



# THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITIES WITH HORSES

GROUP PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOLS

# Testimonial

*"We have found Equine Therapy to be groundbreaking for some of our pupils; they have developed social skills with their peers, concentration skills and confidence whilst building and developing new skills; the setting has enhanced their cultural capital- being in a field with animals is a new world for many of our pupils. Jenny and the team are experts in their field and the positive impact we are seeing with our pupils is amazing- all of our pupils have shown an improved well-being score as a product of this intervention programme, and all have also shown increases in attendance. For some of our pupils, regulating behaviour has been a challenge in the past; but the learning and the mindfulness approach of this therapy have seen significant improvements in their behaviour, which have been sustained. For others, they have historic trauma, some have special educational needs around communication, interaction and attention; learning in this environment has been a very special experience, but also one which has resulted in significant improvements in their well-being and learning behaviours."*

Deputy Headteacher  
 Selly Park Girls' School

## Overview

The Centre for Emotional Growth and Resilience (CEGR) has developed an Equine Assisted Therapeutic Group programme tailored for schools. Our programme provides a range of therapeutic activities with horses that support well-being, emotional development, and social relationships.

The programme is delivered from 'Hillside,' our beautiful, dedicated outdoor facility in the heart of the Clent Hills in Worcestershire.

Dr Jenny Uppal is the founder of CEGR and Head of Service. She is an experienced and fully registered Educational Psychologist with 30 years' experience of working with complex CYP and their parents and carers. Dr Uppal brings a wealth of experience using everyday life experiences and activities to work therapeutically with CYP who are difficult to engage. She is qualified to use horses in all aspects of her therapeutic work.

The 5 areas that make up wellbeing, as identified within NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing<sup>1</sup> are:

- Connecting with others
- Physical activity
- Learning new skills
- Giving to others
- Being mindful i.e. paying more attention to the present moment, including your thoughts, feelings, your body and the world around you

These 5 areas are woven naturally into every activity within the programme.

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<sup>1</sup> [5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

In addition, the programme offers specific therapeutic opportunities which have been proven to support:

- Self-awareness
- Emotional regulation
- Relationship building
- Self-efficacy
- Confidence
- Empathy

For more detail regarding specific activities and the therapeutic purpose of each activity, see Appendix 1.

The programme develops positive emotional and social outcomes through:

- Practical activities that provide therapeutic experiences.
- Positive staff relationships that actively facilitate emotional development.
- A beautiful safe outdoor environment that can offer a naturally therapeutic space i.e. calm, empathetic, contained, and consistent, all prerequisites for emotional growth.
- Access to a herd of therapeutic horses, animals, and appropriate, DBS checked, staff to enable CYP to experience hands on therapeutic animal contact.
- Opportunities for young people to practice establishing collaborative/working relationships outside their day-to-day environments.
- Group work that focuses on the primary emotional needs of the CYP eg self-awareness, social skills, confidence, and emotional regulation to support resilience and self-esteem.

Programmes are risk assessed in conjunction with the school and a baseline assessment is conducted for each participant of current emotional and behavioral functioning using a Likart scale format.

## Programme Delivery

This programme is delivered over 8 weeks, with an additional taster session prior to the start. Each week sessions are planned and delivered at Hillside and are reflectively tailored around the CYP's needs, experiences and feedback, ensuring CYP feel listened to and empowered to shape their experiences with us.

All the activities, with appropriate facilitation, lend themselves to developing self-awareness, which is the basis for emotional regulation, impulse control, communication and relationship building. CYP are encouraged to set their own personal targets and where appropriate certificates, records of achievement and digital records are used to support the sense of achievement and progression.

Relating to others is the central theme of the programme. CYP naturally gain insights into their own social and emotional behaviour through relationship building with the animals. Experiencing the power of relating to the animals with sensitivity, empathy and respect provides a concrete opportunity to reflect on complex relationships in life. Direct and non-judgmental feedback from the animals naturally enables CYP to

develop self-awareness about their own barriers and strengths in connecting with others. This opens the way to change. Relationships with staff are characterised by clear boundaries, communication and expectations, reliability, collaboration, responsibility taking, empathy and non-judgement.

A review occurs during session 7 of the programme, where achievements are shared, and the complex emotions triggered by the ending of the programme are acknowledged.

Week 8 is a celebration of the CYP achievements on the programme. CYP are encouraged to leave something at Hillside that they have made, contributed, or created, and reflect on what they take with them from the programme.

## Price

A 90-minute taster session is available for 5 prospective individuals which costs £350. This allows the participants to make an informed decision about whether they want to attend the programme.

The price for the programme is £4680, which includes 8 sessions for groups of up to 5 individuals. Each group session last 2.5 hours. The price includes CEGR facilitators on a 2:5 ratio and refreshments. Additional staffing may be required according to risk assessment.

# About Us

CEGR is a community interest company established in 2019. A Community Interest Company (CIC) is a limited company, with special additional features, created for the use of people who want to conduct a business or other activity for community benefit, and not purely for private advantage.

