

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

THERAPY IS **MORE** THAN TALK: EXPLORING EQUINE-ASSISTED
PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH TRAUMA
BY

STEPHANIE LOCKHART

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF COUNSELLING

GRADUATE CENTRE FOR APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

JUNE 2024

© STEPHANIE LOCKHART 2024



Approval of Thesis

The undersigned certify that they have read the thesis entitled

THERAPY IS MORE THAN TALK: EXPLORING EQUINE-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH TRAUMA

Submitted by

Stephanie Lockhart

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling

The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis and the oral examination is approved

Supervisor:

Dr. Paul Jerry
Athabasca University

Committee Member:

Dr. Murray Anderson

External Examiner:

Dr. Darlene Chalmers
University of Regina

June 6, 2024

Acknowledgement

This journey began years back at a mental health trade fair, where my path crossed with art therapist Cyndi Gray Williams. Cyndi, you were the one who genuinely motivated me in this profession and my academic pursuits.

I extend my utmost gratitude to my graduate supervisor, Dr. Murray Anderson. At the beginning of my graduate studies, Dr. Anderson promptly inquired, "Why would you not choose to pursue your thesis?" Throughout this journey, you have consistently provided invaluable guidance and support, motivating me to complete the task.

I appreciate Dr. Paul Jerry's vital assistance during the final stages of my thesis research. His support was crucial in ensuring the successful completion of my work. I am fortunate to have had him as a part of this research project.

Additional gratitude is extended to Athabasca University for its financial support, which enabled the successful fulfillment of this research endeavour.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my closest friends and family for your unwavering support throughout this entire process. Although it has been a tumultuous journey, I appreciate your constant encouragement. Tolerating my chaotic progress in this project has been a challenging accomplishment. For that alone, I am forever grateful that each of you has been involved in my journey in some capacity. To my children, Brigette and Logan, as well as my partner Darryl - I can't say thank you enough - my promise to you is that I take a break from school and research for a while ;-)<3.

Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the therapeutic benefits of equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) as an intervention for children under the age of 10 who have experienced recent trauma from the voices of adults who work with this population. The specified traumas that children may encounter are kept vague for this research study so as to protect the anonymity of an already vulnerable population. The aim was to understand how EAP might serve as a valuable modality for healing and provide support to this specific population. A qualitative research methodology employed in this study utilizing data obtained through narrative interviews that focused on participants' experiences of engagement in EAP sessions. The study involved individuals taking part in four EAP sessions, after which data was collected using individual narrative interviews and focus groups. The study sample consisted of four adult professionals in occupations related to caring for and educating children aged ten and younger. The participants kept from disclosing whether the children they were interacting with had experienced traumatic events. The insights gained from the interpretations of the participants' experiences offered valuable understanding regarding the potential of programs, such as EAP, in providing benefits to children who have recently undergone traumatic experiences. The thesis findings represent the perspectives of professionals engaged in fields closely associated with the study and care of children such as education, justice, social services, and early childcare. This research aimed to expand psychotherapy options, specifically in Saskatchewan, Canada, enhancing mental health resources for trauma-affected children.

Keywords: equine-assisted psychotherapy, trauma, children

Table of Contents

Approval Page.....	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table Of Contents.....	v
List Of Figures	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Justification of Research.....	3
Research Question.	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	7
Introduction.....	8
Equine Assisted Psychotherapy	9
Why Horses? Why Not Dogs?	11
What Is Trauma?	14
Traumatic Events and How They Are Typically Experienced.	15
When Trauma Is Unresolved	16
Childhood Trauma	17
Connecting EAP And Children with Trauma	20
Where Does the Rest of The Equine Helping World Fit?	21
Where Does Further Research Need to Go?	22
Conclusion	23
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework.....	24
Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism	24
Theories Guiding My Research	25
Gestalt Theory.....	26
Reality Theory	28
Emotional-Focused Theory (EFT)	29
Chapter 4: Methodology	31
Narrative Research.....	31
Narrative Interview	32
Narrative Exchange.....	32
Rationale For Narrative Interview as a Method	34
Research Design.	35
Participants.....	36
Sampling and Participant Recruitment	36
Ethical Considerations	38
Reliability And Validity.....	40
Transferability.....	41
Results.....	42
Data Collection Strategy	42
Data Analysis	45
Session Overview.....	46
Assumptions.....	50
Positionality And Reflection on Self	50
Researchers Position	52
Limitations	55

Chapter 5: Discussion	56
Findings.....	56
Participants.....	61
TallymansRoyalCat.....	61
FlyinMissSis	61
QuincysPeppyJag.....	62
AllAboutRed.....	62
Timeline	63
Horses Used in Research.	63
Red	64
Lady	64
Honey.....	65
Jackson.....	65
A Newfound Sense of Attachment, Relationships, And Connections.....	66
Attachment.....	66
Relationships.....	70
Connections.....	72
An Increased Sense of Confidence	75
Increased Sense of Safety	82
Communicating In Silence.....	85
Let's Adapt and Let's Learn!	90
The Umbrella of Emotional Regulation.	94
Implications.....	98
Limitations	99
Conclusion	100
References.....	104
Appendix A: Liability Waiver	124
Appendix B: Media Release	126
Appendix C: Farm Rules/Dress Code.....	127
Appendix D: Certification Of Ethical Approval	129
Appendix E: Referrals For Local Mental Health Services	130
Appendix F: Equine Behavioural Assessment	131
Appendix G: Session Layout	134
Appendix H: Narrative Interview Questions	140
Appendix I: Word Wall	141
Appendix J: Completed Equine Behavioural Assessment	142
Appendix K: Definition Of Terms.....	144

List of Figures

Figure 1 Impact of Childhood Trauma.....19

Figure 2 Key themes identified from the perspective of research participants50

Figure 3 Pony Curriculum vs EAL Curriculum54

Figure 4 Participant Narrative Voice58

Chapter 1: Introduction

“EAP is an effective trauma-focused approach that positively influences the development and resilience of children” - Barnstable, 2022.

In the past, horses used to charge across the battlefields; they used to pull plows and haul coal from the depths of the earth. The horse's history is crucial to civilization as it was the fastest means of transportation before the steam locomotive, defining human development through transportation (Tallis, 2012). Throughout the second phase of American industrialization, the horse, also known as an iron horse, spinning machine, or horsepower, was regarded as a living machine (Greene, 2008). Today, the role of horses has changed with modern technology. The horse no longer fights in battles, and they rarely pull a plow or haul coal up from the mines. Often being portrayed in the media (e.g., Seabiscuit, Hidalgo, Spirit,), the horse was frequently depicted as a large, strong, brave, and safe animal that brought forth powerful and positive imagery (White-Lewis, 2019). Narratives such as Black Beauty portrayed the horse as a sentient being, rather than a mere machine (Greene, 2008).

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a therapeutic approach that relies on the human-animal bond for effectiveness (Rodrigo-Claverol et al., 2023). The client-animal bond can improve physical, psychological, and social states (Rodrigo-Claverol et al., 2023). Therapy animals provide unconditional love, fostering a climate of security and trust (Rodrigo-Claverol et al., 2023). When engaged in therapy sessions such as equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP), horses were found to help clients experience a culturally safe, non-traditional therapy that can aid in enhancing emotional regulation (Burgon, 2011; Cagle – Holtcamp et al., 2019; Chamberlin, 2015; Coffin, 2019; Flynn et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2015). EAP provided an approach and setting that is unique from traditional therapies or self-help programs. The space used for therapies such as EAP, is much larger than a traditional city office, and the techniques of

including horses as partners, has proved to be vastly influential (Yorke et al., 2008). Equine-assisted therapy offers clients a flexible, nontraditional environment, allowing them to practice either outdoors or indoors, depending on their preferences and weather conditions. This unique setting makes it an attractive alternative to traditional office settings (Tedeschi, 2019). The environment used for EAP sessions provides a more authentic experience, easing the suspicion and anxiety that participants often feel when meeting with medical or health professionals in a clinical environment (Coffin, 2019).

Flynn et al. (2020) conducted a study where they used semi-structured interviews to gather data from 23 clinicians affiliated with Green Chimneys, an approved private school in New York State. The study aimed to investigate various forms of animal-assisted therapies, including those that involved farm animals, dogs, horses, and wildlife. The results indicated that five themes emerged among the youth who had the opportunity to participate in these therapies (Flynn et al., 2020). These themes included youth having the opportunity to contribute, a sense of safety, self-regulation, increased engagement, and facilitating youth relationships with others (Flynn et al., 2020). Flynn et al. (2020) explained that the horses presence enhanced the youths' self-awareness of their internal states, contributing to substantial self-regulation skill sets. This natural environment, along with the animals, contributed to high levels of participant engagement and increased emotional regulation skill sets. A study by Frederick et al. (2015) indicated that horses provide support to individuals from diverse backgrounds and contribute to the healing and personal development of children who had experienced trauma. When youth have the opportunity to interact with horses, they experience a unique learning opportunity focused on personal growth and wellness through interactions with a horse (Frederick et al., 2015). EAP showed great potential as a therapy for children who experienced trauma and who

may have responded to this approach more readily than they might have to traditional counselling techniques (D'Agostino, 2019).

For the purposes of my thesis research, trauma is defined as a person who has experienced a negative event or situation in their life that overwhelmed their ability to cope (Dziak, 2020). This research study focuses exclusively on the perspectives of adults who work in some professional capacity with children aged 10 and below, examining various symptoms of trauma at different stages of development throughout our lives. Adult-onset traumas often result in job instability, relationship difficulties, and mental health issues (Lindberg, 2021). Children who go through traumatic events often exhibit problems such as behavioural issues, recurring bad dreams, emotional detachment, anxiety, or limitations in their daily functioning (Ehmke, 2022). The purpose of the study was not to investigate the specific traumas that children have experienced and their effects. Instead, it aimed to examine the perspectives of professionals working in fields related to children, where these children may bring known traumatic experiences or the consequences of trauma into their interactions with these professionals. It is worth noting that many children attend schools or daycares, regardless of whether they have experienced a traumatic event or not.

Justification for this Research Study

The study I conducted was relevant as it contributes to expanding the potential of different therapeutic interventions for children. It also helps in establishing these interventions as recognized therapeutic practices that can potentially benefit and support children who have endured trauma. Often times, therapy focuses on talking as its core, based on therapeutic modalities such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), psychodynamic therapy, and humanistic therapy (Rivera, 2021; Stapleton, & Grimmatt, 2021).

Rivera (2021) emphasized that talk therapy success relies on the patient's willingness to be open, honest, and trustful in sharing their story. Furthermore, Stapleton and Grimmatt (2021) explained that for clients to receive the therapeutic benefits that CBT offered entirely, they were encouraged to complete specified activities sent home after their counselling session. However, the researchers found that less than 50% of these clients completed their homework, leaving them unable to experience therapeutic success.

Talking can be challenging for some individuals, particularly children who have experienced traumatic events (Rivera, 2021). Communication can be difficult for children with complex trauma because they can struggle with expressing and managing emotions, often unable to express feelings (Peterson, 2018). D'Agostino (2019) suggests that if clients are not progressing in traditional talk therapy, mental health practitioners should consider exploring EAP programs to enhance their sessions because the primary focus in any counselling or therapy practice should be the clients' needs. Rosing et al. (2022) highlights that various treatment approaches for people with PTSD encompass talk therapies and experiential therapies. However, some patients find traditional therapy ineffective or do not seek help, leading to a lack of alternative treatments.

Accordingly, D'Andrea et al. (2012) highlighted that the prevalence of children who suffered silently from traumatic stressors, is forming a silent epidemic. Their study aimed to break down barriers and provide parents and caregivers with tools to support the child's healing journey. Therapies such as EAP have become increasingly popular (Nelson et.al, 2016), providing additional support for children who have suffered trauma and widening the options accessible to them. This method is particularly beneficial when traditional talk therapy has not yielded positive outcomes for the specific child (D'Andrea et al. 2012; Harvey et al., 2020). As

the researchers suggest, children with a history of interpersonal trauma were more likely to terminate current therapies and continue exhibiting externalized behaviours.

The study conducted by D'Andrea et al. (2012) discovered that interventions targeting various areas, such as dysregulation, attention, consciousness, interpersonal skills, attributions, and schemas, positively influenced children who have experienced traumatic events. According to Perkins (2018) and Robinson (2022), engaging with horses in a therapeutic setting has improved interpersonal skills, including safety, confidence, trust, and self-esteem. These skills assist young individuals in discovering their unique expression, effortlessly unwinding, cultivating a sense of accomplishment, and enhancing their ability to connect with others.

Traumatic events in children lead to a higher prevalence of emotional and behavioural conditions compared to those not exposed to such events (Flynn et al., 2020; Pelyva et al., 2020). Engaging with horses in a therapeutic setting can significantly benefit children by assisting them in managing their emotions and dealing with difficult experiences. Overall, therapeutic engagements with horses can help children better regulate their emotions and cope with traumatic events (D'Agostino, 2019).

My thesis research utilized counselling skills acquired during a master's in counselling psychology program, which included respectful and nonjudgmental listening as well as paying close attention to the body language displayed during the counselling session. According to gestalt theory (Clarke, 2022), the client's language and body movements are the focus during EAP sessions. It is crucial to acknowledge that equine communication relies heavily on kinesthetic cues and that the majority of equine language is conveyed through body language (D'Agostino, 2019). This concept enables both clients and practitioners in an EAP session to be aware of the nonverbal signals they convey through their body language, interpret the body

language of the equine, and strengthen the importance of self-awareness, social cues, mindfulness, and maintaining focus in the present moment (D'Agostino, 2019).

The research question asks, “How can Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy provide support for children under the age of ten who had experienced traumatic events in their lives?” The objective of this study is to investigate the therapeutic advantages of equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) for children under the age of 10 who have recently undergone trauma. This was achieved by analyzing qualitative descriptive data obtained from narrative interviews conducted with adult professionals who specialize in working with this specific group of individuals.

Research Question

“How could Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy provide support for children under the age of ten who had experienced traumatic events in their lives?” The research question I explored was the potential therapeutic support EAP provides to children who had recently experienced traumatic events. There is limited research specifically dedicated to this topic of trauma, children, and EAP. However, an increasing amount of research is being carried out on EAP and equine-based therapy programs for individuals of different ages and backgrounds. Engaging children in treatments after trauma can pose challenges, but EAP is recommended as an effective method of treatment and therapeutic support (D'Agostino, 2019). Further investigation is needed in this field of study as there appears to be a lack of research conducted with a primary focus on equine interventions and individuals who have experienced trauma (D'Agostino, 2019).

Barnstable (2022) explained that EAP was used for diverse client populations (in conjunction with various therapeutic modalities), emphasizing the client's psychosocial and behavioural aspects and how they interacted with the horses. A study conducted by Coffin

(2019) showed that Indigenous youth dealing with grief, loss, and trauma began showing self-improvement in self-regulation, self-awareness, and socialization skills based on the opportunity to work alongside a horse while engaged in an equine-assisted learning (EAL) program. EAL is a tailored experiential learning activity in which equine-assisted experts observe non-verbal communication and serve as interpreters and facilitators to motivate learners to accomplish specific goals (Cartier Farms - Equine Assisted Learning, 2002). Equine-assisted psychotherapy is a therapeutic method that involves participants working with horses as part of their mental health therapy, supervised by a licensed therapist and an equine specialist (Arabi, 2022).

As Barnstable (2022) noted, clients who participated in EAP had increased somatic and emotional regulation capacities, improved appetites, enhanced self-confidence, decreased panic attacks and separation anxiety, and decreased overall body tension. As children grow, their behaviours and emotional regulation develops, positively or negatively. Unaddressed childhood trauma can lead to adults facing daily challenges such as relationships, attachment, trust, communication issues, emotional response difficulties, and mental health conditions like anxiety and depression (Lebow, 2021). Unaddressed childhood trauma can be attributed to the lack of opportunity to deal with these traumas, leading to a broader range of challenges (Lebow, 2021).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Always be humble enough to learn something new. Otherwise, it’s only a matter of time before your knowledge becomes outdated.”- Clinton Anderson (Meyer, 2017).

