

Horses for Hope Principles and Practices Kildonan Uniting Care



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Horses for Hope Principles and Practices

Introduction

Horses for Hope (HFH) is a program that aims to address suffering in horses and people that have experienced trouble and distress. This is achieved by bringing them into interaction with each other in particular ways, and working with the parallels between the horses' stories and the people's stories. Reciprocal help positions the participant differently to usual counselling in that the person is making a contribution to the life and safety of another being, rather than just being the recipient of help.

This program has as its baseline the underlying principles of congruence between actions and philosophy, respect for people and animals, trust, honesty and patience. It values recognition of the efforts made towards change by both people and horses and has a commitment to teaching horse sense in order to support the development of people sense. It is not eclectic and draws quite specifically on the underlying principles of Natural Horsemanship and Narrative Therapy.

Narrative Therapy informs workers holding a position of “not knowing”, staying open and curious, and having an interest in figuring out what works together with the person participating. There is a recognition that “we have skills and processes but not knowing where it will end up” (HFH staff). This approach relies on the idea that workers are not an expert on the person or on this particular horse but in horse language and in noticing and asking questions of people in order to draw forward rich identity stories. The experiences in the horse yard provide opportunities to notice and develop these stories.

More recently there is recognition of the connections of this work with neuroscience and brain plasticity. There is a growing interest in how neuroscience helps to make sense of why the experiences and conversations offered in HFH are having such an impact in the lives of those involved. The people in the program are open to ideas and practices that fit within these frameworks and extend understandings or openings in this work.

Animal Assisted Therapy Outcomes

There is a long tradition of animal assisted therapy, “the purposeful addition of an animal as part of the therapeutic situation” (Signal, T., Taylor, N., Brotos, H., Prentice, K., Lazarus, K. p25, 2013). Horses for Hope exists within this tradition, using horses specifically. While this is an emerging field in terms of evidence based practice, preliminary studies of equine assisted therapy indicate positive psycho-social outcomes in a range of contexts including sexual abuse, family violence, anger, trauma, and depression and anxiety. (Schultz, P.N., Remick-Barlow, G.A., & Robbins, L, 2006, Evans, N., & Gray, C., 2012, Signal,T., et al, 2013). Some of the effects that have been recorded include an increase in problem solving and conflict resolution abilities, an increase in self worth, self-confidence and positive self-image. In working particularly with horses in the context of

young women who have experienced sexual assault, having a large and powerful horse respond to communication in a calm and favourable way contrasts sharply with previous experiences of not being heard or respected. This can provide a sense of personal authority and validation. (Dietz, Davis & Pennings, 2012). Achieving this communication with a horse requires the person to be calm, confident and demonstrate strong and non-violent leadership (Burgon, 2011). Noticing, developing and drawing these skills into a preferred identity story is an important part of the work at Horses for Hope. Dietz et al., (2012) found that Equine Facilitated Therapy (EFT) had a significant impact on lowering depression in children, adolescent, and adult indigenous and non-indigenous women who had experienced child sexual assault.

One of the contexts in which Equine assisted therapy is useful is when a person has not found it easy to engage in traditional counselling or “talk therapy”. This may be a consequence of mistrust from experiences of abuse by trusted adults, or having been involved with multiple services and staff.

“Lots of people have stereotypes and fears about traditional therapy and with young people who have been in care, who have spent much of their lives being assessed and bounced around services, they're quite wary about accessing traditional services” Donaghy (2006).

At Horses for Hope the process of watching how staff work with horses and the parallels for how they work with people, builds trust. The work with the horses can open a door for conversations about their experiences once trust is established, or the young person's interaction with the horses can provide a metaphor for addressing aspects of their own lives indirectly.

This document will outline the theoretical frameworks, values and principles that underlie the work at HFH and how they relate to the practices and processes central to this program. It will outline in detail what these practices and processes are and the skills required working in these ways.

Theoretical Perspectives that Inform our Practice

What creates conditions of change for people and horses?

Equine assisted therapy (EAT) is being used in many contexts and there is a growing interest in this practice partly because of its efficacy in engaging groups of people who traditionally don't engage easily in “talk therapy”. Children and young people who have experiences where a trusted adult is the perpetrator of abuse have good reason not to trust and this can make establishing a therapeutic relationship more difficult. Many of the people who come to Horses for Hope have had these or other experiences of trauma.

There are three main theoretical perspectives that specifically inform practices in the Horses for Hope program. These are Natural Horsemanship, Narrative therapy and Neuroscience. There is an interplay and congruence between the ideas that come from these three sources of theory and philosophy that together provide the rationale for why we do what we do. Both Natural Horsemanship and Narrative therapy seek to create relationships of collaboration and teamwork that facilitate choice and open possibilities. Recent developments in understanding of the brain help us to appreciate why the practices informed by these approaches can create positive changes by providing opportunities for the development of new neural pathways.

Natural Horsemanship

Natural Horsemanship is a philosophy of working with horses based on the idea of working with the horse's natural ways, using an understanding of how horses think and communicate to establish a co-operative partnership between horses and people.

“Natural horsemanship is a method of training and interacting with horses that differs from traditional methods. Rather than using force and teaching a horse "who's boss," natural horsemanship keys into the language of the horse. Instead of forcing the horse to do something, the handler helps the horse to understand what is wanted and to be willing to do it. Handlers use the body language and herd behaviours of horses to develop a partnership with the horse. Gentle but firm pressure applied in place of fear, pain, and defeat invite the horse into an understanding and trusting relationship” McClean (2011).

There is a long history to working with horses in a way that is respectful, non violent, and uses a knowledge of their ways of communicating. The concept of natural horsemanship as used in this program has been influenced by Monty Roberts and by the experience and training of the workers in the program with their own horses and horses in the program. Workers in the program continue to extend their skills and knowledge of the horse human relationship and have a commitment to remaining open to learning about ideas that fit with their principles. Recently, this has had them pursuing an interest in the work of Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling. Hempfling has studied horses in the wild and is committed to creating horse human partnerships based on the horse choosing to follow the person as leader. He views proximity to horses as transformative of human lives.

The term coined “natural horsemanship” (NH) refers to a handling style inspired by natural horses’ behaviour, which is based on an interpretation of the natural ethogram of the horse (McGreevy et al., 2005). Wild horses are known to deliver visual cues such as body language in order to communicate with each other (Waring, 1983 and Goodwin, 1999). Accordingly NH techniques emphasise the importance of visual and gestural cues by the person handling a horse. For Hempfling (2014), “The basis of his work is consideration for the horse's psyche, communication via body language that is understood by the horse and interaction with these powerful, beautiful, dignified creatures in accordance with nature.”