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# Appendix 1

## Therapeutic Purpose of Activity Table

Activity	Therapeutic purpose
<b>5 senses</b>	Body based awareness as a basis for self-awareness and emotional regulation. Connection to self and environment
<b>Observing horses</b>	Considering different characters, moods and factors that impact on behaviour Relationship building Perspective taking Observation skills related to behaviour and communication Self-awareness Signs of anxiety in ponies
<b>Connecting and greeting ponies</b>	Relationship building Observing responses in others Interpreting behaviour of others and perspective taking Emotional self awareness Prosocial emotional regulation Respectful relationships Personal space and impact of behaviour on others Signs of anxiety in self and others Responding to stress in ponies and self Confidence
<b>Grooming ponies</b>	Self-awareness and regulation Soothing and reassuring the ponies by modifying own energy and behaviour Respectful boundaries and relationships Positive communication Self care Confidence
<b>Using headcollars with each other and with the ponies</b>	The importance of establishing trust and effective communication within relationships Subtle communication through physical pressure ie 'asking' verses 'demanding' Recognising signs of anxiety in self and others Exploring ways of responding effectively to stress in ponies and self Self-efficacy and confidence
<b>Matching steps with the ponies</b>	Creating cooperative rather than coercive partnerships Being present and in the moment ie mindfulness Creating connection with the ponies Self-regulation
<b>Leading ponies around obstacles</b>	Developing partnership All of the above
<b>Walk around the whole site</b>	Developing authenticity Enjoyment of outdoors Fun
<b>Using energy to move the ponies around the arena</b>	Self efficacy and agency Being able to impact on the ponies by changing their own energy. Sense of authentic fun through free physical movement
<b>Symbolic use of obstacles to reflect on dreams and challenges with chosen pony companion</b>	Self reflection Focus on future aspirations and challenges Using emotional resources to overcome challenges
<b>Painting of symbols on horses using health enhancing coloured clay.</b>	Use of symbols to convey emotions that are difficult to express verbally Use of symbol as a link to unconscious feelings. Self care Honoring ponies Celebrating experience and time with the ponies.

# Appendix 2

## *Explanation of Equine Assisted Therapeutic Interventions*

Horses have a unique ability to read and respond to non-verbal communication. As prey animals, they innately sense subtle changes in their environment to ensure their survival, and so horses will mirror people's emotions in a non-judgemental manner. This can provide a compelling opportunity for reflection and insight into emotional states and the impacts these may have on the self and others.

As herd animals, horses demonstrate the importance of clear boundaries and consensual leadership, as these qualities are crucial to their survival and wellbeing. In addition, working with powerful animals that weigh over half a ton can help people to attain a sense of achievement and build self-confidence, while learning to be respectful, heighten spatial and body awareness and control their energy levels.

As a physical therapy, equine assisted therapy has an increased capacity to enable learning, emotional healing and sensory re-integration by naturally connecting emotional and physical experiences. Horse responses to humans enable powerful neurofeedback opportunities to promote self-awareness.

The experiential nature of the therapy means that individuals learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses rather than simply talking about them.

# Appendix 3

## *Evidence Supporting the Efficacy of Equine Assisted Therapy*

Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) arose during the 1970's as an alternative to traditional talking therapies and it is increasingly being used to promote emotional growth and learning. The interest in this alternative intervention is evidenced in numerous reviews of its positive outcomes, many of which can be found via the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)<sup>2</sup>

- Equine-assisted therapeutic interventions are often treated as a 'last resort' when no other interventions were proved to be helpful. The CYP [Children and Young People], who are referred to in our services have often experienced adversity in early life, present with a high level of social and emotional difficulties and find it difficult to trust adults.
- As the horses started to become characters within CYP's stories, I was able to develop insights into their lives at home and school; into their relationships, and the helpful and unhelpful coping mechanisms which they have developed to manage their daily lives. From the feedback of the behaviour of the horses, I witnessed CYP developing their own solutions and changing the ways they behaved, so that they could bring out different reactions from the horses. I noticed that this instant feedback from the horses was very powerful and often hypothesised that it laid the foundation for the development of an internal locus of control and sense of self agency.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.evidence.nhs.uk/search?q=equine+assisted+therapy>

<sup>3</sup> DECP Debate Edition 175 August 2020, Aysun La Fontaine, Equine-assisted therapeutic interventions: Promoting self-awareness and emotion regulation

- An Equine Guided Learning programme funded by the Greater Manchester Mental Health Foundation Trust in 2019 aimed “to deliver increased self-awareness; increased confidence and self-esteem; increased observational skills and sensory awareness; increased self-belief and emotional resilience and the experience of peer support.
- During the programme, staff observed moments of joy, moments when it “just clicked” and moments of carefree teenagers having fun together. The young people stated: ‘I was surprised that I could connect with the horses so quickly and take control’; it made me think if I can take control here of the horse, what else can I take control of’.<sup>4</sup>
- A study by South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust and the University of Huddersfield found that Equine Assisted Therapy “...enhances positive behaviours, reduces negative behaviours and has helped people with mental health problems... can be as effective as other therapies currently in use and could be an alternative to talking and existing experimental and creative therapies.”<sup>5</sup>
- ‘Positive effects were observed on various aspects of social competence, including improvements in children’s self-awareness, self-management, personal responsibility, decision making, goal directed behaviour, and relationship skills.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> OTnews June 2019

<sup>5</sup> CANTIN Anna, MARSHALL-LUCETTE Sylvie. Examining the literature on the efficacy of Equine Assisted Therapy for people with mental health and behavioural disorders. *Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 8(1), Autumn 2011, pp.51-61. South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust and University of Huddersfield

<sup>6</sup> Pendry and Roeter, S Experimental Trial Demonstrates Positive Effects of Equine Facilitated Learning on Child Social Competence; *Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin* 2013, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1-19