Introduction

Since the 1950s, equine-based therapy programs have gained popularity as an intervention in animal-assisted therapy (AAT) (Nelson et al., 2016). Globally, therapists recognize horses' ability to aid in human healing, leading to the development of various branches

of equine-assisted therapy and learning programs to improve mental well-being (Nelson et al., 2016). Evidence became prominent that horse-related activities play a role in improved behavioural changes amongst individuals (Pelyva et al. et al., 2020). Coffin (2019) explains that equine-based programs encourage participants to engage in various life skills such as “emotional awareness, self-regulation, healthy boundaries, improved self-awareness, and persistence” (p. 2). Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) improves children’s emotional regulation abilities, therapeutic engagement through alliance formation, and enhanced attachments (D’Agostino, 2019). White-Lewis (2019) state “the practice of using horses to heal physical, emotional and psychological challenges is just beginning” (p. 64). While horses have been integral to various cultures for millennia, the research and comprehension of incorporating horses into human healing journeys are just beginning.

Based on this study, I firmly believe that acquiring a more profound understanding, as well as diverse viewpoints from research participants, is crucial in substantiating how EAP can be an effective form of therapy for children who have undergone traumatic experiences. Qualitative data is the typical form of research within this field (Robinson, 2022). EAP supports people with behavioural challenges, substance abuse, anxieties, depression, and mood disorders (Robinson, 2022). Perkins (2018) research has discovered that when participants engaged with the horse, they developed authentic relationships because the horse provided immediate feedback. This feedback allows participants to be who they are, to find security (possibly for the first time), and to trust ever so slightly while gaining a more in-depth insight into themselves (Perkins, 2018). Robinson’s (2022) study further confirmed that children brought up common themes after EAP sessions, including security in relationships, positive social development, and an overall elevated mood. The intent of my research study is to explore and understand how EAP

may be beneficial for young trauma survivors. EAP, supported by multiple research studies, is widely recognized for its therapeutic benefits in allowing children to express their perspectives through equine therapy. Expanding the scope of qualitative studies will strengthen the foundation for future qualitative and quantitative studies, further advancing the importance of integrating approaches like EAP into therapeutic interventions.

The thesis study analyzed 80+ journal articles from 2010-2024 on EAP and childhood trauma, including articles specific to EAP and counselling. The literature reviewed suggests that EAP could be a complementary therapy to conventional therapies (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021), as one in five clients dropped out of conventional therapy supports prior to choosing to accept therapy supports (Chamberlin, 2015). Combining traditional therapy elements, EAP can support children's healing journey.

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)

EAP is a therapeutic practice that uses horses as a primary support to help clients learn about themselves and the world around them (Bark, 2011). Bark (2011) explains that clients embark on a journey with a horse to understand themselves and the world around them. EAP is a therapeutic practice using horses as the primary tool for the practitioner to achieve specific treatment goals for their clients (Barnstable, 2022; Robinson, 2022). EAP is an on-ground practice that does not explicitly focus on horseback riding, which may require more emphasis from the counsellor for instruction and direction (Bark, 2011). EAP is a collaborative process involving a licensed mental health professional, an equine specialist (a person who is competent in equine behaviour), and therapy horses to address psychotherapeutic objectives (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). The goal is to encourage clients to open up, focus on the moment, and express their thoughts or feelings (Bark, 2011; Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). Horses can be an affirming

experience for clients, as they believe they are worthwhile and actively seek to build relationships with them (Coffin, 2019). This approach can help clients feel more supported and understood.

EAP therapies go beyond simply petting a horse; they create a relationship between horse and client to create bonds, trust, respect, and responsibility (Bark, 2011). Youth who work with animals often begin sessions with an open mind and sense of belonging, regardless of their history (Flynn et al., 2020). EAP often uses CBT, person-centred, or psychoanalytical therapies, with a horse as a co-facilitator, fostering qualities such as trust, respect, and responsibility in clients (Robinson, 2022; Barnstable, 2022). Hershberger's (2022) study highlights the importance of attachment in equine programs, suggesting that horses can serve as co-therapists and sources of healing attachment for participants, facilitating treatment goals and promoting understanding and security. Not all horses are suitable for EAP work, as they need positive attitudes, good manners, reliability, adaptability, flexibility, and previous training and experience (Robinson, 2022; Barnstable, 2022; Bark, 2011).

EAP aims to enhance personal confidence and self-esteem through qualified, certified practitioners skilled in horse behaviours, actions, and reactions, with the primary goal of enhancing self-esteem. (White-Lewis, 2019; Robinson, 2022; Barnstable, 2022). Therapists must be proficient in reading people and horses and conveying body language and communication to support clients' healing journeys (Robinson, 2022; Barnstable, 2022). Counsellors in EAP require specific training, professional competencies like horse knowledge, risk management, equine-specific training, and advocacy for equines and clients' wellness, as well as personal competencies like self-awareness and authenticity (Hershberger, 2022).

Horses play a crucial role in therapeutic sessions, allowing clients to express emotions and provide the therapist feedback (Baratti, 2021). In an EAP session, a licensed practitioner uses a horse as a cofacilitator, making it an active and valuable partner in therapy (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). The horse directly links to the client's feelings in a less threatening manner (D'Agostino, 2019). The connection with horses helps therapists better understand clients' emotional states, providing a less direct and often less threatening communication tool, allowing the therapist to gain information that may not be available through direct questioning (D'Agostino, 2019). Unlike traditional talk therapy, EAP reduces reliance on verbal communication and leads to less intrusive engagement, according to D'Agostino (2019) & Stapleton and Grimmett (2021). Pelyva et al. (2020) and Adams et al. (2015) found that animal (including horse) interactions significantly change behavioural development and emotional wellness in individuals. This behavioural development is due to the comfort and safety provided by the gentle nature of the equine interactions, which can help initiate a child's healing journey.

Why Horses? Why Not Dogs?

Dogs and horses are the most popular animals incorporated into animal assisted interventions (Chitic et al., 2012). Chitic et al. (2012) explain that dogs could easily be trained and are often willing to interact with humans based on their natural pack instinct. However, D'Agostino (2019) states that dogs are predatory animals. A horse is not a predator but prey, allowing it the innate ability to feel fear and life-threatening circumstances (D'Agostino, 2019). In contrast to dogs, the cautious behaviour of horses can assist clients in relating with their own experiences of hyperarousal and hypervigilance (Tedeschi, 2019). As prey animals, horses exhibit integrity in their response to the environment, maintain a hierarchical social structure within the herd, and possess a distinct archetype compared to humans. (Harvey et al., 2020). The

horse's ability to feel fear encourages clients to become completely aware of their inner emotional states and to remain present and mindful of their bodies and surroundings (D'Agostino, 2019).

The horses provide a means for participants to generate metaphors that they can relate to their life experiences (D'Agostino, 2019). The horse offers clients honest feedback regarding their behaviours, establishing a sense of security and facilitating nonjudgmental reflection (Buck et al., 2017). This encourages clients to become more receptive to analyzing their post-traumatic stress reactions, leading to more efficient and empathetic therapy (Buck et al., 2017). Bark (2011) further explained that the horse became a friend and companion in various ways. The relationship between horse and human is proving therapeutic; incorporating the horse (EAP) into therapy practices plays a crucial role in human psychological, spiritual, and developmental growth areas in the human psyche (Bark, 2011).

In the late 1960s, Peter Levine noticed that although prey animals in the wild were often threatened, they were rarely traumatized (Levine & Kline, 2002). They discovered that animals could rebound from constant threats or danger when living in the wild (Levine & Kline, 2002). Animals, such as horses, can rid themselves of any residual energy built up through trembling, rapid eye movements, shaking, panting, or deep breathing until their bodies return to normal.

Further, Levine and Kline (2002) confirmed that because animals were perceived as non-judgmental and instinctual, the animal, in this case, a horse, could become a powerful resource to support children by connecting directly to their healing process. Because animals, such as horses, did not have words to express their feelings, there was no judgment, resulting in the animals not feeling shame or blame but the primitive language of their instinctual reptilian brain, a language

of sensation (Levine & Kline, 2002). Because horses, like humans, could not think in terms of language, they could feel the energy that was within and around them (Dampsey, 2018).

Frederick et al. (2015) study illustrated that using a horse gave participants a unique learning experience on their growth and wellness journey. Robinson (2022) stated that the horses' sheer size and power demanded a physical and emotional presence from the clients. Robinson (2022) added that horses are susceptible to nonverbal cues; body language is their language, allowing a high sense of reactivity to the internal state that the client arrived in. Along with developing authentic relationships, participants demonstrated pride, communication skills, increased self-esteem, and the ability to regulate their emotions and feelings more positively after working with their equine partners (Perkins, 2018). Horses' size and trainability make them ideal for clients to gain experiential knowledge and boost self-confidence, a challenge often associated with smaller animals (Hershberger, 2022). Stapleton and Grimmett (2021) explained that a horse's size may have been intimidating, but what happened was that the size of the horse offered the client an opportunity to build self-efficacy, overcome their fears, and gain a sense of mastery.

As noted earlier, horses are prey animals; they live in the present moment, demonstrate extreme sensitivity to their surroundings, and can identify and attend to nonverbal cues (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). The participants within Burgon's (2011) study could identify with the horse's innate fear and understand the need for protection and security, providing a metaphor based on how they might have felt (Burgon, 2011). White-Lewis (2019) and Stapleton and Grimmett (2021) identified that horses could recognize human emotion and respond intentionally to what they both saw and felt from the client. Stapleton and Grimmett (2021) further explained that "horses connected and engaged with clients when the horse perceived the individual to be in a state of physical and emotional congruence" (p. 3).

Burgon (2011) noted that the horse developed highly efficient communication mechanisms focused primarily on body language and could 'pick up on' human emotions and intentions. Horses are emotionally intelligent creatures, having a heightened sensitivity to human emotions, to both the emotions clients were attuned to and were often unaware of (Dampsey, 2018). This ability allowed the animal to notice underlying feelings the participant may have been experiencing, potentially leading to therapists engaging in more in-depth, meaningful conversations with the youth. During EAP sessions, clients often empathize with their horses, allowing them to process and examine their struggles (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). The horse is honest and often responds stubbornly, but once the client changes their attitude, approach, and tone, the horse automatically responds differently (Bark, 2011). This response from the horse highlights the importance of understanding the client's interpersonal skills and the power of empathy to overcome challenges (Bark, 2011).

According to a study by Flynn et al. (2020), most clients found the horses to be calming, safe, and comforting because they were in a setting where they believed they could be competent and good at something. Because horses immediately react to body language, the therapist can interpret the humans' actions and emotions, improving self-awareness (White-Lewis, 2019). White-Lewis (2019) further stated that a goal was to enhance personal confidence and self-esteem when a client was engaged in a counselling session with a licensed psychotherapist or psychologist.

What is Trauma?

Robinson (2022) stated that “trauma was one of the most complex and longest-effecting disorders that mental health providers treated” (p. 6). Everyone experiences trauma differently, but in general, trauma can be defined as a person or people going through a traumatic event or

situation in their life that exceeds their capacity to cope (Dziak, 2020). When stress, helplessness, or fear overwhelm people, they frequently find themselves unable to cope. (Dziak, 2020).

Levine and Kline (2002) explained that trauma was physiological versus psychological, as when we face a traumatic event, we do not have the time it takes to think; therefore, we react on instinct. When people experience traumatic events, the brain perceives danger; thus, it automatically activates an extraordinary amount of energy (Levine & Kline, 2002). When we do not discharge energy, it remains trapped, creating the potential for traumatic symptoms. The younger the child, the fewer resources they have to protect themselves, resulting in more undischarged energy (Levine & Kline, 2002). After a traumatic event, the brain changes by existing in a state of survival and not necessarily returning to that person's everyday functioning (Robinson, 2022). An instinctual fight-flight or freeze phenomenon happens in one's brain after a traumatic event (Robinson, 2022).

Traumatic Events and How They Are Typically Experienced

Traumatic events encompass various forms such as abuse, neglect, homelessness, racism, natural disasters, severe accidents, life-threatening illnesses, refugee or war experiences, violence, sexual exploitation, military stressors, animal attacks, physical injuries, being lost, or near-death experiences (Dym Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Dziak, 2020; Lindberg, 2021; Levine & Kline, 2002). Trauma in children can lead to a range of symptoms, including nightmares, behavioural outbursts, increased concerns about trust, fear of the world, nervousness, and detachment from others (Ehmke, 2022). Other symptoms include regression to early childhood behaviours, functional impairments, heightened senses, self-blame, denial, anxiety, fear of injury or death, and complaints about physical discomfort (Ehmke, 2022 & D'Agostino, 2019). Childhood trauma is often connected to depression in both children and adults, and it is also

acknowledged that childhood trauma links to childhood anger (D'Agostino, 2019).

Diagnosing trauma and stress-related disorders involves explicitly listing exposure to a traumatic or stressful event as a diagnostic criterion. These disorders include reactive attachment disorder, disinhibited social engagement disorder, PTSD, acute stress disorder, and adjustment disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These disorders often exhibit one's inability to feel any form of pleasure as well as feelings such as irritability, guilt, or failure, externalizing anger and aggressive symptoms, or dissociative symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These disorders are classified together because they can manifest in various ways and cause significant distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

When Trauma is Unresolved

Unresolved traumas in children can lead to adulthood, resulting in PTSD, distorted self-perception, shame, fear, guilt, self-blame, humiliation, and chronic physical pains (Lindberg, 2021; D'Agostino, 2019). These experiences can cause difficulties in jobs, interpersonal relationships, and mental health (Lindberg, 2021). Children who lack support in healing may face challenges into adulthood, including emotional dysregulation, unhealthy coping, substance abuse, and insecure attachments (D'Agostino, 2019). If adults experienced trauma as children, they may experience symptoms similar to children, including separation anxiety, anxiety or fear, difficulty sleeping, increased nightmares, crying or acting out, decreased appetite, moodiness, and increased aggression and anger (Lindberg, 2021). It is crucial for caregivers to provide support in their healing journeys.

Educators, researchers, parents, and caregivers must acknowledge that addressing and managing children's traumas is essential for providing support and preventing the development of PTSD or mental health issues in adulthood. Rosing et al. (2022) states that unresolved

childhood trauma leading to adult PTSD can significantly affect a person's concentration, academic achievement, financial self-sufficiency, and job stability. This negatively affects well-being and self-esteem, reinforcing the social stigma associated with the condition (Rosing et al., 2022). PTSD can cause sufferers to question existential understandings, leading to a sense of hopelessness and lack of future aspirations (Rosing et al., 2022).

EAP offers therapeutic support for individuals experiencing rejection, confusion, inadequacy, depression, anxiety, PTSD, drug and alcohol addictions, and eating disorders (Bark, 2011). When treating children exposed to trauma, professionals commonly use cognitive processing therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy, narrative exposure therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, play therapy, or art therapy (Lindberg, 2021). Addressing childhood traumas can mitigate long-term mental health issues like anxiety, depression, substance abuse, emotional dysregulation, comorbid psychopathology, problematic sexual behaviours, unhealthy attachment styles, and chronic conditions in adults (Lindberg, 2021; D'Agostino, 2019).

Dziak (2020) emphasized the importance of building a sense of safety for trauma-experienced children and their caregivers. Lawson and Quinn (2013) supported the creation of Child-Parent Psychotherapy for children under six, focusing on strengthening parent-child relationships, providing safety, and attachment, to improve cognitive, behavioral, and social functioning capacities. This approach supports the child's overall well-being (Lawson & Quinn, 2013).

Childhood Trauma

Childhood trauma is a shared experience that many individuals have faced. Children who experienced traumatic events suffer from emotional and behavioural conditions at a much higher rate than children who did not experience various forms of trauma (D'Agostino, 2019). Lindberg

(2021) stated that two-thirds of people had experienced trauma by the time they turned 16 years of age. According to Heidinger's (2022) findings, a significant proportion of the Canadian population, specifically 72%, has encountered various types of child maltreatment. These forms of maltreatment include childhood victimization, harsh parenting practices, and exposure to acts of violence throughout childhood. According to Heidinger (2022), the concept of harsh parental treatment encompasses various forms of adverse experiences during childhood, including physical punishment such as spanking or slapping, verbal abuse that inflicts emotional harm on the child, feelings of being unwanted or unloved, and failure to meet the child's fundamental needs. In these encompassing instances, children observe their parents engaging in verbal abuse against each other or other adults, in addition to witnessing fights between their parents or other adults (Heidinger, 2022). In a similar vein, Van der Kolk et al. (2005) conveyed that abuse and neglect were prevalent within our modern-day society, and the effects persisted over time. According to van de Kolk et al.'s (2005) study, separation anxiety disorder is the most prevalent psychiatric diagnosis among 364 children who have experienced trauma; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is not necessarily the most common psychiatric diagnosis that children experience.