One aspect of NH is that when the horse gives the correct response, the NH handler ceases to apply pressure, ideally a form of pressure that is as minimal as it can be. Horses for Hope staff are interested in listening to and observing the horses communication carefully and responding in a way that helps the horse to overcome the restraint that may be stopping them from co-operating. What else can we do to invite the horse to respond differently? What is it that is making it hard for the horse to respond? What are we reading in the horse’s communication? The Horses for Hope team would describe this pressure as communication. Horses for Hope staff have observed that in a herd, a good horse leader will use minimal pressure – a horse that tried to establish leadership through aggression may not be respected in the same way. In the HFH herd, they have noticed this over time with two horses, Belle and Vondalora. Both Belle and Vondalora seek to be the “lead mare” in the herd. Vondalora is consistently aggressive, baring her teeth, rushing at, or kicking other horses while Belle raises her body up and looks strongly at another horse. Her communication is very clear, but not so aggressive and the other horses pay attention and respond. Another feature typical

of the NH approach consists in exposing the horse to a variety of visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli in order that the horses undergo habituation and desensitization to these stimuli. The latter term (desensitization) is preferentially used by NH handlers although it would be more suited to the case of sensitized or hypersensitized animals (Fureix et al, 2009). In the HFH program this is used when participants help horses through “hard and tricky situations”, such as helping a horse to walk over a tarp, or have a plastic bag moved around its body. These experiences help the horse to stay calm in unexpected situations or with unexpected noises, and provide the person the opportunity to shepherd the horse through difficulty while using their skills to stay calm.

Some of the central underpinning ideas drawn from natural horsemanship include an understanding of what Monty Roberts refers to as the “language of equus”, the process of ‘Join-Up’ (Roberts, 1996, p.349) and an appreciation of the horse as a flight/fight animal which means that horses’ negative behaviour is understood as coming from fear rather than “meanness”. Monty Roberts identifies an understanding of what he refers to as “advance and retreat” (Roberts, 1997, p.104) as essential for developing trust between horses as “flight” animals and humans as “fight” animals. The process of “Join-Up” is a method during which clear leadership is established in a non-aggressive way, using body language that a horse understands. This communication process relies on the idea that a horse values clear leadership, and in fact feels safer and more relaxed when leadership is established. Initially the horse is sent away, as they would be out of a herd when disciplined by the lead mare, when they consistently indicate through their body position that they are wanting to offer respect and trust to the person, as their leader, they are invited to come in and be with that person.

“Join-up is a process by which a human utilizes a combination of predator and equine signals (typically those of the lead mare in a herd) to propose a relationship of cooperation in which the human will take the decision makers position (just as the lead mare in a herd does). This process is complete when a horse chooses to be with a human rather than away from him.” (Roberts, 2014)

At Horses for Hope we understand this communication process to be using horse leadership communication and *would not* consider it to be combined with predator signals. We need to be aware of times when our communication enters the predator zone, and manage this. This notion of establishing leadership and working in a way that has the horse choose to be with the person is also central to the way in which **helping** works. The concept of strength without aggression is significant in establishing this leadership. This model of leadership positions itself against violence in both human and human horse relationships.

“I first developed ‘Join-Up’ to stop the cycle of violence typically used in traditional horse breaking. Through a process of clear communication and mutual trust, horses are motivated to be willing partners.... can only be accomplished if both partners are relaxed at the end of the process.....To gain ‘Join-Up’ with a horse, it is necessary to step into his world, observe his needs, conditions, and the rules that govern his social order. One should learn to communicate in Equus, since we know he cannot communicate in our verbal language. This process cannot be faked. Once understood, it is easy to use and can be trust-building for both human and horse” Roberts (2014).

Engaging in this process of learning “horse sense”, the “language of equus” and then putting this into practice to communicate with a horse in order to achieve cooperation is central to the change

process at Horses for Hope. This kind of leadership, based on respect, trust and calm is referred to as Shepherd leadership, this is modelled both with horses and participants in the program.

“Our study suggests that NH exercises could improve horses’ Horse Human Relationship”. As Waran et al., (2002) underline those horses receiving NH handling show a reduced tendency to make responses thought to indicate negative affective states, including panic. “ (Fureix et al., 2009) The knowledge and skills that are both taught, learned and discovered by people involved in the program include finding a place of calm in difficult and challenging situations and understanding and interpreting horse’s non-verbal communication. Skills in close and detailed observation of both the horses’ state and the person’s own mental and emotional state are developed, as are responding to these. While there are many different understandings of the “right way” to communicate with and train horses in the horse world, there is evidence to suggest that observational skills and the ability to read non verbal communication and respond sensitively and quickly are central to any successful horse -human relationship development.

“Only well trained observational skills allied with advanced knowledge of horse behaviour can realize horses being handled safely” Hausberger et al., (2008).

Monty Roberts proposes that adrenaline and learning are linked and that we do well with education when we create an environment conducive to learning, where there are opportunities to absorb learning, rather than having it imposed. This means creating a space where both the horse and the person can be relaxed and enjoying the experience.

“Horses are animals of synchronicity. If the trainer’s heart rate or adrenaline increases, the horse will sync with this physiology I say, adrenaline up; learning down. Adrenaline down; learning up” Roberts (2014).

This principle applies to people as well as horses; learning opportunities are enhanced when our adrenaline is down. In addition to creating a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, one way to lower adrenaline is through breathing techniques. One of the “horse sense” skills central to the work in this program is learning the ability to “breathe for the horse” to create a safe, relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. This context assists the horse to engage in a partnership with the person and learn to get through difficult situations. The person interacting with them learns to be aware of and use their breathing to help to communicate safety to the horse, and then also to use this in their own life.

“The mechanism may be that a horse’s heart rate decreases with people who have had extensive experience with horses— and thus hold a positive attitude towards horses thereby leading to the forward ear position, less ear movement, low resistance, and low head position found in this study, all of which suggest a relaxed, comfortable, confident, interested horse” Chamove et al., (2002).

This program advocates an approach to working with horses that draws on NH and the work of Monty Roberts and other like-minded horse people because of the belief that to create a sense of safety and connection for the horse as well as the person is fundamental. The concept of mutual respect in idea and action is central. Unlike other EAT where horses are chosen for their quiet, safe ways, the horses that are chosen to work within the program because they have experienced negative effects from their relationships with humans or from physical trauma and the program has a commitment to making a difference to the lives of these horses. Like, Evans and Gray (2012)

who “contend that, in the planning and implementation of any form of AAT..., similar consideration needs to be given to the well-being of the animals as to human participants, and these interventions should, where possible, also provide benefits for the animals.” This is a central feature of Horses for Hope. There has been some recent research around the effects of EAT generally on the heart rate variable and cortisol levels in horses, while this is not measured in any formal way at Horses for Hope, staff are observant of the physical signs in horses of relaxation or stress. The intention is that through repeated experiences of safe, non-aggressive leadership with different people that the horses in the program will develop trust and be able to engage with people in a safe and useful way again, and either go back to their original homes or be “rehomed” if this is appropriate. This reciprocal change and helping process that features at Horses for Hope is also used in programs in prisons.

“In working with and training unwanted dogs and horses, the inmates save the animals from being euthanised and train them for future work as companions for people with special needs. In the process, the inmates give back to the community” Evans & Gray (2012).

This reciprocity provides a unique opportunity for participants to experience themselves differently, and is one of the contributing factors to building a sense of self worth.

A low-level of emotional reactivity among horses and positive human–horse relationships are crucial for improving safety and learning (Fureix et al., 2009). Horses’ ability to learn from their positive experience and indeed generalize this positive experience to change their expectations of people in general is supported by research that indicates that horses have a long term memory and will generalize from repeated positive interactions with humans (Sankey et al., 2009).

“From our results, it appears that horses are no different from humans: they behave, learn and memorize better when learning is associated with a positive situation.” Sankey et al., (2009).

