond description; not to mention when the horse began to move with the child atop. It was after witnessing this beautiful interaction between the horse and the children that I knew that I wanted to dedicate my life to helping children through the intervention of the horse.

I am a skilled horsewoman having had over 55 years of experience with horses: operating a number of riding schools, competing in and preparing youngsters for horse shows and conducting trail riding at hotels, local attractions and at my farm.





In around 2006 I experienced an Equestrian Assisted Physiotherapy session with about ten at risk teen boys with Tina Williams and Sidney McGill in St. Ann's bay and decided I just had to do this. In about 2008 I went to Florida and took the EGALA Course and got certified at the course 1 level. For the last 5 years I have been holding summer camps and weekend sessions where we have been implementing these programs with At Risk teens and children from the inner city.

Marguerite Phillips

EQUINE THERAPIES

Three types of therapy using the horse:

- Hippotherapy.
- Equine Assisted Psychotherapy
- Therapeutic Riding and Animal Husbandry, otherwise known as EQUINISIM

Hippotherapy comes from the Greek roots hippo, for horse, thus meaning ‘Therapy with the help of a horse’. The horse’s gait enables the therapist to grade the degree of input to the patient and use this movement in combination with other treatment strategies to achieve desired therapy goals or functional outcomes. Hippotherapy is used largely with client(s) with neuro-muscular- skeletal conditions, and is a therapy used by physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists along with a horse specialist. This therapy is directed towards clients who are autistic, physically impaired, mentally challenged etc.



Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is a mental health treatment. It involves setting up activities with the horses which will require the client or group to apply certain skills. It is a collaborated effort between a licensed/trained therapist and a horse professional, working with the client(s) and horses to address treatment goals.



Therapeutic Riding and Animal Husbandry, otherwise known as Equinism. Therapeutic horseback riding is equine-based therapy used to improve the balance: coordination, focus, independence, confidence, motor and social skills. Therapeutic riding is beneficial to children and adults who present with any of a wide range of cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioral conditions. Building a relationship with an animal can be very rewarding. Gaining the trust and loyalty of an animal builds confidence and a new language skill in the student which is then extended to their personal relationships.

It is our inbuilt nature to need and to want to give Love, to reproduce and to consider and to be considered (to receive and give kindness and touch) By being taught to take care of an animal using these languages, students who have learned to suppress, and turn inwardly or have become abusive or disrespectful, soon begin to transform when they see how responsive the horses become to them when they give to the horses the same emotions they themselves hunger after.



THE RATIONALE BEHIND EQUINE ASSISTED THERAPIES & THERAPEUTIC RIDING AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Equine Assisted Learning is an opportunity for participants to partner with horses to facilitate the learning and growth process. Whether or not we are ready to hear

it, horses reflect back to us exactly what we need to improve as leaders, communicators and team members.

The great thing about horses is that they are so large, powerful and sensitive, and are totally dependent on their quick reaction to danger or threats (fight or flee) for survival. A wrong approach from a client/student will most definitely earn a bad result, usually with the client/student coming out in the second place. A horse can inflict great pain with very little effort if treated incorrectly or even innocently by merely stepping on someone's foot in error. The sheer size and power of this majestic animal automatically instills fear in our client(s) to start with, but as the client(s) are taught how to get the respect and trust of the horse, confidence and self-esteem is built. As the client(s) grown in these positive attributes, the client(s) can then be taught to take these lessons home and learn to transform their homes and communities.

1. It is effective

Equine Assisted therapy creates interactive sessions with horses that allow people and professionals to "see" where the problems are and find ways to solve them. In the sessions, the focus is on doing, being active in the moment, and finding solutions that provide faster, more permanent change. It is effective for people of all ages and conditions.

2. Uncovers the REAL person, quickly

Through experiential activities, Equine Assisted therapy helps you to immediately see how groups and individuals act and react to different situations, giving professionals a clearer picture of what they need to do to help.

3. Makes the Process More Engaging

Because Equine Assisted therapy is active and effective, the process is more engaging for both professionals and the people involved. Once a horse enters the equation, everyone is instantly attentive and engaged in the process.

4. Gets People Past the Sticking Points

Everyone can hit a wall and remain stuck in old patterns and attitudes. Equine Assisted therapy can help one get out of the rut and back on track.

5. Great for Individuals and Groups

Whether working with individuals or groups, the horses provide powerful opportunities to address social skills, communication issues, and other dynamics necessary for healthy, and meaningful relationships.

6. Provides Real Solutions

When participating in Equine Assisted therapy everyone is excited by the process. Whether used for gaining insight, self-confidence, learning appropriate communication and relationship skills, or other issues, people find the time with the horses to be meaningful, and leading to real and long-lasting change.

7. Translates into human relationships

Equine assisted therapy is directly transferable to humans because participants learn and practice skills. The skills learned are relational skills because life happens in relationship, whether those relationships are boss/employee, teacher/student, leader/group. It does not affect the value of the skill if it is initially learned from and practiced with horse partners and it is often easier to risk more of ourselves when we are not faced with the judgment of others.

From Reference: Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: Healing Therapy or Just Hype?

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