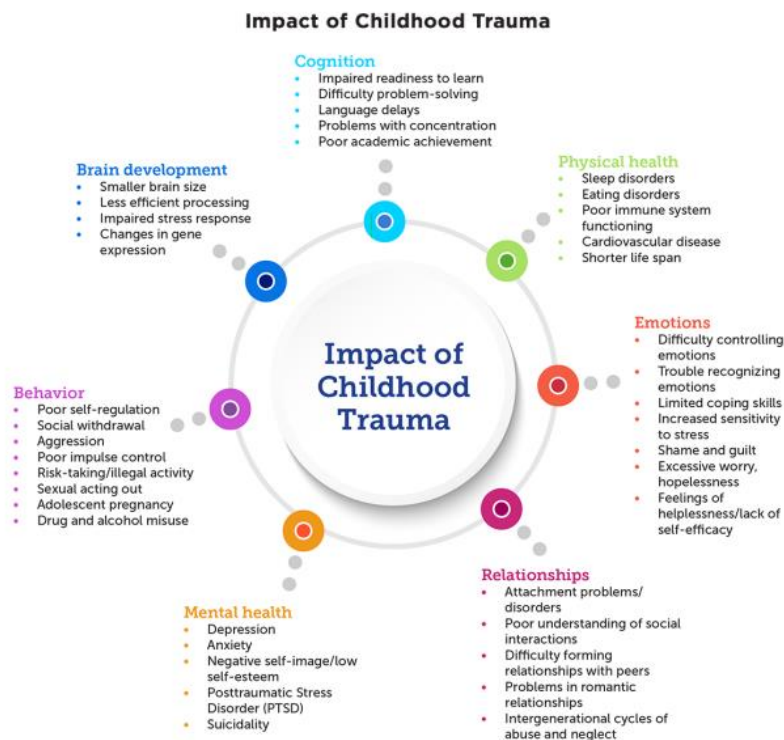
Trauma affects children in various areas, including relationships, emotional and mental well-being, and cognitive development (Dym Bartlett & Steber, 2019). Challenges include decreased self-esteem, compromised decision-making regarding behaviours and safety, poor impulse control, and substance abuse, as shown in figure 1 on page 19 by Dym Bartlett and Steber (2019). Trauma can lead to delays in learning readiness and impaired communication abilities (Dym Bartlett and Steber, 2019).

This research study focuses on the idea that participating in therapies like EAP can help

children deal with difficult emotions such as shame, worry, or heightened sensitivity (Goldman & Greenberg, 2019). It also promotes developing healthy relationships to address potential challenges related to attachment disorders or difficulties forming friendships (Haskins & Appling, 2017). Additionally, it aids in working through various mental health challenges, helps children exhibit assertive behaviours rather than aggressive ones, and improves their self-regulating ability (Netherton, 2021). Lastly, it allows children who have experienced trauma to achieve success in problem-solving (Harvey et al., 2020) and confidently address language delays, knowing that language can be expressed in different ways (Parish-Plass, 2021).

Figure 1

Impact of childhood trauma.



Note. Figure 1 from Dym Bartlett, J. D. B., & Steber, K. (2019).

Connecting EAP and Children with Trauma

When a horse(s) is used in EAP sessions, children develop secure human relationships, as trauma-affected children often struggle with establishing secure attachments (D'Agostino, 2019). Traumatic childhood experiences can lead to learning delays, attention difficulties, and increased self-harming behaviours while also affecting emotional regulation, stable bonds, and attention difficulties in children (D'Agostino, 2019). Supported by Anderson & Lambert's (2001) claim that "the longer one remains in therapy, the greater the benefit (p. 875), D'Agostino (2019) also acknowledges that more EAP sessions significantly reduced symptoms in children. Pelyva et al. (2020) found that animal experiences positively influence behavioural development, as these skills are complex to demonstrate and repair once broken. Pelyva et al. (2020) and Dampsey (2018) state that youth who learn to listen and engage with horses can transfer these skills into their daily lives, as the thriving relationship they develop with horses can lead to physiological and self-regulation growth.

Few studies have focused on EAP and anger specifically, but studies have shown that it reduces anger in children who have experienced trauma (D'Agostino, 2019). EAP effectively reduces depression in children who have experienced trauma and significantly improves their symptoms (D'Agostino, 2019). Animal-assisted therapy studies have shown that the presence of an animal reduces stress indicators in children with trauma exposure, despite the development of anxiety (D'Agostino, 2019). Ehmke (2022) suggests that caregivers should provide physical support to children who have experienced trauma while also being mindful of media exposure. Consistency in routines, bedtime, and engaging children in activities are also recommended (Ehmke, 2022). Conversations should concentrate on feelings, including the child's and the caregivers. It is essential to ask questions about what is going well (Ehmke, 2022).

Recent research indicates that youth participating in equine programs experience emotional regulation, including decreased depression and loneliness, increased problem-solving and emotional control, and an overall enhancement of mental well-being and psychosocial functioning. Adams et al. (2015), Frederick et al. (2015), and Stapleton and Grimmett (2021) support this research. Cagle-Holtcamp et al. (2019) noted extensive research on animals' emotional support and its effects on individuals.

The language within the equine helping world

Pohl (2021) explored the different types of equine-based programming and emphasized the need for clarification of terminology. Pohl (2021) explains that therapy and learning are intermingling in equine-based programs, and for a program to be considered equine therapy, a therapist, psychotherapist, speech-language pathologist, or physical therapist must be present due to the defining parameters of what EAP entails. The frequent use of different terms in studies may cause confusion among clinical professionals and the general public (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). Specific equine therapies include hippotherapy, animal-assisted therapy (AAT), and equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) programs.

Hippotherapy is a therapeutic approach where professionals use equine movement to engage clients' sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems, promoting functional outcomes (Peterson, 2020). Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), a global standard in equine psychotherapy and personal development, mandates a licensed mental health professional and a qualified equine specialist to handle clients' treatment plans (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association [Eagala], n.d.). AAT is a therapeutic approach that involves the patient, therapist, and trained animal to improve the patient's emotional, cognitive, motor, and social domains (Shelef et al., 2019).

Pohl (2021) argued that equine-based programs are not therapy but learning programs unless a therapist is involved. Equine-assisted learning (EAL) is an emerging program that focuses on learning various life skill sets and aligns with First Nations Medicine Wheel teachings, emphasizing spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects (Adams et al., 2015). This approach provides a bio-psychosocial and spiritual foundation for human action (Adams et al., 2015). The study by Adams et al. (2015) highlights the use of natural and historical teachings in equine-based therapies, which encourages self-discovery. Hallberg (2018) observed that at the time, various forms of human health care used 63 terms to describe equine-based supports, often interchangeably or to refer to the same services.

Where Does Further Research Need to Go?

EAP research is in its early stages, and further in-depth studies are needed to understand long-term results. Previously, EAP has helped combat issues such as substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and mood disorders (Robinson, 2022). Current research is primarily qualitative, with limited experimental quantitative data (Robinson, 2022).

The literature on EAP has limitations, and future research should be longitudinal and inclusive of various age groups, genders, contexts, and client cohorts (Townsend & Hood, 2019). Nevertheless, contemporary studies affirm the validity of EAP in a changing society and its many benefits for individuals of all age groups and diverse backgrounds. Nurse clinicians are increasingly choosing equine-based programs as an alternative intervention due to positive results in the literature about the connection between humans and animals (White-Lewis, 2019).

Further research is needed to validate the impact of EAP on participants' emotional regulation skills. Pendry et al. (2018), Townsend and Hood (2019), and Xue-Ling Tan and Simmonds (2017) propose that further research is necessary to investigate the effects of equine-

based therapies on youth. Pendry et al. (2018) argue that clinicians should develop a more precise theoretical and methodological foundation for incorporating equines into traditional counselling practices.

Research indicates that equine-based programs can positively impact youth, but more research is needed to determine the most relevant program practices (Pendry et al., 2018). Townsend and Hood (2019) suggest conducting longitudinal studies in diverse contexts, including different age groups and gender-specific research, to better understand and address various issues. Xue-Ling Tan and Simmonds (2017) highlight the difficulty in assessing the extent of positive progress from equine initiatives compared to other youth-focused programs.

The research, while limited, highlights the growing use of horses for physical, emotional, and psychological healing among youth (White-Lewis, 2019). Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that these programs utilize culturally supported, non-traditional healing methods, providing a solid foundation for future studies. The unconventional environment that EAP takes place in removes negative associations from therapy, increasing its availability in communities and across various cultures who may be reluctant to seek conventional counseling (Sheade, 2023).

Conclusion

The literature review identified a broad research area and articulated the research question, highlighting its relevance to the practitioner's practice. The issue of EAP being a supportive means for children who have experienced trauma was discussed, emphasizing the significance of working with horses over dogs and highlighting their crucial aspects.

The literature review explored childhood trauma, EAP, and future research opportunities. Hallberg (2018) emphasized that the rich history of working with horses brought confidence to

the world of EAP despite the uncertainty of the exact nature of horse-based interventions. In accordance with various researchers, EAP, provided children with a sense of security, healthy attachment, and an enhanced cinematic experience after traumatic events. It combines traditional therapies, allowing children to no longer suffer in silence, and often helps children with behavioural challenges.

As suggested, programs like EAP can integrate into traditional therapies to enhance the interpersonal skills of children with traumatic experiences. Participating in activities that improve one's interpersonal skills can provide individuals with the chance to overcome the negative consequences of trauma, such as behavioural difficulties, relationship issues, and trouble with problem-solving. Refer to Figure 2 on page 20 for interpersonal skills that are potentially affected due to childhood trauma. It also highlights horses' unique ability to encourage emotional regulation and challenge specific behaviours, highlighting the need for mainstream support for interventions such as EAP. This approach can help children develop confidence, leadership, and self-esteem.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” – author unknown.

Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism

This research utilized a social constructivist paradigm (commonly referred to as interpretivism), which posits that individuals seek an understanding of their world through social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The individual's life is often influenced by their interactions with others, as well as historical and cultural norms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructionists emphasize the dynamics of social interaction, prioritizing processes over structures (Burr, 2015). The focus of social research shifts from the nature of people or society to how people achieve certain phenomena or forms of knowledge through interaction with that of

other people (Burr, 2015). Knowledge is not a possession or lack of it, but rather a collective effort and action by individuals (Burr, 2015). Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist, asserted that knowledge is not a copy of reality but rather the result of the mind's capacity to choose and make sense of recreated experiences (Lohman, 2021).

This research utilized social constructivism as a lens to examine participants' experiences and social interactions in EAP. Emphasizing the importance of meaning-making in human functioning, the constructivist position enables individuals to change their world constructions and create new possibilities for action (Burr, 2015). The study emphasized that horses are social creatures, and participants learned and demonstrated social behaviours through their horse partners. As a novice researcher, I aimed to rely on the participants' experiences and interactions within an EAP situation. Relying on the participants' experiences enables this research to be carried out through the collaborative efforts and actions of the individuals involved as research participants.

Social constructivism is a congruent theoretical framework for EAP research because of its emphasis on the learner's active participation, co-construction of knowledge, and learning from those involved. Constructivist psychologies emphasize that individuals perceive the world uniquely and create their meanings from events, questioning the idea that perception involves internalizing an accurate representation of the world (Burr, 2015). This approach views learning, growth, and change in EAP as social phenomena through the social assistance of the horse.

Theories Guiding My Research

EAP is understood to be a practice that incorporates various theories, including gestalt theory, reality therapy, and emotional-focused therapy (EFT) (Harvey et al., 2020). These theories are relevant to addressing childhood trauma and promoting overall well-being. The

success of EAP clients is primarily determined by diversity and fluidity, with no rigidity or 'right way' of therapy (Robinson, 2022). The fluidity of a therapy session encompasses theories like gestalt, reality therapy, and EFT.

Gestalt therapy is a powerful psychotherapy approach that fosters heightened awareness, effective problem-solving, and personal development by encouraging clients to actively participate in genuine work and creativity, thereby facilitating growth and improvement (Palmer, 2011). Reality therapy asserts that individuals can make conscious choices and exert control over their behaviour, resulting in clients being held accountable for their actions (Wubbolding, 2010). Emotion-focused approaches prioritize the significance of emotion in shaping one's identity and organizing one's thoughts and behaviours (Greenberg, 2004). These approaches combine logic and emotionality to achieve the best possible adjustment and personal development (Greenberg, 2004).

These theories validate the importance of interpersonal skill sets as children experience and enhance these skills through EAP support. The 'right way' of therapy is flexible, ensuring clients reach their goals (Robinson, 2022). These theories will inform my research by enabling a broader approach while providing the adaptability and concentration needed to stay within the current context.

Gestalt Theory

Gestalt theory encourages natural, fluid practices in exploring clients' growth and development areas (Thompson, 2018). Traumatic exposures can lead to unhealthy feelings, actions, and thoughts in children (D'Agostino, 2019). Around 22.3 million youth are at risk of developing clinical symptoms following a traumatic experience, with 2,000,000 meeting PTSD

criteria and 3.4 million ending up abusing drugs or alcohol (D'Agostino, 2019). These statistics highlight the importance of addressing trauma-related issues in therapy.

Equine-assisted therapy is a specific type of animal-assisted therapy that employs horses as part of a team to support therapeutic interventions. Equine-assisted therapy, similar to Gestalt and existential therapies, promotes client awareness through metaphors, problem-solving exercises, and horse interactions (Harvey et al., 2020). Gestalt therapy promotes wholeness and health by fostering close relationships with individuals to meet basic needs (Truscott, 2010).

Change occurs in the present moment, within the therapist-client relationship, and in environmental and social contexts (Watson et al., 2011). Gestalt therapy has historically relied on firsthand experiences and evidence to support its findings (Gold & Zahm, 2019). To further support growth, Gestalt therapy encourages active learning by recognizing the impact of each person in the relationship on one another (Brownell, 2015). This approach helps individuals move past traumatic events and move forward.

According to Brownell (2015) and Watson et al. (2011), when a gestalt therapist is present and supports the client's authentic self, it fosters trust and an empathetic bond, especially when working with clients with delicate and self-inflicting issues. Gestalt therapy, influenced by existential and humanistic psychology, views the self as a continuous process, emphasizing body awareness and healing relationships between client, horse, and therapist (Lac, 2016). The therapist-client relationship is crucial for success in gestalt practices, especially when dealing with clients with fragile and self-inflicting issues (Laska & Wampold, 2014; Watson et al., 2011).

Combining Gestalt coaching with a horse can enhance the effectiveness of life skills learning (Greve, 2021). Gestalt therapy involves clients becoming more aware of their

experiences, interruptions, and behaviour corrections, leading to increased self-awareness and self-regulation (Watson et al., 2011). This awareness allows clients to choose behaviours, become self-supportive, act freely, and connect with others (Watson et al., 2011). The therapy emphasizes the client's ability to exercise their free will, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and self-regulation in achieving personal growth (Watson et al., 2011). Therapists using the gestalt technique experience a sense of relationships and the experiential nature of the work (Fischer, 2017).

Reality Therapy

Children who experienced trauma encountered challenges with trust and relationships (Lebow, 2021). Reality theory explains that people need to feel as if someone cares about them and their well-being (Glasser, 1975). Having someone (or, in the case of EAP, a horse) we knew cared for us helped us get through traumatic and difficult experiences (Glasser, 1975).

In EAP, therapists who use a reality-theorist approach can teach clients how to communicate effectively and build healthy relationships (Haskins & Appling, 2017). Perkins (2018) illustrates effective communication through sharing with a horse. Therapists also aim to avoid toxic behaviours and model helpful behaviours for clients, incorporating elements from this perspective (Seehusen, 2018).

Horses exhibit behaviours through body language and tone, while reality therapy effectively addresses social anxiety, interpretation bias, and interpersonal relationships (White-Lewis, 2019; Khaleghi et al., 2017). Reality therapists believe the root cause of suffering is a lack of meaningful relationships and connections (Glasser, 1975).

Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT)

Emotion-focused therapy (EFT) helps clients process emotions, transforming or regulating them when accessed (Goldman & Greenberg, 2019). Brownell (2015) emphasized the importance of the client and therapist in the therapeutic relationship, with the therapist often supporting and directing the client's experience. EAP supports and explores emotions in depth, allowing clients to feel their emotions mentally, articulate their physical feelings, and reflect on the past and painful memories (Baratti, 2021). This approach supports and encourages emotional growth and transformation (Meneses & Greenberg, 2019).