Participants in the program learn both horse sense and the language of equus as part of the skill development component of the program. While the work that takes place in and out of the horse ring at HFH draws on ideas of Monty Roberts, including Join-Up, it represents a compilation of practices drawing on similar philosophy. These skills and knowledges, combined with skills of calmness and self-awareness allow participants to contribute positively to the lives of horses by transforming their experience of humans. We have observed that participants bring with them skills and knowledges about communication and staying calm in difficult situations that appear to have previously gone unrecognized, or have not been given significance. Making these skills and achievements visible and incorporating them into preferred identity stories contributes to the change process. This storying process uses narrative therapy principles and practices.

Narrative Therapy

“Many people who seek therapy believe that the problems of their lives are a reflection of their own identity, or the identity of others, or a reflection of the identity of their relationships. This sort of understanding shapes their efforts to resolve problems, and unfortunately these efforts invariably have the effect of exacerbating the problems...In short people come to believe that their problems are internal to their self or the selves of others –

that they or others are in fact, the problem. And this belief only sinks them further into the problems they are attempting to resolve” White (2007, p.9).

Narrative therapy seeks to provide opportunities for people to separate their identity from the problem, to recognize events and initiatives that lie outside the problem story and to develop rich stories of life and identity that open possibilities for change. The therapist’s role is one of enquiry, rather than assessment and treatment, of exploring with and journeying with the person as they discover and make sense of skills, abilities, intentions, hopes and purposes.

“Practices that decentre the voice of the therapist have the effect of bringing to the centre of the therapeutic endeavour some of the “knowledges” of life and skills of living of the people who consult therapists. These are knowledges and skills that are not very visible at the outset of therapeutic consultations” White (2011, p.3).

HFH finds congruence between this approach to collaborating with people, working things out together, and the co-operative horse-human relationships that underpin their work. Experiences both in and out of the horse ring provide rich detail for the identification of skills and knowledges and the development and description of preferred identity stories. Many of the people referred to HFH arrive seeing themselves as the problem, as they step into the horse ring, skills in communication, remaining calm in the face of fear, managing their emotions and reading and responding to the horse and the horseperson with them become readily visible and available for storying. The meaning of experiences can then be explored and taken into and recognized in relationships and events outside the horse ring, both in the present and historically. These initiatives and conversations about the initiatives allow people to engage in “a performance of their lives, one that is significantly transporting of them - transporting in the sense that such a performance is an activity through which people become other than who they were at the outset of this engagement”

White (2011, p.6). A young person who may have been identified as a troublemaker who can’t concentrate and or listen, has a new way of viewing themselves and being seen by others as they notice themselves enacting bravery, calmness, focus and other abilities in the horse ring. These initiatives may appear quite small initially, and it is important to notice these small steps. Their intentions to connect with the horse, their hopes for the horse’s recovery from their difficulties along with their commitment to making a difference provide possible avenues for conversations that open new possibilities for identity.

The conversations that happen in the Horses for Hope program draw on the following narrative therapy principles.

- Change happens through noticing, attending to and richly storying events and initiatives that stand apart from the problem story.
- Problems are external from people and animals
 - There is always a social and historical context of problems
 - Neither people nor animals are pathologised
- People are the experts in their own lives
- Focus on the development of preferred identity stories is a priority
- Identity is a social and relational achievement - providing opportunities for witnessing of preferred story fits with this
- Creating opportunities both in activities and conversations that have an effect on the effects of problems is part of the collaborative process

- Learning and conversations need to be scaffolded – small and interesting steps that are socially supported scaffold both the learning process and developing identity story.
- Relationships need to be respectful and engender trust

While conversations often form only a small part of what happens in the Horses for Hope program, how these conversations are shaped is important. This way of working has developed as a response for those people who have not wanted to or found it hard to engage in traditional counselling. The conversations may be focused only on what happens with the horse, between the person and the horse, or drawing in other aspects of the person life and context. There are various “practice maps” that the therapist can draw on to shape these conversations. These include:

- **Externalising Conversations**

“Externalizing conversations can provide an antidote to.... internal understandings by objectifying the problem...This makes it possible for people to experience an identity that is separate from the problem; the problem becomes the problem, not the person” White (2007, p.9).

You said you felt a bit scared before going into the ring, when you stepped into the ring with Belle, did fear follow you or were you able to give it the slip?

What does fear get happening in your body? How/where do you notice that?

Is there anything that helps put fear more in the background? What sorts of things would fear prefer you didn't notice? What sorts of ideas help fear, which ones help you?

Is it a little fear, a medium sized fear or a big fear?

When did you first start to notice calmness take over? How did that happen? Was it something that you did or thought about?

Now we are thinking about how you left fear at the gate and stepped into calmness, are there other times or places you are remembering that you have done this?

- **Statement of Position**

What sorts of things might you say or do when anger is around?

Does this have an effect on your connection with other people, or how you see yourself?

Has it ever wrecked anything for you that mattered to you?

What might it be like if anger got the best of you when you were in with Vondalora (the horse)?

Is it okay with you when anger gets you “getting all uptight” and yelling at your parents or would you rather be doing something different?

Why is that ok/not okay?

What is important to you that it wouldn't be okay? What do you want instead? Is that something you'd say is important to you?

Ali noticed that your walk today was calm and purposeful –were you aware of that?

What was the effect of that on Treasure (horse)? What was the effect on you?

Are you feeling pleased about that? Why?

- **Re-authoring**

Re-authoring conversations help people to notice and attribute significance to events and initiatives that stand apart from the dominant, problem story lines that might otherwise be overlooked. These events and experiences can be understood as “unique outcomes”. These unique outcomes provide an entry point to preferred stories by encouraging people to “recruit their lived experience, to stretch their minds, to exercise their imagination, and to employ their meaning making resources” White (2007, p.62).

We noticed Merlin (horse) really relaxed and dropped his head as you ran your hand down his forehead? Can you say a bit about how that happened? You were stroking him, were you doing anything else that helped him relax? What would you call what was happening between you?

What skills did you have to use to let him know he could trust you? What was that like as you felt him relax and start to trust you? You sound pretty pleased about this, does this fit with some hopes you have for how you want to connect with animals?

Are there other times when you have used these skills for staying calm, or relaxing to help someone else in a difficult situation?

Is this something you have known about yourself or something you are just recognising now?

- **Re-membering**

Re-membering conversations evoke a notion of identity that brings forward the contributions of others to our life and our sense of self, and our contributions to the lives and identities of others. Making visible the reciprocal process of shaping of identity stands against an idea of passivity and contributes to sense of agency. These conversations add to a multi-voiced and multi-storied concept of identity that brings forward “positive but non-heroic conclusions about one’s actions in life and about who one is” White (2007, p.138).

Remembering conversations thicken preferred identity stories through rich descriptions of skills of living and knowledges of life as known and developed in these relationships.

You mentioned that your Grandfather knew something about horses, what would it have meant to him if he had seen you here today, helping “Z” across the tarp so calmly? Would he have known something about the skills that took? What would he have called what he saw you do?

Is there anyone else in your life or family that also gives importance to caring for animals like you do? How do you see that in their life?

Who would be least surprised to have witnessed you maintaining your calm in the face of “P” bucking and kicking like that today? How would they have known this about you?

Is there anyone who has inspired you or who knows something about persisting in the face of difficult times? What would it mean to them to know you are putting some of what you learned from them to work here?

