

# Horses for Hope

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY

## 2015 Evaluation Results

*Kildonan UnitingCare's Horses for Hope program uses horse and human connection to address the needs of both in a safe and therapeutic environment.*

The Horses for Hope Equine Assisted Therapy model brings the horse and person into interaction with each other, working with the parallels between their stories.

Horses for Hope uses narrative therapy methods, combined with the experience of rehabilitating neglected, abused or traumatised horses (using Natural Horsemanship methods). This provides the scaffolding to enable people to transition from the domination of troubling life experiences, life stories and perceptions of themselves, to feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy.

Horses for Hope has been operating since 2003 in the Shepparton region. After the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 the program was extended to Kinglake.

The program to date has assisted approximately 1,500 people aged from 3 to 80, mainly from Victoria. Participants include bushfire survivors, children and youth, parents, and people with a range of mental health issues including anxiety, social phobia, depression and conditions such as autism and attention deficit disorder.



Horses for Hope is also available to state and federal government departments and community services agencies for their clients on a fee for service or package deal basis, including disability, family services, defence and war veterans.

In mid-2015, Kildonan commissioned Melbourne-based consultants Susan Geraghty and Danny Blay to conduct an evaluation of Horses for Hope.

The purpose of the evaluation project was to provide evidence of participant and carer-identified outcomes, identify the strengths and limitations of the program and provide recommendations for future program development and ongoing evaluation.

*"After Horses for Hope I started to find myself, developing trust in my instincts. It was a chance to reclaim part of myself that had been sleeping for a long time. Through working with the horses with a range of different issues I learned to face difficult areas in my life with patience and clarity. I progressed from one day to the next; the horse and I both took a step forward."*

## Methodology

From an identified list of 150 participants who had completed the program in the past 12 months, 60 contacts were made via email.

An online survey was then sent to these contacts to complete anonymously and a request for interested participants and carers to participate in a telephone, Skype or face-to-face interview.

More than 30 respondents (50 per cent of those contacted) provided retrospective assessments regarding participants' sense of wellbeing and identified attitudes and behaviours pre and post their involvement with Horses for Hope.

They also provided feedback about the processes and practices involved in the program.

Fifteen participants and carers provided authorisation to be contacted by the consultants for an interview and 13 participated in an interview.

## Key findings

The identified outcomes for the participants of the Horses for Hope program were overwhelmingly positive. Both participants and carers identified improvements in a range of participant behaviours and attitudes identified by Kildonan as evidence of a changed perception of self. These were:

- Greater sense of well being
- Increase in positive interactions with others
- Improved anger management and increased self control
- Greater engagement and attendance at school or work
- Greater engagement in community activities
- Improved social abilities
- Improved sleep
- Reduced use of alcohol and other drugs
- Stronger connection between children and parents
- Increased ability to self-manage and self-calm

Participants also identified feeling greater confidence and trust in themselves as well as better self-awareness, emotional and behavioural control, resilience, assertion and communication skills, and reduced anxiety and fear.

### Participants indicated:

- an increase from 10 per cent reporting a positive sense of self to almost 77 per cent
- an increase from 7 per cent reporting feeling confident to over 83 per cent
- an increase from 38 per cent reporting feeling capable to 91 per cent
- an increase from 31 per cent reporting enjoying spending time with their families to 83 per cent
- an increase from 38 per cent reporting an ability to adapt to change to 100 per cent
- a decrease from 23 per cent reporting sometimes or often using drugs to calm down to 7 per cent
- a decrease from 77 per cent reporting sleeping badly to 23 per cent.

*"I am now trusting myself again. I make slow steady progress. My mother saw a huge difference in me and said she hadn't seen me like this for years. I've found a voice again."*

### Parents/carers of participants reported:

- an increase from 8 per cent of participants taking responsibility for their choices to 61 per cent
- an improvement from 53 per cent of participants never or not often enjoying being with family to almost 70 per cent enjoying being with family
- a reduction from 85 per cent of participants never or not often being happy with their ability to deal with problems to 7 per cent
- over two-thirds of participants never or not often being able to adapt to change which reduced to 15 per cent
- a reduction from almost 77 per cent of participants often or always getting angry to approximately 15 per cent.
- a dramatic improvement from over 84 per cent of participants who could never or not often tell when s/he was getting angry, nor knew how to calm down, to over 69 per cent of participants now often being able to.

## Contact

Horses for Hope currently operates from a Shepparton base, with access to Melbourne locations. For more information about how you can refer your clients, or for self-referrals, contact:

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*Kildonan UnitingCare acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Custodians of Melbourne and the surrounding area.*