Engaging children with a traumatic past in EAP support can enhance their emotional awareness and understanding, similar to EFT (Goldman, 2019). Encouraging healthy lifestyle changes through experiences with horses focusing on EFT allows children to face painful emotions, create new meanings, and better adapt to life situations (Goldman, 2019). Therapeutic interventions involving equines have been found to enhance interpersonal skills, emotion regulation, empathy, and social competencies, particularly in children and adolescents (Craig, 2020). Research has shown that EAP positively impacts various aspects of children's lives, such as self-image, self-control, trust, hope, and socio-emotional development (Craig, 2020).

Children with trauma often struggle with secure attachments and meaningful relationships, leading to difficulties in the present (D'Agostino, 2019). The horse provides a significant relationship for children to learn trust and build relationships (Flynn et al., 2020; Xue-Ling Tan & Simmonds, 2017). Coffin (2019) reported that the horse aids in relaxation in the present moment, relieving the pressure of sitting in a room and being watched and asked questions. This experience was relevant to the children's current experiences. The study by Xue-Ling Tan and Simmonds (2017) found that equine-assisted interventions improved the

psychological and emotional well-being of children with autism spectrum disorder, enhancing self-regulatory abilities and social benefits. This concept is similar to EFT, which connects problems to emotions like sadness, fear, and shame (Goldman & Greenberg, 2019).

Emotions guide us toward goals, connect us to our needs, and help us understand our lives, process information, and receive advice on our well-being (Meneses & Greenberg, 2019). During an EAP session, therapists and clients work with horses to help the client process their emotions and thoughts about their current lifestyles and situations, allowing them to work in the here-and-now moment. The therapeutic work's strength lies in the trusting relationship between the therapist and client, which is crucial for effective therapy. EFT emphasizes developing and maintaining a robust therapeutic relationship (Brownell, 2015). The relationship built with horses demonstrates a new method for building trust, acceptance, and understanding (Pelyva et al., 2020).

Brownell (2015) and Watson et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of actions in fostering a child's sense of security, trust, and attachment with their equine partner. Children with trauma often struggle with emotion regulation, avoidance, and processing. EFT suggests that change occurs when clients are made aware of their emotions, taught to regulate them properly, and transformed into healthier ones (Goldberg, 2019).

Shanker (2013) found that children have experienced numerous setbacks and regressions in their ability to regulate their behaviour. Children who lack essential self-regulation skills display inappropriate behaviours or disengage from their surroundings (Shanker, 2013). Research suggests that children's participation in programs or activities helps them develop self-regulation skills and manage their reactions calmly (Shanker, 2013). As individuals mature, they develop self-awareness about their abilities and establish a perception of their capabilities

(Shanker, 2013).

EFT has been instrumental in treating depression, trauma from early childhood, unresolved interpersonal injuries, generalized anxiety disorders (Diamond et al., 2016), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Shameli, 2019). EFT helps control and regulate emotions, as children with traumatic experiences often struggle with challenging interpersonal skills, leading to various mental health conditions (Meneses & Greenberg, 2019).

Chapter 4: Methodology

“What is the bravest thing you have ever said?” asked the boy. “Help,” said the horse.

- Charlie Mackesy, 2019

This thesis research asked the question: “How could Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy provide support for children under the age of ten who had experienced traumatic events in their lives?” This study used a qualitative methodology and narrative interviews as a flexible framework for understanding how EAP offers children under the age of ten who have been through traumatic experiences.

Narrative research

Narrative research focuses on understanding people and their experiences through the narratives of others (Andrews, 2021). These stories are rich in detail and often contain information shaping our worlds and histories. The research starts with people's lived experiences and focuses on studying participants, gathering data, reporting on their experiences, and making meaning of those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Despite having a beginning, middle, and end, narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points, making it a valuable source for understanding people and the world (Andrews, 2021).

Narrative research involves collecting stories from participants about their lived experiences, often using various strategies, and analyzing them chronologically (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to narrative psychology, stories exchanged between individuals and others influence our possibilities, highlighting the impact of this process on shaping our lives (Burr, 2015). In this study, participants experienced an EAP session and were encouraged to share their experiences through individual private questionnaire and oral discussions. The stories often contained turning points and were heard and shaped by the researcher. The study aimed to understand the impact of EAP on participants' experiences and understanding of the research question.

Narrative interview

This research utilized narrative interviewing to gather data on participants' individual experiences during four EAP sessions. Narrative interviewing aims to collect data on an individual's experience through specified questions, encouraging the participant to respond in a narrative or story-like format (Dixon, 2020). Narrative interviews provide a way to understand others through their stories, making them a meaningful experience (Seidman, 2006). The stories shared by participants revealed the meaning they gained from experiencing EAP sessions. By conducting narrative interviews, participants were placed at the center of the study, engaging in lived experiences specific to EAP sessions. After each session, the researcher collected their stories and experiences as raw data through interview questions and conversations.

Narrative exchange

Narrative exchange is a method that helps make a lived experience understandable and communicated effectively (Perry, 2009). By adding personal stories to the collected data, researchers can create emotional connections with readers, fellow researchers, and potential

fundings for mental health services (Kingham, 2022). Kingham (2022) suggests that personal stories with passion build trust and meaning, while Perry (2009) expresses that writing and sharing stories connect research participants with their experiences.

The researcher incorporated narrative exchange into their research to enhance the description of experiences. Sharing stories with participants triggered deeper reflection and a willingness to reciprocate. In sharing personal EAP experiences, participants were then encouraged to share their experiences freely, defining narrative exchange as a means of sharing (Perry, 2009). This approach brought excitement, compassion, empowerment, and engagement to the participants.

Through sharing experiences and personal stories, Kingham (2022) illustrates that this approach can remove fear and inspire courage, even in seemingly irrelevant situations. The author hopes that sharing their own and their research participants' stories will spark curiosity and engagement within EAP, particularly for children with trauma, thereby enhancing the support provided to these children.

Rationale for narrative interview as a method

Narrative research, specifically narrative interviewing, was chosen to explore the potential benefits of EAP for trauma-affected children. The research aligned with the practitioner's work with participants and horses in EAP. The author witnessed daily positive changes in children who engaged with horses at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies. The research highlighted the benefits of horses as therapeutic support for trauma-affected children. Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies shared their own experiences and insights from participants who had no prior experience with EAP or the programming at Success Ranch, adding new insights to validate the work conducted in EAP.

Research Design

I was seeking to answer the question, “How can Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy provide support for children under the age of ten who had experienced traumatic events in their lives?” In this study, the intent is to gain insight into the firsthand experiences of the research participants and their perspectives on how EAP can offer additional support and facilitate healing for children who have undergone traumatic events.

The literature supports the benefits of EAP for children with trauma, but it's important to note that EAP is not a one-size-fits-all method. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights the importance of addressing the mental health needs of adolescents, avoiding institutionalization, prioritizing nonpharmacological approaches, and respecting children's rights. Expanding treatment options and recognizing that not all adolescents will be reached in the same way is crucial (Harvey et al., 2020). The researcher acknowledges that EAP is not universally suitable for all individuals. Participants may struggle with intense apprehension or phobia towards the animal, allergies, or a lack of affinity towards animals, which can lead to apprehension and difficulty in participation. If a child doesn't respond well (to either talk therapy or EAP), the support team should continue finding a supportive service that best suits the child and their needs (D'Agostino, 2019). Best practice treatment depends on the disorder classification, individual history, and severity of the pre-existing illness (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). Understanding the ever-evolving role of EAP in supporting children in therapy sessions is crucial for healing from trauma. Study participants' perspectives could provide new insights into the potential value of EAP for this group of children.

Participants

The study involved adults in a profession that directly supports children with experiences of trauma. Participant recruitment for this research study included professionals within the realms of social workers, educators, victims' services staff, counsellors/psychologists, children's therapists, justice support services, and childcare providers. Participants chosen for this research study included the professions of early years caregiver, educators, and school counsellors.

Inclusion criteria included:

- minimum of 25 years of age,
- currently worked in a field related to children who had experienced trauma,
- worked with these children for a minimum of five years,
- limited equine background and knowledge, and
- of healthy and sound mind (self-assessed).

The study involved screening potential participants to ensure they met inclusion criteria. The screening process involved potential participants completing a brief questionnaire based on the inclusion criteria. Acceptance was based on first-come, first-served, with a consent package including a liability waiver (Appendix A), media release (Appendix B), and farm rules for Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies (Appendix C). Participants in this study were engaged voluntarily and did not receive any form of compensation or honorarium.

Sampling and participant recruitment

The study utilized a purposive, convenience sample with snowball sampling to reach the desired sample size. Participants were recruited through social media, specifically the Facebook page Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies (<https://www.facebook.com/SuccessRanchDSL/>), and public advertisement through Kijiji. General advertisements were made through local radio

stations Rock 98.5 and GX94 if recruitment was unsuccessful. If recruitment through public means was unsuccessful, the plan was to email various organizations familiar with children with trauma.

The recruitment for this study was promoted on social media for seven days. Interested individuals were actively encouraged to submit an email within the designated timeframe. After the timeframe ended, potential research participants were tentatively confirmed. Thirteen individuals showed interest in participating by reaching out through social media and email. Unfortunately, seven potential participants could not continue due to time constraints and discussions surrounding screening questions. Initially, six participants were confirmed, but two decided to withdraw from the study on the day of the first session. Two individuals withdrew due to unforeseen circumstances.

The study involved six participants, chosen for group work and safety reasons. I had chosen a minimum of three equine handlers to ensure the safety of participants. I had chosen a maximum of six participants for safety reasons and to utilize the space efficiently. Due to the study's small sample size of 4 participants, teams of two were formed to ensure maximum safety. Each team consisted of one horse, two participants, and one equine handler. The equine handler observed any behaviours exhibited by the horse that could potentially pose a physical threat to the participants.

Creswell and Poth (2016) recommended a study of three to ten participants, while qualitative narrative inquiry research (2021) noted no specific rule for sample sizes. The average sample size for a thesis ranged between six and ten participants. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) emphasize the significance of saturation in qualitative research, asserting that saturation can be

attained by conducting a series of 9-17 interviews. This thesis research study involved 14 interviews conducted for data collection.

Ethical considerations

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board approved the study (Appendix G), emphasizing the importance of ethics in the entire research process. Participants were reminded of their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality, anonymity, and safety were maintained throughout the study. Anonymity was ensured in the study. At first, the research participants were unfamiliar with each other and had no prior knowledge of me. However, as the sessions progressed, the participants started to form relationships not only with the horses but with each other. Sharing stories was encouraged, but participants had the right to choose not to. If a participant disclosed heavy stress or personal traumas, conversations were held to support them. Referrals for free local support were provided during session one to participants before EAP sessions began, ensuring they were aware of available programs and services. See Appendix H. The study aimed to ensure participants' well-being and safety during their participation.

The research participants' confidentiality was maintained through various methods, including reporting their data without personal association. Every participant received a pseudonym for research purposes. Participants shared identifiers, including their pseudonyms, professions, and experience working with children under ten who had experienced trauma. To support the confidentiality of the children within the participant's stories, the portrayals that the participants shared about their experience working with children who had experienced trauma were protected by ensuring that the identifiers of said children were not disclosed and details were fictionalized (Mertens, 2019).

Upon meeting the research participants, I asked them to provide pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. As Mertens (2019) explained, in the role of researcher, it was my job to ensure that I established a good rapport with my research participants and engaged in the EAP session in the least disruptive manner possible. Establishing a good rapport with research participants requires fostering an open, positive environment that promotes smooth communication through mutual agreement, understanding, and empathy. The researcher proposed that the research participants were not from a vulnerable population and could understand and sign a consent form independently. Further to this, research participants were given a consent form that outlined specific elements, including:

- Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- The study's central purpose and data collection procedures were discussed.
- The protection of respondents' confidentiality was a crucial aspect of the policy.
- The study's participants were aware of the potential risks associated with their participation.
- The study's expected benefits to participants were discussed.
- The participant's and the researcher's signature were required.

The research focused on safety for participants and equine partners due to working with horses in data collection. Animal ethics were not required as horses were not the subject of the study (Leicht, 2022). Three equine professionals were involved to assist during EAP sessions, ensuring participants did not unintentionally put themselves, or the horses, in danger.

EAP sessions differed significantly from standard counselling or therapy sessions, necessitating practitioners' flexibility (Robinson, 2022; Barnstable, 2022). EAP needed to remain a psychotherapy session, even if participants are not interested in working with horses

(Robinson, 2022). In order for EAP to be verified as a therapeutic service the therapist needed to be competent and qualified in traditional talk therapy before adding horses to their practice (Robinson, 2022; Barnstable, 2022). In this research, the therapist was present during EAP sessions. The sessions were led by me, fulfilling the roles of a therapist, researcher, and graduate student.

The research conducted a behavioural assessment of horses used at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies to evaluate the horse's safety and soundness to ensure the safety of the research participants and their involvement in this research project. An equine professional knowledgeable about equine behaviours completed the assessments on each horse used for this study. The same four horses were used for each EAP session presented. The researcher familiarized themselves with the horses, and they trusted their abilities based on the criteria presented through the equine behavioural assessment. Stephanie Lockhart owned the horses for the research project, granting her insight into the quirks and personalities of the horses. Appendix I includes the assessment.

The data filing system followed a guide from Creswell and Poth (2016), involving backup copies of computer files, high-quality recording devices, a master list of information, and participant confidentiality. Data was stored on a private, password-protected computer system. The researcher did not share an office or have coworkers within their space, which could have led to potential threats to data compromise or confidentiality. The researcher solely examined the raw data.

Reliability and validity

Data was collected immediately following the participants' engagement in the phenomenon, in order to capture their most recent experiences within an EAP session. To ensure

the validity of the research, strategies involved clarifying biases, engaging in reflexivity, seeking participant feedback, and observing the field for prolonged engagement and persistent observations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To integrate my observations into the gathered data, I documented audio reference notes following each session and provided commentary on participants' body language during various activities. Subsequently, these notes were transcribed and utilized to confirm the data provided by participants within their interview responses. The accuracy of the participants' responses to interview questions proved to be highly valid. Validation in qualitative research is a process that assesses the accuracy of findings, as described by the researcher, participants, and reviewers (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is a strength of qualitative research, as extensive field time, detailed descriptions, and closeness to participants add value to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The use of audio recording technology ensured that the interview responses accurately captured the participants' statements in a straightforward and precise manner. The quality of qualitative research needs researchers' active engagement with those who are of interest while maintaining an appropriate level of detachment from the phenomenon being studied to document observed actions accurately (Mertens, 2019). The participants' diverse characteristics and unique backgrounds in EAP sessions contribute to the quality of the collected data, as they are not influenced by other group members' professional status or experience.

Transferability

The concept of transferability helped readers assess the validity of study findings by comparing the research context to their circumstances (Mertens, 2019). To provide a comprehensive analysis, a thorough explanation was given about the sessions participants were involved in, clarifying the broader context of the study. The raw data from the four EAP

sessions, including time, location, and context, was supplemented with a description (Mertens, 2019).

The study utilized physical descriptions, movements, and activities to provide more detailed information about the session, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the results within their own means. This approach transitioned from general concepts to more specific components, which enhanced the understanding of the session's content (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This understanding shows that while overarching themes were suggested for each session, the participants provided particular elements or phrases, focusing on their personal experiences during their EAP session.

The study was conducted in east-central Saskatchewan, Canada, specifically at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies highlighting the bond between therapist, horse, and child in facilitated healing, regardless of where they are located. It is important to note that the focus is on the support a horse may offer to a child in a therapy-based session, regardless of where the child may reside.

Findings

Data collection strategy

The study involved participants who participated in group sessions of EAP and shared their experiences in an individual 60-minute interview and focus group debriefs. Overall, the research participants participated in a total of four group debriefs. Each research participant also participated in a total of four individual private interviews. The interviews were recorded and varied in duration, from three to 12 minutes, depending on the participant and the session they experienced.

To collect data, participants first had to undergo the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Four EAP sessions took place with the participants, followed by an unstructured focus group debrief and private recorded interviews. The choice to interview participants following the EAP session was driven by an interest in learning more about their experiences and opinions regarding the potential effectiveness of EAP in addressing childhood trauma (see appendix D for an analysis of every session).