- **Pain as Testimony, Distress as a Tribute and Storying Response to Trauma**

From a narrative perspective we are interested in what is called “the absent but implicit”, meaning that is implied but not immediately obvious in people’s responses and initiatives in life. When frustration is evident we are interested in what this indicates might be important to a person, when they are upset by something what this suggests may have been violated that is precious to them. When a person has been subject to trauma and experiences psychological pain or distress, drawing a “natural” or “linear link” between the trauma and the pain can add to a person’s sense of fragility and vulnerability (White, 2002, p.17). This understanding is linked with notions of “not coping” and damage. An alternative understanding of pain and emotional distress that informs narrative practice has us enquiring about what is held precious to that person that has been violated. This includes a person’s purposes, hopes, dreams, and commitments about ways of being in life. Bringing forward these connections contributes to the development of identity stories that are more honouring of a person’s life and opens possibilities for them to respond to the predicaments they face. As these identity stories are developed, day to day emotional distress can be seen as an indication of the ability to hold onto those things that are of value to a person, that have been disrespected in the context of their traumatic experiences. Attending to the meanings of such pain and distress and the specifics of how they are expressed helps to identify and make visible a person’s response to trauma. Exploring these responses to trauma brings forward a second story – one that acknowledges the initiatives, however small, a person took in the face of trauma to somehow ameliorate their or someone else’s pain, protect or prevent.

“This sort of enquiry is one that emphasizes actions taken that reflect people’s exercise of personal agency according to specific intentional states” White (2002, p.18).

While it may not be possible to enter these realms of enquiry with all participants of Horses for Hope, it is these understandings that guide our responses to expressions of psychological pain and distress. When a young person who has had their trust broken by numerous significant adults in their life arrives at the program expressing hostility and suspicion we hold the questions:

What is important to them that has been violated?

How have they continued to hold onto the belief that they deserve trust when they have not been offered trustworthiness?

What might this say about what they are standing for?

How else are they responding and what else are they continuing to hold onto in the face of unfairness/disrespect/abuse?

This perspective may have us asking questions such as:

What might these tears say about what you think is important?

Is there something precious to you that has been stomped on in this situation that has you feeling really angry.

Caleb is a young man came to Horses for Hope some time ago. His story reflects the experiences young people often bring, aspects of the work and the effects engaging with the program can have

both short term and long term. The interview below with Colin Emonson from Horses for Hope brings forward Caleb's story and links it to how the team works.

Jane: Why does Caleb's story come to mind?

Colin: Recently I met Karen in the street and we stopped to say hello. Karen is Caleb's Mother, who when 12 years old was referred to HFH by his school, because he was only able to attend part time and had difficulty coping with that. This was about 8 years ago and we saw Caleb quite a number of times over about a year and a half. Karen wanted to tell me that Caleb was still doing well and thank me for the work that we did with him. She said that she remembered vividly the day when Caleb first worked with a horse and the emotion she felt when as she puts it, "she saw the boy she thought that she had lost".

All previous attempts to engage Caleb in counseling and assistance had failed and he had reached the stage where she was frightened to take him out because he would have angry out bursts against people that he thought might be looking at him, was abusive to her at home and seemed uncontrollable. She was becoming fearful of him and was increasingly desperate to get help for him.

He had been a gentle, kind and respectful boy and this is what had been lost and replaced by these other behaviours. When he worked with the horse she saw that these positive traits that she loved so much and was so proud of, were still there in the way he approached and helped the horse through it's fears of him. This was incredibly significant for her and I remember well her tears that flowed during his first and then other early sessions.

Jane: Colin – do you remember what questions you might have asked Karen to help make this significance visible? How did you enquire about the tears?

Colin: As Karen was beginning to show surprise and emotion as she watch her son in the yard I would have asked her something like;

How would you describe what you are feeling right now?

What is it that you are noticing that seems to be creating those feelings for you?

What might those tears be saying?

You said that these actions are reminding you of the boy you thought that you had lost. What is it that you are being reminded of?

When Caleb came to us he would rarely speak, walked with a stoop because his eyes were always on the ground and had great difficulty with eye contact. I am quite sure that he also thought that he had become this other angry and aggressive person. When he began working with horses both he and his mum began to see him differently and I don't think this should be underestimated in the changes that took place.

Jane: If Caleb could name how he saw himself before the work and how he saw himself after the work, could you guess what words he might have used – or do you have something about this in your notes about how this change was storied?

Colin: Caleb was very sparing with words and I may have got yes and no answers at best. I don't have notes of the questions, but would have been asking questions such as;

What was his opinion of the views that mum was putting forward about that she noticed that the old Caleb was still there with him? Did he think that mum might be right or not?

If he thinks mum is right, did he notice as well?

Or perhaps - in thinking back on what you just did in helping the horse, can you see what mum is saying about how that the old helpful and kind Caleb was still there?

Did you notice it when helping the horse?

Do you think it might have helped you in knowing what to do to be able to help the horse?

Was it just there or did you invite that old way back?

Do you think it might have been hidden for a while now?

What difference might it make to know it's still there?

Might you have any thoughts about how you might be able to help the old Caleb come out more.

Might you be interested in working to bring the old Caleb back?

Who else might not be surprised to know that the kind and safe Caleb is still there?

How does it feel to know that the old Caleb is still there?

Jane: What did these changes mean for Caleb and what he was able to do?

Colin: Caleb returned to school full time and completed high school.

When we met Caleb and Karen, Karen had been having a battle with drug addiction and she was in the later stages of coming off heroin, but was still using marihuana. During the time we knew her and Caleb, she also was able to get herself completely off marihuana and began to study, first doing catch up English and maths, going onto to do her VCE and has recently completed a BA Social

Work, but that's another story.

Jane : Would Karen say its another story or would she say that the work her son did , and her witnessing of it played any part in this direction her life took?

Colin: I have no doubt that seeing the return of the boy she thought that she had lost, began the development of a new story for her as well, it gave them both hope and they both then worked hard at pursuing the new possibilities. It was our's and the horses job to help these discoveries become visible for them and then build and strengthen these into new stories of themselves.

Jane: Could you link how you and the horses made these discoveries visible and then how you built and strengthened the stories with them?

Colin: Each session we explored both the increasing level of Caleb's skills as he progressed through helping different horses and the development of his skills and capacities with situations outside with people. We would have asked questions like;

Have you had any opportunity to use either the old way of doing things or the new skills you are building and developing now?

At the end of each session we asked Caleb to practice these skills, offering words of caution as to not to expect to much of himself to soon. It takes a while for the old ways to come back again and new ones to develop. We would advise to not get too disappointed if he had a go and it didn't work out for him. These most recent habits would be strong and would not be wiling to go away easily, it takes practice to replace them. We caution also to practice in situations where there are not big problems going on, that would be too hard.

There are always was examples to draw on of things being tried in the period between sessions. For Caleb, if he couldn't think of any we would ask Mum if she had noticed him using the skills and she always genuinely had examples.

We would then ask if he thought that Mum was right or not in thinking that he had been using particular skills in certain situations. Caleb quickly moved to approaching taking on some really big potential problems with other kids using his old/new approach. These were major and very significant events for both of them and were strongly noticed by us and at times celebrated.

When he took on something and didn't succeed we would review that event with questions like:

So what happened there?

What did you try?

Did it feel like it might work, or did it seem just too hard?

Do you think that you might have taken on too much for the practice you have had at this stage?

Have you thought about what else you might have tried?

Is there anything perhaps we could practice more when we are in the yard with the horses?

Did you notice anything about yourself when you were having a go at using the new/old skills that you would like to tell us about?

