

Equine Partners CIC – Horses and Humans Journeying Together

By Fran Hibberd

After completing a pilot project just over a year ago, Equine Partners CIC registered as a not for profit Community Interest Company and have just celebrated our first birthday on 19th January 2013. We started providing Equine Assisted Learning sessions to families and young people focussing on relationships, working with families and young people in a wide range of situations.

In situations where there is a risk of the young person coming into care, an adoption breaking down, a youngster who is struggling at school, a young carer or where life simply causes puzzles that the client is finding difficult to solve, we offer a series of activities with horses to assist and overcome individual issues. These activities combined with an opportunity to reflect and learn are a powerful mechanism for change. The approach uses metaphor to allow the client to take a fresh look at their daily lives. They are proving particularly beneficial for those who are difficult to engage or find sitting still for a one to one conversation challenging.



In April 2012 we started the second element of the project, which is Pony Share. This enables teenagers who will benefit from ongoing relationship with a horse to have that contact even if they cannot afford the more traditional methods of lessons or owning a pony. We teach how to relate to the pony, to care for it and to ride. We use a natural horsemanship approach, which works in sympathetic partnership with the horse, rather than the traditional, military influenced approach.



Another element of the project is pony rehabilitation and in October 2012 we took on our first rescue pony. She is a little New Forest mare who had been abandoned. She will work with some of the Teenagers and together, with their own stories and difficult histories will work to restore each other to their full potential.

Jo Marshall and I facilitate the sessions and in June 2012 we were able to attend the NLP Diploma course in Stirling with Monkey Puzzle. The knowledge that we gained has benefitted our personal lives, the planning and development of the project and the lives of the clients we work with. The knowledge that we gained has impacted all aspects of our daily lives, personally we are much surer of our own values and have gained insight into ourselves and others. In the development of the project we now have a clear set of outcomes that we are working towards. Jo and I understand more about each other's preferences and values and so are far more effective as a team.

Incorporating some of the exercises in the sessions, together with our understanding of use of language and the way we process data, has greatly enhanced the work we do. We are able to identify if the client is in cause or effect and by listening for individuals predicates it informs us the best way to set up the sessions. The impact on our clients has been a delight to see. The skills we gained have often brought shifts in a relationship that would otherwise remain elusive.

Every day is a learning opportunity and we are able to feed into the young people a lot of the skills and self-awareness we have learnt, including the NLP methods. In particular the circle of excellence has helped a number of students return to school or college with new confidence and so be able to experience success in their education and so improve their life chances. Our organisation has a significant impact on the young people and I can do no better than to share the status one of our pony sharers spontaneously put on her face book page recently:

'Yes, Charlie may not be mine fully. But I love him... he is my best friend as well as my wonderful pet... He cheers me up when I see him and makes me laugh with his cheekiness... I couldn't ask for anything more than my pony. We've had our ups and downs but at the end of the day he has made me stronger, emotional and physical... We have learnt to trust each other, when riding bare back in just a halter to having the podiatrist do his feet, to me crying when I'm riding to just wanting cuddles... I wish to have this with every pony I meet and have. So my dream to become a parelli instructor and rehabilitate horses will come true even with the amount of bumps in the road... Thank you Charlie for showing my true colours and what I wanna do in life ♥'

As we move forward we are getting closer to our goals. Our next step is to return to Monkey Puzzle this spring to complete our Practioner training. We are both very excited knowing that NLP has had a huge impact on our lives and work so far and looking forward to all we will learn from the wonderful John and Karen and they share more knowledge with us.



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