This research study involved participants at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies in Saskatchewan who participated in free EAP sessions over four consecutive Saturdays in April and May 2023. The sessions allowed the participants to gain a personal experience focused on EAP. Each session lasted approximately two hours, including time spent with horses and interviews. The aim was to provide a similar experience for each participant. All participants engaged in a group-based EAP session. Each of the four sessions they attended with the horses was approximately one hour. The debriefing sessions typically consisted of a twenty-minute group debrief followed by individual, confidentially recorded oral interviews. The interview duration was determined by the amount of information each participant needed to convey on that particular day. Several interviews consisted of brief 2-minute answers, while the following interview lasted approximately 10 minutes. The participants had individual and intimate reactions to their experience with the horses during each session. The amount of what they shared reflected their response to the EAP session they had just experienced.

Collecting data and ensuring participant availability for all four sessions proved challenging due to unforeseen circumstances such as illness. I correctly recorded if a participant could not attend a particular session, but it did not adversely impact the research. Three out of the four participants were present for every single session. One participant could

only attend two out of the four sessions due to medical reasons. I informed all participants that sessions might be rescheduled due to inclement weather. I addressed participant attendance in the invitation to participate and in the informed consent process. The participants were expected to attend all four sessions, but I acknowledged that unforeseen circumstances could occasionally arise. The sessions were facilitated by the researcher, Stephanie Lockhart.

The research participants participated in two-hour sessions of EAP, scheduled from 10:00 AM to 12 noon, with a breakdown of the two-hour sessions:

- 1000 – 1020 – Start on time, briefing of the session, goals of session, expectations
- 1020 – 1100 – 40 min of horse time and engagement with the horses
- 1100 – 1130 – Unstructured Focus Group debrief
 - The group debrief involved an unstructured discussion group, with verbal conversations and questions about the chosen horse, word wall words, and participants' reactions. Field notes were carefully recorded after each session, with careful attention to audio recording and transcription during data analysis. Appendix D further explains potential questions that might have arisen during the debrief.
- 1130 – 1200 – Participants were asked to answer a private narrative interview (Appendix E) in their vehicle, recorded on an audio recorder, and hard copies of the interview questions will be available upon request.

The EAP sessions used audio recordings, transcribed promptly after the completion of each session, to capture raw data, which provided a thick description in the final report and captured 'in the moment' conversations about the research question. The interviews were recorded individually, providing the main information. The EAP experience involved a collective session, providing additional data. Participants were encouraged to participate in group

discussions and respond to private narrative interviews after the EAP session. Interview questions were broad and general, encouraging participants to construct meaning based on their current experience within the arena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis.

A crucial aspect of data analysis involved coding and identifying common and repetitive themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process allowed the researcher to view their data with fresh perspectives. The process involved manually identifying and organizing themes and common words evident in the collected raw data. Mertens (2019) emphasizes that qualitative and data analysis involve interpreting data and formulating hypotheses, while computer systems can aid, but should not replace active researcher engagement in understanding data insights.

Participants selected pre-assigned words after EAP sessions from a 'word wall' (Appendix F) representing their most significant achievements, such as leadership, trust, assurance, or safety. The words chosen then led to a discussion about how participants envisioned children with trauma reacting to an EAP session. The 'word wall' concept initially appeared in the EAL program developed at Cartier Farms Equine Assisted Learning Program (Cartier Farms, 2002.). Since then, it has been embraced and modified for use with clients at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies.

The data was analyzed using qualitative coding, focused on raw data from word walls, focus group discussions, individual interviews, and conversations during an EAP session with horses. The audio data (from both group sessions and individual interviews) was transcribed promptly after each session, and thematic coding was performed once all four sessions were finished. This process was based on the idea that once all the data was collected, I could then start organizing and identifying the commonalities within the interviews. This systematic and

rigorous analysis allowed for the identification of themes and patterns, ensuring transparency and reflexivity for the researcher and others involved (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes emerged based on the key words that participants shared in response to the prompts displayed on the 'word wall.' The words were subsequently classified according to their similarities or synonymous terms.

Participants categorized the words they chose into two categories: the words that described their current feelings and the words they could imagine children with trauma choosing. It was anticipated that themes would be present during group discussions based on the specific theme planned for the session. However, for example, even though I expected the theme of a session to be relationship-building, the apparent focus was safety, respect, and body language. I analyzed the data collected and identified these themes. I conducted data analysis and utilized grounded theory coding to identify thematic patterns (Qian, 2018). Specifically, I focused on levels one and two of the coding process.

Session overview

The researcher provided participants with instructions at the beginning of each session. Then, they were partnered with one another to interact with the horses and the suggested obstacles. An example of the challenges would be having a horse intentionally stepping on a glove, regardless of foot position, and attempting to do this without a halter. Another obstacle was getting the horse to go over raised rails individually or collectively, incorporating direction changes, with or without a lead rope. The sessions followed Cartier Farms EAL Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, with a focus on the CF EAL BuildingBlock™ curriculum, which builds upon the experiences and knowledge gained from previous exercises (Cartier Farms - equine assisted learning, 2019). As a practitioner, I am a student member of the Canadian

Counselling and Psychotherapy Association. According to Marchand et al. (2023), the EAL sessions with their clients promote teamwork, problem-solving, and communication through liberty and in-hand work. Liberty work is a training approach that fosters a sense of freedom, trust, and mutual understanding between horses and humans, enabling them to express themselves and collaborate naturally as a team (Megusta, 2023). Punzo et al.'s 2022 study found that horse-related activities, such as tending, playing, and learning, significantly contributed to participants' self-confidence development.

Another obstacle entailed dedicating plenty of time to engage in careful grooming practices, such as carefully untangling any knots in the horse's tail, carefully cleaning the hooves, and braiding the horse's mane. At the end of each session, the participants returned as an entire group to engage in a debriefing conversation, detailing the emotions and experiences encountered during their engagement. Please consult Appendix D for a thorough analysis of how the sessions were delivered to the participants. According to Souilm (2023), these sessions do not require any riding or specific skills; however, participants may be involved in tasks such as leading a horse, grooming, or feeding. The client expresses their thoughts to the therapist, reflecting on the experience and emotions evoked by the interaction (Souilm, 2023).

Participants were encouraged to work with a new human partner throughout the four sessions. This approach helped to foster relationship development and enhanced communication methods. Given the participants' inclination towards their preferred horse, they were also prompted to interact with the horses involved in each session. Participants were allowed to explore independently in the fourth session, followed by a collaborative group activity. This approach allowed the participants to assess their capacities while fostering a collective dynamic,

highlighting their ability to collaborate as a cohesive team. It examined their interpersonal communication skills within a group setting.

During the debriefing discussion, the facilitator instructed participants to evaluate the 'word wall.' During that time frame, we asked participants to select any words that captured their attention about their experiences or emotions throughout their EAP session (refer to Appendix F for the list of words displayed on the word wall). After completing the debriefing session, participants were asked to take a digital recorder into their vehicles. During that period, the participants went ahead to document their responses to the interview questions (see Appendix E for the interview questions). The subsequent section shows the participants' narratives and experiences during their EAP involvement. Finally, the participants communicated their perspectives regarding the potential benefits of programs such as EAP for children who had encountered traumatic experiences.

This research analyzed specific questions during the individual interviews to answer the original question:

- How do you envision a session like you just experienced to being beneficial, or not, for children under the age of ten with trauma?
- What role do you envision EAP playing in a child's healing journey post traumatic event?

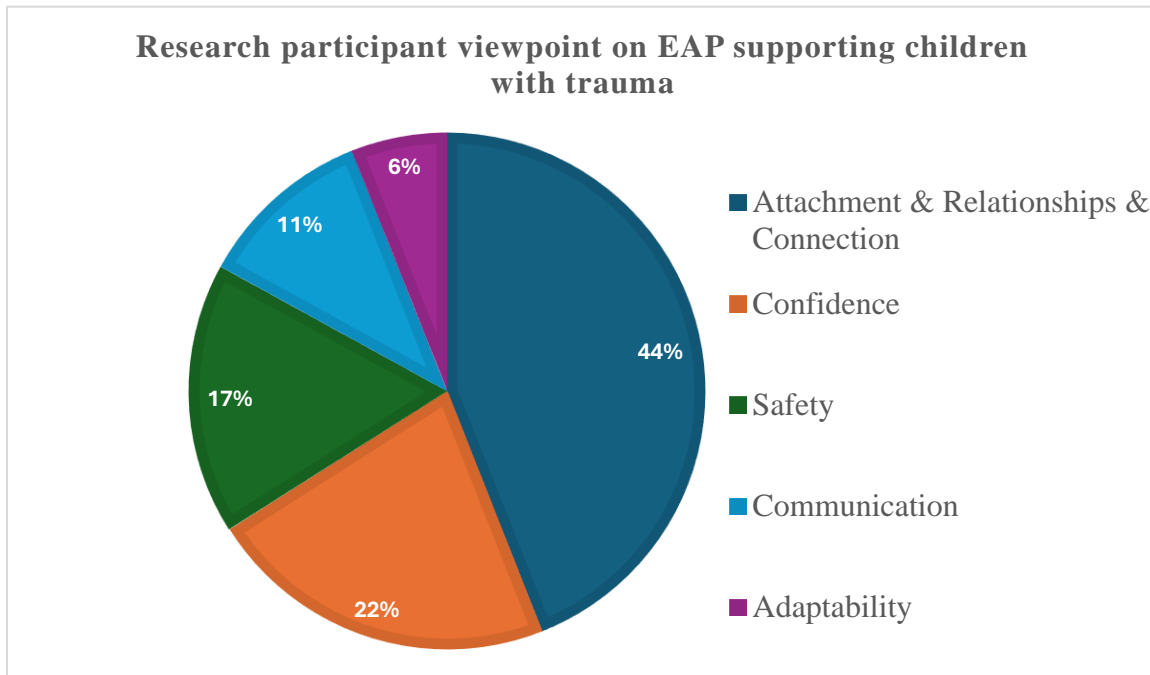
I chose thematic analysis because it provides insights into participants' perspectives, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout four EAP sessions (Caulfield, 2023). At the same time, a deductive methodology was used for individual responses, as suggested by Caulfield (2023). This qualitative study aimed to delve into the participants' perceptions of their own lived experiences and how they might be relevant to children in similar services, like EAP.

As a graduate student researcher, I suggest that EAP programs may benefit children who have experienced trauma by facilitating their healing process and providing necessary assistance. Horses offer healing and support, helping children re-learn love, attachment, and kindness and acquire appropriate behavioural skills. In this study, I analyzed 22 perspectives on the benefits of EAP for children with traumatic experiences. This means that I obtained 12 private interview recordings throughout four sessions out of a possible 16. Due to the comfort level that research participants reported after the session, I did not receive all 16 private recordings. Participants in the research study were reminded that they could join the session without taking part in the interview if they felt uncomfortable. The initial 12 interviews collected were subsequently analyzed and categorized according to the two primary research questions to gain insight into the initial inquiry. The answers to the two questions: How do you envision a session like you just experienced to be beneficial, or not, for children under the age of ten with trauma, and what role do you envision EAP playing in a child's healing journey post-traumatic event produced a total of 22 perspectives that I analyzed further and documented as research data. Key themes included increased attachment connections, confidence, safety, communication, adaptability, and learning strategies.

The study reveals the main themes and factors identified by participants regarding the potential advantages of EAP for children who have experienced trauma. Figure 2 highlights the five main themes from this research study.

Figure 2

Key themes identified from the perspective of research participants



Note: It is crucial to acknowledge that the following responses are exclusively derived from the participants answers to the two questions presented in the interviews. The two questions are: how do you envision a session like you just experienced to being beneficial or not for children under the age of ten with trauma, and what role do you envision EAP playing in a child's healing journey post traumatic event?

Assumptions

Positionality and reflection on self

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of researchers acknowledging their background and biases, as well as the significance of their experiences and cultural backgrounds in shaping their interpretation of findings and understanding the meanings of participants in their research. In addition to recognizing my own subjective viewpoint, it is crucial to emphasize that I firmly believe that EAP is a highly effective approach in assisting children who have

undergone traumatic experiences and are manifesting their distress through a range of problematic behaviours and actions. As a researcher, I resisted incorporating my belief system into the research findings and refrained from including 'supportive' stories during the debriefing sessions with research participants to manage this bias. To minimize the impact of my personal biases on the responses of the research participants, all participants answered the interview questions privately in their vehicles, without any external influences from an interviewer, including unintentional ones such as my tone of voice or body language while asking the questions. To address personal biases, all sessions were recorded in audio format. The coding and thematizing of responses primarily relied on the private, recorded interviews of the research participants.

As a novice researcher, the study of equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) caught my attention because of a memory from my undergraduate studies. During my undergraduate university career in Health Studies and Psychology (2006-2011), I had been encouraged to focus my studies on therapy dogs instead of horses. This response from my undergraduate professors pushed me to further my education with equine assisted learning (EAL). In 2016, I gained my facilitator certification for EAL from Cartier's Farms based out of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. As I began my career with EAL, I started to quickly notice that many of my client base had been children entering my program with experiences of trauma and uncertainty within their young lives. The observation served as added motivation for me to pursue a master's degree in counselling psychology (MC), which would enable me to effectively provide support to the diverse families I was starting to encounter.

In 2022, a family with four children who had experienced traumas was welcomed into my private practice EAL program. This family nurtured my passion for delving deeper into and

actively participating in the field of EAP, particularly with children who had undergone recent traumas. Following this family experience, I transitioned from being an EAL facilitator to an EAP practitioner. The transition to the field of EAP (2022-2023) was facilitated and supported by both my practicum supervisor in the Master of Counselling (MC) program and my graduate studies supervisor.

As an EAP practitioner and therapist, there was an increase in foster children being referred to my 12-session program in 2022. The typical demographic of children that I was starting to accept into my program primarily consisted of children under the age of 14 who were either in foster care or living in group homes under the supervision of social services. The families who were not involved in group homes or foster care sought assistance through victim services or social services agencies that were dedicated to children in abusive circumstances.

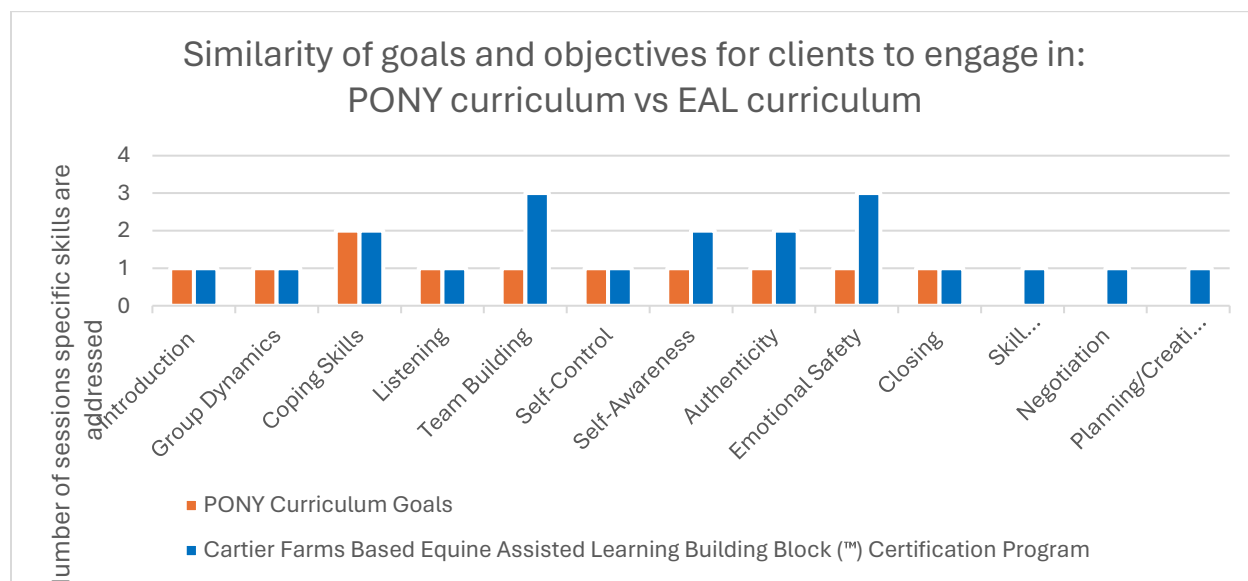
This sparked my curiosity about children with trauma and how horses could support their growth and development. Despite initially being quiet and withdrawn, I saw these children discover their voice within a few sessions, build healthy relationships and transform their behaviour. Foster parents often praised the program's benefits. This passion led me to conduct a study on the unique experiences of children engaging with horses and their unique personal growth experiences. The growth I would often see in my practice was focused on emotional growth and regulation. I was curious to understand how adult professionals working with children aged ten and under perceive and engage with an EAP program as a potential therapeutic intervention for children.