How does it feel to know that you tried, even if it didn't work totally for you, how does that make you feel about yourself?

This idea of you being someone that has a go at doing things like this, does this suit you?

Caleb's behaviour changed dramatically, he began to see his capacity to manage strong emotions, to walk away from trouble and practice bringing back those behaviours that his mum admired and that he was pleased to have. He began to walk more upright and ended up doing a public demonstration of his capacity to work with horses when we were demonstrating the program to the community of Kinglake, in preparation for our work there with survivors of Black Saturday. Both he and his mum were very proud of his achievement that day and she actually prepared and delivered a statement for the crowd about the progress that Caleb had made and the role of HFH in that.

Jane: Could you share some of her words from that statement?

"Prior to going to Horses for Hope I couldn't take my son out in public because he would abuse and be racist to anyone who looked at him. I thought my son was a very nasty person full of hate and anger (because of his past). I wasn't sure what my son was capable of hurting someone or something. I didn't think there was much goodness in my son's heart. The day we went to horses for hope this all changed, my son does better at school, is not as angry or abusive and has learned life skills in confidence being strong he and I also learnt that underneath my son has a very soft heart. The horses love him. He has learnt how to be calm. To reflect on how he actually feels. Going to horses for hope has given my son and myself hope for his future. It is like my son relieves his anger or is healed by the horses. I'm not sure how it works I just know it does.

The purpose of these brief conversations is multiple, including:

- Make visible the skills of the person as they are engaging with the horse, or when they have taken these skills into their life outside the horse ring
- To bring forward knowledge that a person didn't know they have
- To ask questions about the person's observations of themselves and the horses in order to scaffold from what they know to what is possible for them to know
- To draw links between events to facilitate the development of preferred identity stories
- To invite witnesses to reflect on what they have seen happen in the horse ring and outside it to provide richness for these preferred identity stories
- To externalise problem stories - to allow the person to take a position on problematic actions and identity stories
- To provide opportunities for making meaning of unique outcomes that occur in the interaction with the horse or with people
- To draw links to the historical and social context of the positive developments - strengthening positive relationships and
- To make visible and create links around intentions and what is important to a person

The following is Margaret's story of her time with HFH. The authors wrote the story from their recollections and sent it to her for consideration for inclusion in this paper. Her response to agree to have her story included in the paper and to add her own words to the story. Much of what you will read here in this story is Margaret's own words. This is not her real name.

Margaret was in her early 70's when she came to HFH and had enjoyed a long career as a nurse ending up in very senior positions. However she had endured 3 strokes over three years, which had limited her mobility. Plus her capacity to communicate through speech, writing, spelling, had all been affected and her comprehension of what was being said to her. Her memory had not been affected. Margaret knew what she wanted to say, however she could not say the words.

Margaret says that because of the strokes, her personality changed. She said her outgoing, happy personality was replaced by a person full of anger and she became depressed and "a lock in" person. She said that for 12 months she could not/or would not socialize with her friends. Then Margaret said she heard of HFH. She travelled from interstate to experience HFH and had 3 sessions. After returning home she wrote to say that the visit had changed her life.

While her mobility had been affected because of the strokes, Margaret was still ambulant and though we needed to be cautious about what horses she worked with, it was still possible for her to experience and feel how working with the horses could help her feelings of anger, distrust and depression.

Margaret was feeling that the strokes had robbed her of the person she had been, not just physically but also emotionally. She had experience of horses in her early life and had a great love for them and they were very special for her. When she worked with the HFH horses she discovered that the horses could feel her feelings and they horses trusted her. Margaret watched the horses respond to her in the same way that horses did in her early life. She had carried certain beliefs to these horses and she said that were the same values and beliefs that made her a more caring nurse. She said that she believed because of being raised around horses and animals she always had genuine compassion and congruence in how she treated all things including people throughout her life.

At HFH she discovered that the horses wanted to be with her, they didn't see the angry, depressed person. She stated that the way the HFH horses respond to her made her feel that she still had the infinity with animals that had throughout her life. She was surprised and very pleased about that.

She interpreted the HFH horses response to her as discovering that the old self was still there. The strokes had taken some much away from away Margaret, but they hadn't been able to effect that core of who she was.

This was incredibly important for her. Before the strokes, Margaret had been proud of what she had achieved in her career and after her third stroke she believe that she had been damaged so badly. She said that she felt she was not a house any more, but a broken piece of the house. When the HFH horses shared their feelings with her and she shared how she was feeling with the horses, a mutual trust was exchanged. This was evidenced when the Horses invited Margaret to join the mob. From the look on her face and the tears in her eyes, that exchange meant a great deal for her.

After the experience with the horses in the ring, Margaret stated, "the horses found and showed me, I am still in still in there".

Margaret and the HFH team spent quite some time exploring the old self and what it had led her to do and be. This included being the nurse she was so proud of being and the effect that had had on her life.

Margaret had learned life values from family members and family history. From experiencing HFH and through talking about feelings when at HFH (as well as she could), she was overcome, and repeated, that because of the interaction with HFH, she found evidence that the values she had held throughout her life, her old self was still in there.

As Margaret found this evidence, she shared the emotions she felt from the interaction through HFH by saying, "because of illnesses and being treated professionally poorly, I had almost given up, then I heard of HFH and through being able to experience what HFH achieving through horses, HOPE came back into my life, thank you for changing my life."

Trauma can disconnect us from our sense of self and this process assisted Margaret to reconnect with her sense of identity, who she was and continued to be.

It was these discoveries that that led her to state that the experience had changed her life.

The concept of personal agency is at the forefront of the intentions of working narratively. A narrative approach aims to influence a person's ability to make decisions and to impact on their life, and to realize that the world is responsive to them. It works to connect a person to what matters to them and to have their experience acknowledged in particular ways that are not pathologizing. The effect of a person recognising and making meaning of influencing the direction of a 500kg horse by the slight movement of their feet or shoulders or breath is powerful and opens opportunities for strong story development. The development of a sense of agency, of having influence in one's life, lies in the expression and development of preferred stories.

Preferred stories emerge in the conversations prior to entering the horse ring, with the person or witnesses as the person works with the horse, in the conversations that are held following the session in the horse ring, in the retelling at the end of the session and in the photographic and or video images that are captured during sessions. Letters and celebrations add to the ways that these stories become more richly described over time. Witnesses, both human and horse are incorporated into the process of making visible and richly describing preferred identity stories. David Epston's ideas and coaching around question development and importance of ritual and the written word have been a big influence on how stories are thickened. Epston has also inspired and encouraged the use of spontaneous enthusiasm as a response to preferred events and initiative. "We make the case here for the innumerable benefits of spontaneous excitement, a kind informed by particular ethics and brought about by young people's startling contributions in therapy to their lives and to family lifeThe particularities of excitement are considered for how they promote certain ethics of practice and potentially give rise to children's know-how and imagination" (Marsten, Epston, Johnson, 2011)

Neuroscience & neuroplasticity

Learning and connection happens when our adrenalin is not too elevated, the activity is fun, new and creates a strong positive emotion and the preferred experience is richly storied - this creates new neural pathways and allows memory to be both stored and retrieved. This is the context Horses for Hope works to create. Indeed, several large quantitative studies have lent scientific support to the calming effect of AAT (Lange et al., 2006). Reduction in anxiety levels not only facilitates positive outcomes in therapeutic interventions, but can also contribute to children's learning (Faver & Bradley, 2009; Jalongo, 2005; Evans & Gray, 2012). Siegal (2011) explains that "the brain changes physically in response to experience" by activating neural firing which contributes to the development of new connections among neurons, a process called neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is enhanced by a number of factors including focused attention, aerobic exercise, novelty and emotional arousal. The experience and context offered at Horses for Hope includes all these factors.