Researcher's position

I witnessed firsthand how horses in programs such as equine assisted learning (EAL) created a positive and safe space for individuals of diverse backgrounds. EAL differs from EAP

because it is a learning program, not a therapy session (Pohl, 2021). EAL is a program offering experiential learning exercises where equine-assisted specialists observe the non-verbal communications of the horse and acted as translators to encourage the learner/client to attain the outcomes of each exercise better (Cartier Farms - equine assisted learning, 2002). For the past seven years, I have been practising EAL and following a specific curriculum that builds on participants' individual qualities. The curriculum that I have been following with EAL is the "Research-Based equine assisted learning Building Block (™) Certification Program" (Cartier Farms - equine assisted learning, 2002). Harvey et al.'s (2020) research explored a 10-week "PONY Curriculum" with various goals and objectives for clients to engage in.

The "PONY" program combines cognitive-behavioural therapy with equine-assisted psychotherapy (Harvey et al., 2020). The program aims to achieve a 10-week curriculum goal (Harvey et al., 2020). Like the EAL program I implement, there is a curriculum consisting of 12 goals presented in a curriculum-style learning format (Cartier Farms, equine assisted learning, 2002). The two programs share many similarities in the design of what is achieved and outlined in the presented program curriculums. While Cartier's program focuses on EAL, the PONY program incorporates a curriculum that closely resembles an EAL curriculum. However, it easily integrates it into an EAP program with a foundation in psychotherapy.

Figure 3*Pony Curriculum vs EAL Curriculum*

Note. There are many similarities between the two programs in terms of curriculum structure.

This is a concise overview of how the two curriculum structures are presented over a 10 – 12-session period. It is important to note that different equine-based programs such as Cartier’s EAL and PONY EAP focus on different approaches, but they share common elements like self-control, authenticity, and emotional safety.

EAP is a therapeutic approach where a licensed practitioner, such as a counsellor, therapist, or psychologist, incorporates a horse as a cofacilitator, allowing the horse to act as an active partner in the client's therapy (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). A licensed practitioner is an individual who holds a valid license from their credentialing body and follows a code of ethics (Tedeschi, 2019). Therapists incorporating horses into their practice need education, training, and supervision to effectively address traumatic experiences in clients. The horse's role is not to provide treatment, but to assist clients in achieving their goals (Tedeschi, 2019).

As I became more intrigued by the world of EAP, I could visualize how programs, such as EAL, would blend smoothly into a psychotherapy world. From my experiences, there is great confusion surrounding the terms used in the equine helping field, including the phrase "Horse Therapy." The terminology may be precise in the literature, but it can be unclear regarding the general public or support services seeking programs for clients. Similarly, as Pohl (2021) explained, there is a need for clarification regarding the various terms used in the equine helping world. Hallberg (2018) argues that the abundance of terms in this field complicates research.

As an eclectic therapist, I focused on therapies such as reality therapy, animal-assisted therapy, emotion-focused therapy, play therapy, narrative therapy, and mindfulness-based therapy. Pieces from these therapeutic models played their part in the healing journey of those who allowed horses into their lives. As I witnessed children daily in the arena, partaking in various forms of EAP or EAL, I was always humbled to watch these children blossom into a world of voice and confidence. It was this personal experience that motivated me to explore such therapy.

The increasing mainstream acceptance of alternative therapies in healing journeys was a guiding point for this thesis study. People are willing to pay for alternative therapies over traditional ones to improve their health (White-Lewis, 2019). It could be argued that EAP should be encouraged in addition to conventional forms of therapy and healing practices. Robinson (2022) found that adolescents who participated in EAP sessions experienced reductions in anxiety, depression, and self-harm behaviours.

Limitations

As a recruit to the world of academic research, I recognized this project may face many challenges along its course, but I committed to collaborate with my supervisors to overcome my

limits as an inexperienced researcher. Preferably, I would have involved children who had undergone trauma as participants in the study. However, due to the potential risk, numerous ethical concerns emerged when researching this susceptible group, which could have impeded the timely completion of my work.

I also recognized that doing longitudinal studies in this field of research posed significant challenges. The scope of my data collection was restricted to participants who participated in precisely four sessions over one month. As I conducted research including adult participants, the data depended on their perception as well as their experience with EAP of whether they believed EAP was advantageous for children with trauma. In this study, primary data was not collected directly from children who had experienced trauma to address my research inquiry.

Additional limitations in investigating narrative interviews involves whether storytelling constitutes a scientific endeavour. In his 1981 response, Peter Reason emphasized that "the best stories were those which stirred people's minds, hearts, and souls and by doing so gave them new insight into themselves, their problems, and their human condition" (Seidman, 2006, p. 8). Similarly, Seidman (2006), offered that narrative has played a crucial role in the documented history of humanity, and gives us a coherent understanding of the human experience.

Chapter 5: Discussion

“Trauma is not what happens to you. Trauma is what happens inside you, as a result of what happens to you.”

- Dr. Gabor Maté (The Wisdom of Trauma, 2022)

Findings

"How can Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy provide support for children under the age of ten who have experienced traumatic events in their life?"

The data revealed a consistent pattern of participants' responses to questions about the perceived benefits of EAP sessions for children under ten who experienced traumatic events, with the joint statement being "Yes, EAP is beneficial."

Participants primarily discussed the benefits and correlation with a youngster's increased self-assurance. Confidence plays a crucial role in facilitating healing in children who have experienced trauma. The study by Rosing et al. (2022) explores the concept of basic confidence and trust through a unique triangle of horse, patient, and therapist. This connection enhances trust, participation, and social connections (Rosing et al., 2022). The participants' strong bonds with horses and group members contribute to healing, emphasizing the importance of being present, maintaining calmness, and engaging in social activities (Rosing et al., 2022). EAP benefits children by fostering attachment and providing insights into good relationships, attachment, and emotional experiences. EAP provided a secure and nurturing environment, fostering a sense of safety and well-being among individuals through various levels of connectivity. The study by Craig et al. (2020) emphasizes the empowering effect of horses on individuals, offering them reassurance and support. When individuals have the chance to take care of others with warmth and affection, they experience a sense of empowerment and confidence in their abilities, independent of external validation.

Participants highlighted the benefits of diverse communication, positive impact on children, exposure to diverse learning methods, and enhanced adaptability skills. The data suggests that EAP plays a crucial role in a child's healing process by establishing connections, fostering trust, setting boundaries, facilitating personal development, teaching coping strategies, cultivating resilience, and promoting healthy attachment and relationships. Figure 4 highlights the research participants narrative voices.

Figure 4

Participant Narrative Voice

A Newfound Sense of Attachment, Relationships & Connection	Increased Sense of Confidence	Increased Sense of Safety	Communicating in Silence	Let's Adapt and Let's Learn
TallymansRoyalCat				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “He wanted the love, and I was there to give it.” • “Me and Honey (an EAP horse) kind of were in the same boat, so we just kinda'... got the feel of things.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We wanted to give everybody a chance." • "Confidence really stood out for me because I gained confidence..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I see how working with horses can help children because not everybody wants to sit and talk about their problems.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I would have rather done that (EAP) than sat in an office on a couch, talking to a stranger" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “... I felt excited for Honey for doing it, and I felt good once she did it.”
FlyinMissSis				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Connecting to the land and the horse and animals, just to nature, was the best medicine..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...I was looking for perfection and really wanted to keep things slow and calm and in tune, which was difficult.” • "We really needed to slow things down..." • “Even though it was a very difficult task, we did it well and with confidence." 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We had to use body language and sign language to communicate, so it was interesting, but it was a very quiet time" 	

QuincysPeppyJag				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...it was kind of like, 'Awe, you liked me!'" • "Red and I had a bit of a moment; ...not really doing anything..." • "Having that connection ... someone who genuinely cared." • "we could offer horses and make differences that could save lives" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...Red very quickly stole my heart." • "...With the confidence, that confidence will build their resiliency..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's a safe space to release some of the trauma that maybe they had been hiding" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I just really like the quiet. It was nice at the moment. You have to be in the moment." • "...I'm choosing mindful, and I'm grateful for it" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I felt thrilled and maybe at ease, joyful; it was just a nice experience ..."
AllAboutRed				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I had to say confident; I felt super confident." • "I loved today. I felt great; I felt more confident." • "I learned a lot in the last couple of weeks. I noticed that I felt more comfortable." 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...they could show how they were feeling or verbalize in different ways other than actually speaking" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I learned a lot about myself" • "My favourite moment in that arena was getting Red, well, learning how to finish"

All participants agreed that EAP could provide significant therapeutic assistance for children. EAP may help children address challenging behaviours, redefine leadership, cultivate self-confidence, and rediscover happiness. Research participants had recognized EAP as a

therapeutic approach for children's emotional well-being. When children and young people engage in activities that allow them to showcase their abilities and build their self-confidence, their overall well-being thrives (Punzo et al., 2022)

Participants discussed the benefits of a similar session for trauma-affected children and the role of EAP in their healing process. They agreed that EAP can effectively support children who have experienced traumatic events by fostering self-assurance, resilience, meaningful connections, and a sense of calm under challenging circumstances. This consensus suggests that EAP can effectively support children who have experienced traumatic events in their lives.

Traumatic experiences often lead to children struggling with behavioural difficulties. Children need self-assurance, resilience, re-established connections, and self-regulation skills to develop corrective behavioural strategies. Once the child establishes these components, they can implement behaviour corrections and develop emotional regulation skill sets more effectively and successfully. Experiential therapy models, as defined by Rosing et al. (2022), involve clinical activities and experiences aimed at self-development, helping patients internalize coping strategies, reduce anxiety, improve social skills, and strengthen resilience. Experiential therapy, such as EAP, helps children regain and achieve a state of calmness. The participants agreed that children can discover a state of calm, develop emotional regulation, regain trust, engage in healthy relationships, and learn various ways to communicate and succeed.

The programs provided at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies are supervised by myself, Stephanie Lockhart, who serves as both the business owner and program facilitator. I advocate for individuals to step outside their comfort zones and immerse themselves in the equestrian realm, where they encounter diverse degrees of personal development and therapeutic benefits.

On April 22, 2023, a group of individuals joined the staff of Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies. Four individuals exhibited a range of emotions, including worry, enthusiasm, nervousness, and curiosity. These four individuals had served as the sounding board, offering narratives regarding their experiences with EAP. One consistent refrain related to the advantages of programs such as EAP for children who have undergone traumatic experiences.

The study was comprised of individuals who fulfilled several roles within the educational setting, including an early year's caregiver, an educator and counsellor, a student support teacher, and an educational assistant. The research participants arrived at the arena with distinct narratives, lively viewpoints, and profound connections to their professional endeavours. It was important to note that the individuals included in this study were only associated with each other after the beginning of the first session.

Participants

TallymansRoyalCat

TallymansRoyalCat identified as an early-year's caregiver, this participant shared a wealth of knowledge regarding children ages 0 – 5. This participant shared how different home lifestyles (both positive and negative) affected the behaviours of a child's needs and wants. This participant boasted a great strength in having patience on a personal and professional level as they worked with the diverse and unique needs that the young children brought daily into the daycare setting. This participant travelled 30 km to be a part of this study.

FlyinMissSis

FlyinMissSis identified as an educator, a teacher, and someone who worked within their local school district. With over 20 years working in the education system, FlyinMissSis held a master's in education focused on Indigenous land-based learning and a master's in educational

counselling. FlyinMissSis worked with children of all capacities and age groups, sharing an understanding of developmental behaviours and working with children who had experienced various traumas. This participant shared strengths with patience, horses, and intuitively understanding people. FlyinMissSis travelled over 200 km to be a part of this study.

QuincysPeppyJag

QuincysPeppyJag identified as a Student Support Teacher with previous roles as a teacher, principal, and guidance counsellor. This participant shared 20+ years in the education field in various roles. This experience allowed this participant many opportunities to work with children of all ages and backgrounds. This participant brought experience and a deep perspective as they shared their knowledge base centred around children who had experienced traumatic events in their lives. This participant shared that they understood behavioural challenges, education-based challenges, and social challenges these children may face due to traumatic experiences. They boasted that the strengths they shared included being able to connect with people, accountability, and efficiency. This participant travelled 100 km to be a part of this study.

AllAboutRed

AllAboutRed identified as an education assistant and worked and spent many hours up and down the hallways of a school setting supporting children from all walks of life. This participant shared experience working with children from various backgrounds, family situations, and various life experiences. This participant brought knowledge about how to modify situations and how to alter learning experiences to provide for their students the success that they were seeking. They shared that one of their greatest strengths was a compassionate and loving

nature, further demonstrated to the children and adults that this participant worked with. This participant travelled 28 km to be a part of this study.

It was important to note that initially, there were six registered participants; however, due to illness and life commitments, two participants had to cancel at the last minute. The participants in the study had to follow a particular set of parameters to be considered. The main parameter was that their primary employment was in a field related to children, and they had done this job for a minimum of five years. The other focused parameter was that they had no prior connection to Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies.

Timeline

This study commenced in the spring of 2023, and involved a cohort of participants in four EAP sessions, each lasting three hours. The initial two-hour sessions were extended due to the insightful discussions and debates that emerged during the debriefing. The sessions were held on April 22, April 29, May 6, and May 13, 2023.

The study aimed to understand the viewpoints of professionals employed in child-related fields, where children may exhibit known traumatic experiences or the aftermath of trauma during their interactions with these professionals. Due to time constraints and advanced research methods required to do a study involving children directly, the study focused on four adult experts in a field closely related to children's experiences. Discussions about instances of trauma or the individuals under consideration were deliberately omitted from the discourse to safeguard their confidentiality.

Horses used in research project.

This research study involved four sessions with equine subjects, Red, Lady, Honey, and Jackson. LeeAnne Toma, an Animal Sciences Student from the University of Saskatchewan,

conducted a comprehensive evaluation to ensure the horses' mental well-being and safety. The evaluation was documented in Appendix I, and the equine evaluation forms are included in Appendix J. The study aimed to assess the mental well-being and safety of the horses.

Red

Red is a 14-year-old gelding involved in EAP for the last three years. A lovely gelding who was extremely sensitive but also demonstrated great respect. During the evaluation, he averaged as a level 1 horse, meaning he was 'very good,' indicating that Red was suitable for work as an equine therapist, providing his support, mannerisms, and teaching strategies for the people who engaged in programs such as EAP. – LeeAnn Toma. As a researcher, my interpretation of Red was that he was responsive but provided calm and grounding. Red allowed people to feel safe but made them aware when their actions were 'too much' or that they needed to 'tone it down.' He was often referred to as providing warm fuzzy feelings to participants but could demonstrate boundaries to others when they had significant actions.

Lady

Lady is a 9-year-old mare involved in EAP for the last four years. She is a wonderful mare, slightly more sluggish but can still be lively. Sometimes, Lady proved to be stubborn. Through the evaluation, she averaged as a level 1 horse, meaning she was 'very good,' indicating that Lady was suitable for work as an equine therapist, providing her support, mannerisms, and teaching strategies for the people who engaged in programs such as EAP. – LeeAnn Toma. As a researcher, my interpretation of Lady was that she was slow and steady, giving others a powerful maternal sense of care and compassion. She often needed a little more pressure to get moving, but once asked correctly, she responded efficiently, providing people with a sense of success and pride.

Honey

Honey is an 11-year-old mare involved in EAP for the last four years. This horse reacted quickly and was very attentive to her surroundings. She was expressive but demonstrated terrific respect. Through the evaluation, she averaged as a level 2.5 horse, meaning she was 'good-moderate,' indicating that Honey was suitable for work as an equine therapist, providing quick responses and strong body language and spatial awareness in her teachings. As a 2.5, she was more adept at demonstrating boundaries and encouraging people to become aware of how their actions caused different reactions - LeeAnn Toma. As a researcher, my interpretation of Honey was that she was reactive to all her surroundings. She was the horse that demonstrated how our actions had various reactions and results depending on the situation. Honey is the horse that brings life into your world and allows you to sort out your calming mechanisms and how to act appropriately in social settings.