This context for learning and positive experience stands in direct contrast to the experiences of trauma and distress that have effected many of the people who seek help in the Horses for Hope program. Neuroscience helps explain how stress and trauma can contribute to the release of hormones that interfere with both memory formation and retrieval and the ability to think clearly and creatively. Traumatic experiences are often taken in in bodily emotional ways, rather than in a coherent narrative, so traumatic memories come back as feelings rather than accessible stories. This can create a state of hyper arousal during which thinking straight is not possible. Babette Rothschild describes how establishing the "brakes" in trauma therapy are essential;

"Safe, successful trauma therapy must maintain stress hormone levels low enough to keep the hippocampus functioning.....When,, a client sighs, breathes more slowly. Sobs deeply, or flushes, her parasympathetic nervous system (activated in states of rest and relaxation) has been activated, and her stress hormone levels are reducing. Recognizing these bodily signals is invaluable to the therapist. Likewise, a client who learns to recognize them often gains a greater sense of body awareness and self-control" Rothschild (2004, p.62).

Before a person enters the horse ring with Horses for Hope, they are taken through breathing and posture exercises that assist them to lower their heart rate, to help the horse to feel safe and to assist in building a connection with the horse. As they work with the horses their skills in managing the physiological part of stress and fear improve with practice.

The process of engaging with a horse respectfully, with a quiet strength and focused observation and attention, while at the same time tuning into their own state of mind and emotion requires a person to use and develop skills of mindfulness, empathy and compassion with a sense of purpose. When these experiences and understandings are then richly storied new neural pathways begin to develop. These skills, knowledges and identity stories provide scaffolding so that if and when a person is ready to speak about their experiences of trauma they have the "brakes" that they need to do so safely.

Participants in the Horses for Hope program begin to develop the skill that Siegal (2011) calls "mindsight" (2011, p. xl). This is a kind of focused attention that allows us to be more in touch with what is going on in our own mind.

This skill is not something that we have or do not have, but something that is developed with time, effort and practice. During the process of working with a person, questions such as:

- How are you feeling as you are about to enter the ring?
- What's happening in your body right now? What might that tell the horse about how you are feeling as you step towards them?
- Do you have a guess as to what that might be about?
- What do you think is going on for the horse at the moment?
- What do you think they might be responding to?
- When you walk slowly and tentatively away from the horse, what kind of leadership do you think they see? How is that different from when you walk slowly and purposefully away from them?

The process of inviting the person to tune into and closely observe and respond to both the horses non verbal communication and their own experience, gradually develops this ability to be aware of physical sensations physiology, emotions, and how they are enacted in the body and their significance. This skill helps us to be aware of our mental processes without being swept away by them and is transformational at the physical level of the brain. The development of “mindsight” allows us to reshape and redirect our inner experiences and have the chance to have more influence on both our actions and the story we hold about ourselves (Siegal, 2011, p. xl). As we achieve this, we are better able to balance our emotions and cope differently with stress, as well as to tune into others with empathy and compassion.

These processes foster both the development of skill in focusing and building connections with others. Each of these things contributes to a positive sense of identity and wellbeing. These skills of tuning in to oneself and to others contribute to a person being more able to balance their emotions in difficult situations.

Neuroplasticity, “the capacity for creating new neural connections and growing new neurons in response to experience” Siegal (2011, p.5), gives us hope that the experiences in the horse yard help create new neural pathways that are helpful in other contexts. These relational skills that have not been so accessible to participants have the opportunity to develop through practice.

The Science of happiness tells us that both compassion & sense of purpose/achievement are important components of the pursuit of happiness. Evolutionary psychologist & researcher Nancy Etcoff (TED Talk - Happiness) reminds us that our sense of happiness comes in a large part through our sense of belonging and active interconnections with others, rather than from within ourselves individually. There is a sense of being part of a group of people who share a concern for the wellbeing of horses and other animals. Within Horses for Hope, connecting with the horses and seeing and feeling the difference in the horse makes a difference to the participants sense of being worthwhile and contributes to happiness. This is a process of being reciprocally helpful to one another, rather than being the one way recipient of help.

What this means in Practice

Working at Horses for Hope involves parallel practice with horse and person and much of this is non-verbal. Alongside working with horses and people in interaction, the staff is working with troubled horses that they hope to introduce into the program. This includes

- Collecting horses when they are offered for the program, making decisions about their suitability and managing the transport of a “troubled horse”
- Daily care of horses, feeding, observing and responding to health issues

- Making decisions about which small herd a horse fits best in at what time
- Shepherding of horses through hard and tricky situations
- Picking up their feet, getting ready for the farrier, accepting being brushed, touched, led, caught
- Getting them ready to the stage of being ready to work with people in the program
- Establishing trust and respect
- Collecting and returning horses to their paddock

Work with the horses apart from program participants takes about 10% of the total program time and is one of the costs of the program. As with people, each horse is unique and has different requirements. There are usually around 12 horses in the program - cost of keeping them for 12 months is around \$25,000 per year.

Introducing people to the program

After a general introduction and getting to know each other a little, participants are introduced to the program. This process usually begins with educating about horse communication, setting the context of respect and listening and setting up what a person can expect of their visit. Storytelling about the horse and “horse ways” is one of the methods growing in importance for introducing these ideas. Staff will also use props to demonstrate and play out the herd story of how horses interact with each other. The idea is to make this educational part interactive, interesting & fun so that learning happens more easily. David Epston introduced the team to the idea of using story telling in this way and his support and coaching has been largely responsible for the development of these processes in the program.

If the new participant indicates that they are interested in knowing more and taking the next step, one of the staff will do a demonstration of enabling a horse to make a transition to feeling safe with a person. This both allows a person to get familiar with the process but also has the effect of building trust with the horseperson. Monty Roberts has noted that when people watch a horse lose it’s fears and begin to trust a person, they begin to feel that they too can trust the person that did the introduction. This is an important step in engaging the trust and interest of the participant. When a person is traumatized and has had trouble trusting, and they see a horse in the same state shift to place of trust and safety, the same shift often seems to happen with them.

During the demonstration the worker outside the ring is explaining the process - drawing attention to the horse communication and the body up and body down skills introduced already. They are also attending to the responses of the audience, (parents, carers, teachers etc that may be attending with the young person) inviting them to make meaning of what they are witnessing.

At the end of the demonstration the horseperson brings the horse up to the fence – the person is invited to introduce themselves- at that point workers watch the interaction between horse and person and may even change the horse they will work with depending on how the horse responds to them. The notion of the safe place is introduced at this time, drawing attention to how the horse will look to the person who they have connected with as leader to check. Workers will communicate their thinking about what horse - person teamwork involves and makes possible.

If the participant is keen to continue they will be fitted with a helmet and vest. After the demonstration, one of the workers will take the participant through a number of skills, using small steps, demonstration and practice.

Using incremental learning methods, the same as we apply for horses, first they learn to hold and use the rope - swapping hands - holding the loops of the rope in one hand and the buckle in the other. Like learning to ride a bike, this skill is practiced over and over till you can do it without thinking - first standing still then while walking, then using slapping the rope across the body for putting extra pressure on the horse when needed.