Jackson

Jackson is an 8-year-old gelding involved in EAP for the last two years. Great Horse! Through the evaluation, he averaged as a level 1 horse, meaning he was 'very good,' indicating that Jackson was suitable for work as an equine therapist, providing his support, mannerisms, and teaching strategies for those who engaged in programs such as EAP. – LeeAnn Toma. As a researcher, my interpretation of Jackson was that he was a big ole love bug who provided such love and compassion to others. He was very adept at responding to various pressures and knew his job thoroughly without causing participants an overwhelming sense of frustration when they were seeking answers to proposed questions.

EAP equines undergo regular training sessions to reinforce positive behaviours and promote respectful movements. The training focuses on developing motor skills through various

exercises involving pressure and release. Professional horse trainer Clinton Anderson advocates for training methodologies that encourage physical movement and cognitive capabilities in therapy horses (McFarland, 2013). He emphasizes the importance of establishing respect by engaging horses in various movements acknowledging and praising their efforts (McFarland, 2013). This approach helps the horses recall and reinforce respectful behaviours towards those they frequently interact with, enhancing their overall well-being (McFarland, 2013). Equines used for therapy benefit from having time alone, receiving proper physical care, getting attention, having a well-balanced diet, living in natural spaces, and being able to interact with other horses for communication and regulation (Craig, 2020).

A newfound sense of attachment, relationships & connection

Attachment

Childhood trauma can lead to attachment issues, limited social interaction comprehension, emotional struggles, stress management, and emotional regulation challenges, influencing a child's perception of relationships and their ability to handle stress (Dym Bartlett & Steber, 2019). The study found that attachment, relationships, and connection were the main themes that emerged during participants' time at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies.

TallymansRoyalCat stated that during their time with Jackson, "It was like, we kind of just fell together. He wanted the love, and I was there to give it."

This research revealed that love, attachment, connection, and healthy relationships were fundamental factors that offered crucial amounts of support for children who had experienced traumatic experiences. The development of the capacity to accept and give love, as well as the comprehension of the characteristics and dynamics of healthy relationships, played a vital part in supporting a child's healing process following exposure to traumatic incidents. In Punzo et al.'s

(2022) research revealed that the participants (children and adolescents between 7 and 18 years of age with symptoms of mental illness) expressed love for the horse, fostering a personal chemistry that led to a strong bond. Participants maintained this bond in various situations, including difficult times and school conflicts (Punzo et al., 2022). The strong bond with the horse was seen as a source of security and personal growth (Punzo et al., 2022).

Yorke (2010) noted the importance of love and interconnectedness in optimal neurological development. Research on animal-human relationships reveals similar characteristics to traditional attachment theory, emphasizing the significance of love and interconnectedness in human-to-human relationships (Yorke, 2010). FlyinMissSis highlighted the crucial role of EAP in fostering children's attachment and promoting healthy relationships, expressing that "having that attachment and understanding with a horse...that was huge. These good relationships were built just through quiet and body language." Attachment theory suggests that a patient's bond with a therapeutic animal, like a horse, can provide a calming and regulated experience, aiding in the healing process (Rosing et al., 2022).

Breidenstine et al. (2011) detailed the importance of a consistent attachment relationship for children recovering from trauma. Here, attachment is understood to be an emotional bond providing comfort, support, nurturing, and a sense of safety, which is essential for young children's developmental and growth processes. Here, TallymansRoyalCat (2023) demonstrated a remarkable ability to understand others' emotions and respond to horses' needs, stating, "Me and Honey (an EAP horse) kind of were in the same boat, so we just kinda'... got the feel of things and then it was easier as we progressed" this acquired self-awareness and empathy are crucial for children's growth and development, as demonstrated by TallymansRoyalCat's experience with Honey.

FlyinMissSis highlights the importance of a tranquil state of mind after completing an equine-related task, highlighting the rarity of a moment of pure serenity in a world filled with noise, chaos, and fast-paced life. Arguably, this moment of tranquility is rare and cherished. Supporting this view is the work of both McCullough et al. (2015) and Yorke et al. (2013) who found that including horses in psychotherapist sessions increased children's active participation and positive calming emotions, especially when they displayed anxious energies. They also found that animals engaged children's attention, mitigated anxious behaviour, and relieved emotional crises. Children need a tranquil environment for growth and development in today's constantly changing world. FlyinMissSis experienced tranquility, silence, and a deep emotional connection with their equine companion. They bonded with their equine companion, surpassing human connections and family. Regardless of the situation, FlyinMissSis found security and emotional connection in their equine partner.

According to Yorke et al. (2013), children who underwent traumatic experiences may have encountered challenges in their neurodevelopment, particularly in terms of self-regulation and attachment processes about relationships and safety. FlyinMissSis reflected on their childhood and the opportunity they had with horses as a child: "(My horse) supported me to be able to be a patient and understanding calm person in the face of adversity because the environment that I lived in was not calm or patient or at times welcoming."

Equine-assisted therapy offers stress relief and anxiety reduction while reducing stigmatization related to illness and treatment (Punzo et al., 2022). Participants can perceive themselves as equal, active, and developing individuals without feeling labelled (Punzo et al., 2022). Similar to the study conducted by Punzo et al. (2022), participants at Success Ranch:

D.S.L. Therapies also reported experiencing a sense of inner tranquility in the presence of the horse, creating a space where they felt safe and open to vulnerability.

In session three, participants and equine specialists had profound, open discussions about suicide. This topic came to light as one of the participants shared how they needed to be with the horse that day, citing the unfortunate circumstance of attending their close friend's burial due to suicide. This comment sparked a heavy conversation around children, trauma, suicide, and the collective sentiments around these matters.

Horses can shape beneficial attachment patterns, generate experiences, develop client awareness of behaviour patterns, reinforce control, and provide immediate feedback (Rosing et al., 2022). Despite intense discussions, sessions often maintained moments of achievement and optimism. QuincysPeppyJag enjoyed spending time with horses and trying different obstacles, questioning their abilities and how they could get these 1200-pound animals to perform as they were asked. QuincysPeppyJag shared their experience with a horse, highlighting the importance of attachment in fostering healthy relationships, love, and trust. "When the horse kind of looked right at me, just kind of turned his head towards me after he had done something like he wanted to be pet, and it was kind of like, 'Awe, you liked me!'" The horse turned towards her after wanting to be petted, expressing awe and admiration.

According to research in social science disciplines, a child's resilience skills impact their early learning of social affiliation and attachment, underscoring the importance of attachment in fostering healthy relationship growth (Sciaraffa et al., 2017 & Yorke et al., 2013). Craig et al.'s (2020) study examined resilience's development through therapies, activities, and relationships within a nonprofit organization providing EAP to young women (aged 13-17) with adverse childhood experiences. The study explores resilience, highlighting the significance of emotions

through embodiment (Craig et al., 2020). Young women who exhibit resilience develop self-efficacy and coping strategies, often incorporating adaptability and agency into their lives (Craig et al., 2020).

Traumatic experiences like neglect or abuse during critical developmental stages can disrupt attachment relationships in children (Yorke et al., 2013). According to Sciaraffa et al. (2017), research indicates that secure attachment to caregivers is essential for infants and young children in high-risk situations, as it promotes healthy brain development and adaptive plasticity, particularly during the early years. Sciaraffa et al.'s (2017) research indicates that excessive stress or trauma negatively impacts young children's brain development and health, necessitating strategies to prevent and protect a child's healthy development. Positive behaviours like play, nurturing, and love enhance decision-making abilities, emotional reactivity, and higher-order cognitive functions (Yorke et al., 2013). Similarly, Punzo et al.'s 2022 study highlights the benefits of EAP, including stress relief, anxiety reduction, self-esteem enhancement, and self-reliance enhancement, emphasizing the importance of friendship in this context.

Relationships

AllAboutRed emphasized the significance of confidence in forming initial connections with unfamiliar individuals or animals, citing the learning experiences and unexpected revelations they gained through their group sessions. AllAboutRed initially emphasized the importance of maintaining a composed demeanour in various situations but faced new apprehensions in session two as they had to work with a new partner. This new partner was either a research participant or an equine specialist. Despite introductions in session one, it was crucial to establish relationships with each individual or equine participant.

In addition to showcasing relationship affinities, demonstrating leadership skills becomes

evident in the arena as participants instinctively exhibit leadership qualities. By displaying high self-assurance and poise, they also showcase a deep understanding and ability to lead among their peers or colleagues. Effective leadership entails remaining composed by controlling one's attitude, body language, and presence (Lester, 2023). This fosters the acceptance of challenges and motivates others to demonstrate the same behaviour (Lester, 2023).

Participants faced challenges transitioning from one horse to another due to maintaining an emotional connection and friendship with their chosen equine companion. Working with a different equine or individual presented challenges as it required establishing a new connection and achieving success, even without the same emotional attachment experienced with other horses. The obstacles discussed by AllAboutRed promoted creative thinking and assessed the participants' understanding of how to guide horses through the station. Notably, all horses could successfully navigate the station; the difference was in the participant's strategy.

AllAboutRed faced frustration in backing up Jackson due to the size difference between the horse and the limited space. However, they eventually gained the ability to manoeuvre the horses backward successfully. This experience was a significant part of their interaction with the EAP program, where they gained knowledge and found bouts of pride in the completed tasks.

AllAboutRed's perspective on attachment and relationships emphasizes the importance of trust, boundaries, and love in overcoming a child's obstacles, believing that children can learn to trust again, set boundaries, grow, be better people, and love. Fagan (2021) identifies the fear of trusting others as a phobia, also known as 'PisAnthrophobia.' Trust loss is often linked to traumatic experiences, as trust was once associated with comfort (Fagan, 2021). While phobias are a response to accumulated fears, traumas are nervous system illnesses resulting from fear experiences (Contreras, 2020).

Fagan (2021) found that incorporating animals into our lives boosts life goals and confidence, creates a sense of safety and security, and establishes trust. The support of animals suggests that rebuilding trust is a potential strategy for individuals to cope with trauma. With building trust once more, relationship skill sets will once again flourish.

AllAboutRed expressed apprehension about partnering with a new individual, including uncertainty about their perception, response to suggestions, and safety. However, they found positive interactions easier due to their approachable personality and natural ability to connect easily. AllAboutReds experience is related to identifying core qualities and maintaining a humble attitude toward others. QuincysPeppyJag emphasized the importance of social interactions with the equines. "Red and I had a bit of a moment; I pet Red for a bit; it was just kind of nice, just the two of us, not really doing anything... just taking a minute" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). QuincysPeppyJag experienced trust in their equine partner, forming a connection and growing a healthy relationship.

Connection

The theme of connection is significant as it supports individuals in experiencing authentic feelings of compassion, love, kindness, and care. For example, Palomar-Ciria and Bello (2023) highlight that Equine-Assisted Services (EAS) provide therapeutic benefits by fostering deep connections with animals, which are widely recognized as powerful psychological healers. Equines voluntarily choose to work with individuals, exhibiting high trust and acceptance in embracing their authentic selves. "The horse could be the connection that the child is looking for. They (the child) will talk with horses instead of working with actual people" (FlyinMissSis, 2023).

QuincysPeppyJag emphasized that children needed a connection to experience feelings of safety, security, love, and value; "having that connection, just having somewhere or something or someone who genuinely cared." QuincysPeppyJag alluded to the idea that connection is crucial for children as it provides them with a sense of security and attachment to the world around them. The absence of connection can make it challenging to establish relationships due to the associated pain or hurt (Cook et al., 2005). Participants in sessions preferred specific horses, particularly those with whom they formed a deeper and more meaningful connection.

QuincysPeppyJag emphasizes the importance of connection in a child's life, particularly for those who have experienced trauma. "It is just nice to know (with programs such as EAP) that children could have a bond and that they could start to make a connection" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). Establishing connections is crucial for children's growth and well-being, as it prevents feelings of isolation and increases self-esteem and self-confidence (Alisa, 2021).

"Sometimes kids just need that one person, or they need that one something, and this (EAP) could be it. If humans weren't the connection, we could offer horses and make differences that could save lives" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). QuincysPeppyJag explored how horses can be a crucial link for children to rediscover purpose, develop healthy relationships, and establish lasting connections. Engaging in activities that recognize children and adolescents as capable individuals can greatly enhance their self-confidence, empowerment, sense of responsibility, and dedication to their journey of recovery (Punzo et al., 2022).

QuincysPeppyJag suggested that children with traumatic experiences and suicidal thoughts may benefit from equine-assisted psychotherapy during sessions. The proposed strategy could potentially decrease suicide rates in children by promoting healthy relationships and companionship between equine partners.

FlyinMissSis supported that "connecting to the land and the horse and animals, just to nature, was the best medicine... there was nothing like that energy burst of just a renewal, a reset of feelings." Mullenbach et al. (2019) found that nature-based learning significantly impacts children's growth and development. They assert that children's natural connection with nature enhances their abilities, resilience, and social and cognitive development and can support children diagnosed with attention difficulties (Mullenbach et al., 2019). This research underscores the importance of fostering a natural connection with nature.

Participants, including FlyinMissSis, preferred to establish a connection with their equine partner during self-reflection. They emphasized the importance of fostering attachments and connections for adults and children. FlyinMissSis engaged in a meaningful interaction with Honey, discussing the value of attachment and the horse's ability to sense emotions more effectively than humans could recognize.

Bennett and Woodman (2019) suggest that horses' responses to human moods often reflect an individual's emotional state. Therapy horses can help children explore and express suppressed feelings while watching their behaviours, enhancing learning and promoting insights within the child through metaphors and visual cues.

Bennett and Woodman (2019) found that children who initially hesitated to share sensitive emotions with a therapist found self-assurance in horses. Four participants emphasized the importance of developing a connection with a horse, highlighting comfort in sharing, vulnerability, and recognizing strengths and areas for growth in sharing. This level of self-assurance is precisely what FlyinMissSis (2023) meant when they stated that spending time with horses and meeting new people can remind them that being helpful sometimes means setting aside one's ability and allowing others to appreciate the experience fully.

Increased Sense of Confidence

The feeling of confidence has been defined differently by many people. For example, Haavardsholm and Nåden's study (2009) defines confidence as a subjective state of ease, relaxation, and security. It is crucial for children who have recently experienced trauma to integrate it into their daily routines. AllAboutRed often voiced the phrase 'Super Confident.' "I had to say confident; I felt super confident. I felt like I learned a lot today, not only today but just in the last couple of weeks here" (AllAboutRed, 2023). EAP sessions naturally enhance participants' emotional adjustment, confidence, openness, social skills, and overall well-being (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021).

Participants consistently demonstrated confidence throughout their four sessions at Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies. As an academic researcher, one of the primary attributes I observed among the participants was confidence. Additionally, confidence had emerged as a recurring theme in the participants' remarks during debriefing sessions and conversations. AllAboutRed often talked about how being confident in themselves led to feeling calm when they were with horses: "I loved today. I felt great; I felt more confident." The program's potential relevance to children, especially those who had experienced traumatic events, immediately captivated me after closely observing this phenomenon among the adult participants.

As a therapist, I often warned clients about the most challenging session being the first session, causing heightened anxiety due to client expectations and emotional state. According to Chua et al. (1999), anticipatory anxiety is the most basic and common type of anxiety that individuals typically feel. Anticipatory anxiety and anxiety, whether consciously or unconsciously, are unavoidable mind processes that significantly impact our lives, leading to increased impatience, frustration, stress, and anger in a fast-paced human world (Dawes, 2021).

Research participants also experienced similar feelings, displaying mild nervousness and anxiety during the initial session and being uncertain about upcoming activities. Initially, the participants experienced decreased confidence and a sense of uneasiness in the arena during the first session. However, as the session progressed, they experienced a shift towards comfort and confidence. For example, students may often feel nervous and worried on the first day of school. However, as the days progressed, they began to enter the classroom with increased confidence and ease.

FlyinMissSis approached session one with confidence despite apprehension about unknown aspects. However, when QuincysPeppyJag approached the first session, they did so in a manner to prioritize others' comfort and confidence, later citing it was discomfort and a lack of confidence in themselves as their motivation to take lead. Both participants expressed apprehension about the experience. "Sure, I hesitated at the beginning with the horses, but Red very quickly stole my heart" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). Punzo et al. (2022) highlight the importance of developing courage as a developmental process, involving heightened bravery and inner strength, and how it helps individuals manage and control horses, overcoming challenges.