Three gears of pressure are taught - learning to take your body up to different levels of pressure without aggression - opening up and lifting your chest to the sky and being able to take that down to no pressure - really relaxed position - this runs counter to what our body does usually. Sticking with it until they have this sense is important for skill development.

Someone from “the crowd” (a parent/carer/worker who might have brought the person) “being” the horse helps to practice positioning, another step in skill development and practice - roleplaying before entering the ring. Workers will teach that even small distances can make a big difference - where you stand - staying behind the shoulder of the horse, not being drawn into the horse- not getting closer - have to stay in the middle of the ring. They will teach the person how to position the body - square shoulders to the horse’s shoulders and your eyes on the horse’s eyes.

Once these skills are feeling more comfortable, taking the rope in their hands as taught, the participant will enter the ring with a worker at their shoulder. The worker will stay right behind them, holding the back of their vest so that the two people are like one to the horse.

The team will be focusing on aspects of people’s ways of holding their bodies - noticing – and assisting the person to modify, the position of their arms, moving ankles, soft posture, fluid or stiff motion....”chicken wings” (elbows).

The worker skills in the ring include verbally commenting on, keeping the person informed of and teaching the skills previously spoken about. They draw attention to particular descriptions of the body language of the person and the horse without interpretation followed by enquiry about meaning or significance. This is done with questions like;

- Can you see that inside ear? Where is it pointing? What does that mean?
- Did you see that? What happened then?
- When you walked away you held your body quite up - walking a bit like a soldier - then when you dropped you had so far to go ..
- Had you noticed that?
- What was that about?
- How did that feel to have a horse respond like that?
- That’s a 600 kg horse and it just moved in response to your feet moving.... What’s that like?
- “Belle” (horse) took her time in coming into you, how did you keep your body soft and relaxed as you waited? Was there any frustration you had to manage or were you focused on something else?

The worker needs to be reading the horse’s behaviour - when to put pressure on and when to take pressure off and ensuring that the person is also noticing and working with this information. Knowing when a horse gets into lunging mode is important, in this mode they will just go round

and round, rather than responding. The person needs to speed them up and slow down or turn them - get them listening again - there is a difference between lunging and communication that the worker has a responsibility to be aware of. Determining when a horse is communicating and how they communicate - reading the horse and listening to each small communication is part of the workers job, both to be aware of and to teach the person. It is the horseperson's role to assist the person to find what they need.

This is a supported learning and experience - as much or as little input as the person needs. The worker assisting the participant in the yard will back the person up - they will protect or provide a sense of safety for the participant if necessary by positioning beside or behind the person and project more strength and then gradually back off as the person steps into their own strength more.

The challenge of getting the horse to come to someone when connection and leadership is achieved requires an understanding of timing, and what is happening for the horse and the person. This stage might require some subtle "help" for the horse; so coaching the person about how this might be achieved might be needed. The person may need to tune into their body, is their frustration raising their heart rate or perhaps they are feeling nervous about the horse approaching them? The worker helps by inviting them to notice what is happening in their emotions and body and to consider how they can respond to help the horse feel safe.

There are numerous activities that can happen in the horse work, most occur in the round ring and some will happen outside the ring. The exercise establishing leadership and connection is the usual process to start with, moving onto having the horse move backwards and forwards in response to body up and body down for the person. Walking with energy and changing energy begins to develop skills further and having the horse stop respectfully behind and lead at a respectful distance further demonstrates skills that have been achieved.

The idea is to have increasingly challenging horses and horses that present different kinds of challenges so that the challenges provide opportunities for the person to develop different skills or to increase the level of the skill. If the horse is challenging in a particular way this is discussed with the person - perhaps the horse has trouble coming in, or trouble giving respect. The challenges that the horse faces may mirror some of the challenges the person faces in their relationships with themselves, others or the world. The hope is that people are incrementally challenged so that each experience gives a sense of achievement and movement.

The participant can progress to helping the horse through hard and tricky situations including leading across a tarp, or if they are relatively unhandled, picking up their feet and brushing. Long reining is a higher-level skill, the starting point, not using the reins at all and then introduces reins that steps up to a different level of complexity.

In situations where a person is ready to move to a very advanced level and has the skills required the team might introduce floating. This is more dangerous and success is important for both the horse and person. Any activity that happens in confined spaces adds a level of danger and this requires added ability both in horse sense and in calmness.

This process of working with people and horses in this way requires knowing about horses in general and each horse in particular, and "not knowing" about the person. It can be a balancing act to maintain this position of knowing and not knowing. A position of "not knowing" about the person requires the ability to ask questions, rather than making assumptions.

The key question before going into the yard is “What are you feeling?” or “What is happening in your body?” - These questions may need to be scaffolded in order to get a particular understanding. The notion that the horse will know is introduced here - with the information that horses respond to our heart rate, which is influenced by our feelings. The horse person might ask questions such as “a little bit worried or a big bit worried?” “Just a bit excited or really excited?” When naming feelings is hard, the worker might go to bodily sensations - “How is your heart - is it beating fast or slow?”. This is part of teaching self-awareness - what do you look for in your body that will help you identify feelings. They then might ask, how do you imagine the horse might respond when it realizes what is going on inside you?”

During the session when something changes - “what did you do?”

When connection is achieved or the participant has shepherded the horse through a hard or tricky situation, they bring the horse to the fence and introduce the horse to the audience person or persons. This is a time when the horse will turn to the participant to check if the audience is safe, confirming their leadership. This is an opportunity for the participant to be cast in the role of the helper for the audience who may be carers, parents or others. It is also a time for audience members to practice the skill of projecting quiet, calm trustworthiness.

After the session there may be a time for “the crowd goes wild” this is a time of acknowledgment and applause. This is the time for the kind of “spontaneous excitement” referred to earlier. This might mean greeting with handshakes - or high five with kids - it is a time for acknowledgement of what happened, of the achievement. Often, a carer who has witnessed the assisted join-up will have been moved to tears as they watched the person engage with the horse. It can be a powerful experience to see the emotional connection created between the horse and the person, and to witness actions and emotions that stand so far apart from the problems the person struggles with.

After the first and each horse session the team goes back to the office - or not, sometimes the conversation will take place by the ring or even in the ring with the horse if that seems useful. The conversation will usually involve the participant, the HFH team, team member inside and outside the ring during the work with the horses and participant, (horseperson, the worker outside the ring), the audience (which may include carers, siblings, a teacher or others) and a volunteer who has been taking photographs. This group varies depending on what is most comfortable or seems most useful for the person. One worker makes notes of the conversation so we remember for next time and to facilitate a “re-telling” that can be added to or modified on being read back both at the end of this session and the beginning of the next. The participant’s and audience’s words are “rescued” through this process. The idea of noticing is introduced here - what the workers noticed, what other people might have noticed, what the participant noticed. Having a team of witnesses helps to create a rich picture and story of the experience of the horse yard and to begin to make meaning of this. These observations and reflections are not applause and not comparative, they are acknowledging and can reflect curiosity. Someone might ask something like “Do you mind if I ask you questions about this? - You’ve got me really interested - there are some things we can learn from for other people”. The team takes care not to get too therapeutically inquisitive - especially

with young people who have been objecting to therapeutic interactions. There may be space for these conversations later if invited.

All sessions following first one begin by reviewing the notes and reading them out loud. During a second or further session the workers will also begin to ask questions that make visible links between horse yard skills and life or people skills. Some of the following questions might draw this forward.

“Have you noticed yourself using any of these horse yard skills or was there an event where you thought they might have been around?”

“Who would be least surprised to hear this?”

“What would the horse say/think about what you are describing?”

“If they could talk, what might they say this tells them about you as a person?”

“What sort of things might you like to focus on this/next time? Try out this/ next time? “

When referred to HFH, Justin was 11 and in permanent foster placement with the one family since a few months age. He has been diagnosed with an intellectual disability and ADHD and is considered to have suffered significant trauma as a baby with resultant attachment issues. Justin is very active and has problems with impulse control and concentration. Anger management was becoming more of a problem as he got older and bigger. He was unable to attend “normal” school and was attending school for kids with learning and behavioural issues.

He engaged very strongly with HFH and loved being able to “help” horses. To do so Justin had to work hard on controlling excitement and other strong feelings that might arise when he was close to horses and on concentration. If he got excited in the horse yard, excitement could lead to quick movement and the horses being concerned about him rather than feeling safe with him. Allowing his mind to wander to other things was not safe as you need to be watching and listening to the horse all the time. This is important so you can respond to what the horse is feeling and help it feel safe if it starts to feel worried. To do this you have to know how to be calm so you can help the horse feel calm.

Staying calm and focused was hard work for Justin because these were the things that he thought he wasn't good at. He did know how to do them and with our reminding and encouraging he was able to use his skills at focusing and staying calm and he could see how this helped the horses.

This experience provides an opportunity to scaffold for Justin and make links with how this also applies in his life and relationships with others. We did this with questions such as

“Have you noticed yourself using these horse yard skills elsewhere”?

“Have you noticed any particular situations where you remember using these skills”?

“Might you be interested in having a go at using the skills else where”?

“Could you think of a situation recently where these skills might have come in handy, perhaps might have helped you stay out of trouble”?

Justin spoke of how he didn't like of the way some of these things gave him trouble and he enthusiastically took on the idea of seeing if he could develop and use these skills. His mum (permanent care mum) was recruited to help him by reminding him of the skills if any of the old habits or problems started to over take him and they agreed to practice the skills at home, without

horses. They reported enthusiastic ongoing practicing at home which was good, because the more you practice the better you are with helping horses, and you don't need a horse to practice these horse helping skills. The other thing that happened that was very pleasing to Justin and his mum, was that they came up with a method to help him unlock himself from the grip of a problem that was rising and taking hold of him. This was the thing that was really hard for him. Once it started to take hold of him, he had trouble shaking it off.

Their plan was that if a problem started to take hold, mum would say the name of the favourite horse that he had helped. This horse needed lots of calm breathing. When they tried it they were both surprised, Justin was able to free himself from the frustration of anger that was taking hold of him because he would immediately go into the calm breathing that he had used for that horse and had been practicing. He discovered that this was enough to put the problem back in its place. They were both very pleased about this.

Justin had become the manager of strong feelings for himself, instead of some one that was controlled by strong feeling. Justin went on to be interviewed by a national TV show about how he can do this. During this interview, he and the reporter swapped roles for a while and he interviewed the reporter like an old pro. He was taking charge of a situation in another way. He had grown up a bit by then, he had turned 12.

Periodically, and at the end of the person's participation in the program, a CD of all of the photos taken during sessions is presented to them. A certificate recognising specific skills they have brought and developed accompanies this, it draws out the key points. A nice photo that is blown up to A4 size and exudes some meaning of the connection with the horse or outcome of the work is also presented. This is usually one with a smile on the person and a relaxed horse. This is another way of documenting and making the developing preferred story visible and tangible.

For this program to succeed, staff are required to have both highly developed horsepersonship skills and therapeutic skills, although while working in a team, the actual "counselling" conversation is more led by the counsellor in the team. The other staff member is a key player as both a witness and by making and reading back a written record of the conversation. Another key role for staff is to support, monitor and manage input from volunteers.

Core skills needed by staff include:

- Willingness to give everybody a chance - people and horses .
- Sensitivity, an ability to breathe before telling the other person to breathe
- Ability to do what they are asking the person to do - both horse wise and reflection wise.
- Having a comfortable presence and being relaxed and approachable.
- Honesty, respect and a willingness to listen, discuss and figure things out together with others.
- Narrative therapy skills or awareness/commitment to these.
- Attitude - around the beliefs & having a work ethic & flexibility and commitment to what we do....might start at 8 one day, finish at 6 another and go home to nap another.
- Tolerance and willingness to work together and to listen and figure out it together.
- Able to work in unknown territory.
- Someone who doesn't bring home to work - don't take it out on other people.
- Self-awareness - ability to be present for the person and the horse and know when you can't.

- Substantial level of horsemanship skills that can be built on quickly - have knowledge and be open to learning - be prepared to give away another approach that conflicts.
- Commitment to and understanding of the principles that inform the work.
- Ability to reflect what has been witnessed in a way that is non-judging and acknowledging.
- Ability to capture people's words and tell these back in a coherent story.
- Ability to ask questions that invite people to tune into themselves or the horse in a non-judging way.
-

Workplace Health and Safety

Health and Safety is another important aspect to the workers role in Horses for Hope. These are practices to keep horses and people safe and include assessing the horses and their capacity to be useful and safe in the program. Making this assessment includes the following knowledge and practices:

- The horse needs to be able to respond
- Staff have to deal with how the horse presents and look beyond
- Fearful, scared and sensitive horses often make the best
- Notice what happens when you put your eyes on a horse
- Feel for it, is it going to be right?
- Make sure they are sound - structurally sound, not in any pain or discomfort
- Looking for "trying" in the horse - something more they can bring
- The horse coming with a story is important

Another aspect to safety is where, when, how and who the horses are handled by. Keeping the round yard outdoors if possible can make it easier on the horses - taking them out of the herd situation can be tricky for them to begin with, working outdoors can contribute to safety. If there is a roof over the round yard it is best to have open sides. Horses are led to and from the yard by staff or volunteers and are kept in a safe yard close to the work area until needed.

The preparatory steps taken before someone goes into the ring, learning about horses, rope handling, and putting on the safety equipment, helmet, covered shoes and protective vest all contribute to keeping people safe. There is a covered area for witnesses and sunscreen available when needed.

Volunteers

Volunteers are an important part of the Horses for Hope program team and help to make the work possible. The program usually has 2 volunteers who share a commitment to the principles and ethos of Horses for Hope. Their roles vary enormously from direct care of horses and their preparation for the day's work, to capturing the experiences of the participant in photo and video, to participating in team reflections.

Volunteering is a reciprocally rewarding experience; they both contribute to and gain from the experience with Horses for Hope. Introduction into various parts of the program is gradual and considered. There is thinking and reflection about the level of involvement and blending the volunteers with various aspects of the program at the level of their skill. There are rules around their involvement and these are negotiated carefully.

Conclusion

Horses for Hope is a program that works with horses and people to provide experiences that are mutually rewarding. It is a form of equine assisted therapy that draws on the theoretical perspectives of natural horsemanship, narrative therapy and neuroscience. The principles of reciprocity, curiosity, collaborative enquiry and respect are central to and underpinning all practices. The program provides a way of engaging people who may have been reluctant to participate in traditional counselling situations and opens possibilities for them to move forward through skill and story development.

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