Participants reported increased confidence as they worked with horses to overcome various obstacles. One example was that of TallymansRoyalCat, Honey (an EAP horse), and 'the rails!' Honey displayed varying levels of discomfort and impatience when prompted to cross the rails, despite having previously crossed them on multiple occasions. With the support of TallymansRoyalCat, Honey gained confidence and pushed herself to overcome obstacles, actively seeking TallymansRoyalCat to become a confident leader.

TallymansRoyalCat also faced a significant challenge expressing confidence due to her inherently quiet and anxious nature. This experience highlights children's difficulties living in a world of closures and limited opportunities. Traumatic events may often lead to young people

being reluctant and metaphorically concealing themselves, using a protective shell.

AllAboutRed reported that they felt at home in the arena, confident and capable from day one. They overcame apprehensions, became more socially engaged, and enjoyed a profound sense of inclusion. Engaging with horses, whether actively participating or observing, allows clients to explore their creativity and self-exploration (Stapleton & Grimmett, 2021). The sessions featured four horses, with three distinct teams skillfully navigating through obstacles, proving the event's positive impact. The sessions included four horses and three teams skillfully manoeuvred through obstacles, demonstrating the positive effects of EAP. Research participants enthusiastically selected their preferred horse but frequently requested "two horses" to ensure that the fourth horse did not feel excluded.

The sessions featured four horses, with one tied to the rail, allowing participants to choose their horse without feeling forced. They also had the freedom to interact with other teams and learn from different equine personalities. The method consistently led to one horse being tied to the fence. TallymansRoyalCat often prioritized inclusivity, ensuring the active participation of tied horses in all situations and timings. "We wanted to give everybody a chance" (TallymansRoyalCat, 2023). Individuals' inclusion in a session fostered confidence among others, as they recognized their inclusion, had partners, and felt more confident in their abilities.

Children with behavioural challenges naturally grasp concepts and desire inclusion, even when hiding behind a metaphorical wall. This feeling of inclusion builds confidence and boosts self-esteem among participants. According to my research, opportunities provided by others foster a sense of inclusivity and empowerment. FlyinMissSis (2023) highlighted the significance of inclusivity in their decision to select Jackson as an alternative option, stating that TallymansRoyalCat felt as though Jackson was left out due to not having the opportunity to go

out yet. This underscored the importance of compassion, inclusivity, and teamwork in decision-making. Being included builds a person up, fills their bucket, and boosts confidence in their abilities and skill sets.

TallymansRoyalCat initially displayed nervousness and anxiety during sessions but consistently preferred the word "confidence" as the chosen word off the board after each session. "Confidence really stood out for me because I gained confidence, and I knew that next time it was just going to be that much easier for me, and I would just feel better about it" (TallymansRoyalCat, 2023). Others detail how EAP sessions can significantly boost a child's confidence and self-reflection. Bennett and Woodman (2019) note how horses facilitate self-reflection and foster confidence, as participants often perceive horses as trustworthy, leading to a more authentic and unconditioned response from clients enhancing their ability to cope daily.

My research findings highlight how the EAP program has significantly increased confidence levels. For example, among participants such as FlyinMissSis, have improved their ability to interpret horse behaviour and reactions and developed a heightened awareness of their surroundings. The self-reflection involved understanding the weather's impact on their horse's anxiety, their partner's misunderstanding of instructions, and the differences between team and individual expectations. FlyinMissSis (2023) states, "We had invisible rules that we couldn't step over the rails, and we couldn't knock things over, so I, I was looking for perfection and really wanted to keep things slow and calm and in tune, which was difficult."

Other findings suggest that self-awareness cultivation can significantly aid a child's healing process after a traumatic event by influencing their behavioural outcomes. The field of psychotherapy emphasizes the importance of promoting positive outcomes to enhance a client's progress during therapy sessions (Parish-Plass, 2021). Parish-Plass (2021) emphasized that the

healing journey involves relationships between clients, therapists, and animals, contributing to self-awareness, reduced stress, perspective-taking, and openness to feedback through specific neurobiological and psychological processes. The internal elements of self-realization enhance and grow our confidence levels.

Engaging in EAP helps individuals develop self-efficacy, enabling them to address their inner feelings and find healthy ways to express their emotions. Children's awareness of directing desired responses from a horse can boost their self-esteem and confidence, reducing behavioural difficulties (Signal et al., 2013). Confidence in children reduces behavioural problems and fosters self-efficacy, a reliable indicator of emotional stability (Burns et al., 2016). Research by Craig et al. (2020) shows that participants develop self-efficacy and coping strategies through resilience, often using personal narratives to demonstrate adaptability. Activities like horse grooming can help address bullying issues and feelings of neglect (Craig et al., 2020). Overall, EAP can be a valuable tool for dealing with emotional challenges.

The research project revealed that confidence was the participants' most frequently shared feeling. An example was when the participants successfully guided their horse to perform a small circular movement within the boundaries of a triangular shape without crossing over the rails. FlyinMissSis observed that despite Jackson's confidence, the team needed to slow down the process and provide additional support when attempting a 360-degree turn in a small triangular space. "We really needed to slow things down and just really supported Jackson so that he wouldn't step over the rails" (FlyinMissSis, 2023). Slowing down allowed FlyinMissSis's team to discover that Jackson could successfully twist his body to complete a circle within the small confines of a triangle.

AllAboutRed and their partner struggled with a task involving a 360-degree circle within a triangle station, leading to frustration and challenges around this particular station. Initially, the team halted at this station, but with increased confidence and persistence, they successfully completed the task. The team completed this task by modifying the station to ensure the horse followed the instructions. They did not break the rules, but the station became less intimidating. This achievement and sense of completeness gave AllAboutRed an incredible smile of triumph and determination to continue despite the challenges.

Successful task completion often boosts confidence, as individuals feel accomplished, proud, and self-assured after completing tasks. This confidence encourages them to tackle tasks effortlessly, even if they are more complex than initially thought. As FlyinMissSis stated, "I thought my favourite moment in the arena would have been when we completed the small triangle with Jackson. Even though it was a very difficult task, we did it well and with confidence." The experience fostered pride and accomplishment, leading to the successful completion of tasks assigned to FlyinMissSis, which in turn contributed to the development of self-confidence.

The task of guiding a horse to rotate 360 degrees within a triangular enclosure was challenging but also provided an opportunity to assess various developmental stages, including social, emotional, cognitive, communicative, and motor strategies. Children actively engage in gross motor skills during hands-on activities. Bunker (1991) suggests that various opportunities and activities enhance children's confidence and knowledge, enabling them to complete tasks and highlighting the difference between those with and without confidence. Trauma can negatively impact children's confidence, leading to decreased positive emotions. However, experiencing success or accomplishments can reverse this downward trend and increase positive emotions and

confidence. Involving horses in therapy links the experiential nature to improved self-esteem, confidence, and assertiveness (Mueller & McCullough, 2017).

This study reveals that EAP significantly enhanced the confidence of participants. The study questioned the effectiveness of EAP, revealing that children who experienced traumatic experiences may have experienced a profound and revolutionary change in their lives through the development of confidence. The study suggests that children may also experience a similar level of confidence during an EAP session involving horses, considering the impact of EAP on adult participants. AllAboutRed expressed confidence in their ability to perform the task, citing significant learning in the past few weeks and a sense of increased comfort: "I learned a lot in the last couple of weeks. I noticed that I felt more comfortable." Research participants unanimously agreed that gaining confidence enables individuals to develop and improve internal skills such as trust, self-esteem, teamwork, and leadership.

TallymansRoyalCat praised the benefits of EAP for children, stating that it fostered a strong sense of well-being, trust, confidence, and excitement, proving that it was achievable. FlyinMissSis reported that the sessions for children under 10 with trauma would be practical due to the support and calmness provided by the horses. QuincysPeppyJag discussed the increased confidence among individuals participating in EAP programs. "I think this would be an excellent opportunity for children who have suffered trauma. With the confidence, that confidence will build their resiliency, and we know that resiliency is how they will see their way through trauma" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). This is in line with the work of Pizzolongo and Hunter (2011) emphasized the significance of resiliency, defining it as the human ability to overcome and transform adversities, as mentioned by QuincysPeppyJag.

Increased Sense of Safety

Fear, anxiety, stress, trembling, shaking, laboured breathing, and crying are common responses to feeling unsafe in both children and adults. Safety was emphasized in sessions with horses, providing comfort and empowerment for participants to express their thoughts and concerns. Participants reported feeling empowered to voice their innermost thoughts.

Turner and Harder (2018) define a psychologically secure environment where individuals can make mistakes without severe consequences. Learning from mistakes and the idea of self-correction allowed students to experiment and take risks without worrying about the results (Turner & Harder, 2018). This concept encouraged creativity, teamwork, and open communication. Psychological safety, encompassing comfort and recognition, further bolstered these behaviours, as per Turner & Harder (2018).

Participants in session three felt psychologically safe, with QuincysPeppyJag experiencing a significant emotional response. The debrief conversation elicited an internal response from the participants despite no notable incidents. A participant shared their experience of a close friend's suicide, highlighting the importance of connection, attachment, and relationships in ensuring safety. Following session three of EAP, an unplanned discussion occurred during the debriefing. The arena provided a comfortable environment for participants to express their hearts openly, but the profound discussion heightened emotional responses in QuincysPeppyJag after the EAP session.

QuincysPeppyJag initially enjoyed the session and expressed excitement, but the conversation grew heavy afterward. The discussion on suicide was a sensitive topic, involving participants who expressed their views on the subject. The participants showed mutual respect and consideration, expressing their viewpoints with admiration. The vulnerability and rawness of

the moment were crucial for the researcher, who believed that a sense of safety within the environment would have been essential. EAP involves discussions that are often emotionally demanding and deeply meaningful, reflecting the lived experiences of individuals. The ability of both children and adults to express and disclose personal and sensitive information about heavy matters after an EAP session highlights the success and necessity of programs like EAP.

Programs were instrumental in facilitating profound thought release, promoting emotional well-being, and providing a secure environment for individuals to address issues. Despite the sombre tone of the sessions, the development of discussion and expression through verbal communication fostered self-assurance and resilience, enhancing overall well-being.

AllAboutRed experienced a range of internal emotional experiences, including safety, tranquility, composure, self-assurance, and authentic joy. During sessions, AllAboutRed experienced anxiety and stress. However, as the sessions evolved, they actively interacted with horses and their partner, resulting in increased relaxation, a sense of ease, and even experiencing positive emotions during challenging moments. The study revealed that horses' ability to communicate effectively with their handlers and sense of safety was a significant factor in their comfort and inclusion within the arena. AllAboutRed reported that they attributed this level of communication to their ability to detect and respond to human emotions.

The participants reported that horses appeared to intervene and support their partners when they displayed significant worry or sadness. AllAboutRed (2023) highlights that horses exhibit distinct attitudes and character traits similar to humans. The horse's unique personality traits and attitudes made it exceptional in providing support during critical periods. Horses responded to humans' high energy levels by matching or resisting, reducing energy to a controlled and safe level.

The components of therapeutic interventions become more accessible when individuals feel safe and secure in their surroundings. "I see how working with horses can help children because not everybody wants to sit and talk about their problems. I didn't! So, being able to get comfortable with the horse...like I felt like I could continue with the horses"

(TallymansRoyalCat, 2023). Working with horses can help children who may not want to discuss their problems. Establishing a sense of security through verbal communication is crucial for therapeutic interventions. Mental health professionals facilitate a safe space for clients to express their emotional burdens openly and authentically, promoting a more comfortable environment for healing.

Horses, as a metaphorical bridge, help connect verbal expressions with emotional experiences. The presence of a horse provides a sense of security, allowing clients to express themselves more openly. Therapists aim to establish a relationship with clients, creating an environment of openness that helps clients let go of negative emotions and better understand their situation. Horses provide a reflective experience for clients, allowing them to become more aware of their presentation and make necessary adjustments (Hershberger, 2022). This improves their ability to recognize and understand their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours when interacting with horses and other individuals (Hershberger, 2022).

QuincysPeppyJag argued that the presence of an arena and horses provided a sense of security to individuals. "It's a safe space to release some of the trauma that maybe they had been hiding" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). QuincysPeppyJag refers to the concept that when children feel safe and secure, they are more likely to express their emotional burdens openly. Therapeutic practice often faces challenges with young clients who lack understanding of trauma, leading to negative behaviours. A safe setting and understanding of the traumatic experience can facilitate

recovery and promote overall well-being. For example, children who are in foster care are at risk of developmental delays and emotional disturbances due to inconsistent childhood experiences and mistreatment, leading to a lack of trust of others and living in a continual state of survival mode (Crenshaw-Williams, 2023).

AllAboutRed highlighted that daily progress might have been challenging. However, initiatives like EAP could help individuals navigate the real world, learn coping mechanisms, and overcome life challenges, as per their understanding.

Communicating in Silence

Mastering communication can be challenging, as it involves various methods like words, gestures, facial reactions, and actions, as well as whether the intended messages are received. During four sessions, participants discovered a communication barrier between humans and horses, as horses cannot vocally communicate in English, German, Cree, Arabic, etc. Body language is a universally accepted and shared communication method, encompassing all individuals, including horses. Horses communicate non-verbally using subtle cues like adjusting ears or widening pupils, providing direct feedback to handlers (Hershberger, 2022). They can interpret hand gestures, visual cues, body language, and vocal tone, making them useful for individuals struggling with emotion regulation or social cues. Domesticated horses can also offer immediate feedback through awareness and connection (Hershberger, 2022).

The sessions were centred around a central theme, with session one focusing on relationship development, session two on teamwork, session three on communication, and session four on options and decision-making, all addressing crucial topics related to communication and nonverbal cues. AllAboutRed (2023) suggests that EAP can enhance communication and processing skills in children who have experienced traumatic experiences,

allowing them to express their feelings and verbalize in various ways rather than solely using words. "Children could learn that they don't need to necessarily use words to get their point across as they could... they could show how they were feeling or verbalize in different ways other than actually speaking" (AllAboutRed, 2023).

Effective body language is crucial for effective communication when working with equine animals in close proximity. "I would have rather done that (EAP) than sat in an office on a couch, talking to a stranger" (TallymansRoyalCat, 2023). A calm and peaceful environment greatly facilitates a child's development and recovery journey, benefiting adults and children and promoting a quiet and noise-free environment. TallymansRoyalCat states that the arena's serene atmosphere and the presence of horses created an ideal setting for individuals to feel at ease and self-assured, enabling them to express their thoughts and concerns openly.

Session three primarily focused on communication. Verbal communication was discouraged during the instructional session. "We couldn't speak during that lesson. We had to use body language and sign language to communicate, so it was interesting, but it was a very quiet time" (FlyinMissSis, 2023). Quiet periods facilitate effective communication, reflection, and self-growth, which is especially beneficial for children who have experienced traumatic events. Children who have experienced trauma tend to display strong responses to stimuli and find it challenging to soothe themselves when upset (Peterson, S., 2018). Having the opportunity to experience quiet and calm atmospheres allows children to learn and mimic those calm behaviours and reactions when or if they do become upset. Cox (2022) highlights the importance of silence in cognitive functions, children's mental and emotional growth, and promoting concentration and focus, ultimately improving brain health. Children who experience quiet and calm environments improve their understanding and emotional management (Helping Children

Calm Down: 3-8 Years, 2021). Engaging in therapeutic interventions like EAP can help individuals achieve a state of tranquility and serenity.

Many children lacking emotional regulation skills often experience increased distress, even though they naturally seek a quiet and calm atmosphere (Peterson, 2018). Research participants noted that the time spent with the horses is typically characterized by a quiet and calm atmosphere. Approaching a horse with speed and chaos often causes the horse to react quickly and flee the situation promptly. Children often learn this lesson very soon during EAP sessions if and when they are allowed to experiment with action and reaction. Naste et al. (2017) found that clients who replicated a therapist's behaviour and interactions with horses improved their physical reactions, communication, and body pace, leading to relaxation and awareness in their equine companions and enhancing their body's regulation.

In session three, research participants explored the effects of remaining silent while encouraged to participate in various teamwork activities. Children's brains naturally absorb vast information, emphasizing the importance of silence in overall well-being. Cox's 2022 study highlights the benefits of silence on mental clarity, mindfulness, self-awareness, stress reduction, and brain development.

Greenberg and Harris (2012) suggest that mindfulness interventions can improve children's social skills and school-related functioning by integrating EAP programs that allow individuals to practice mindfulness and experience the moment, particularly for trauma-affected children who struggle with social skills. A child's ability to remain calm is challenging, especially in environments with high noise levels, rapidity, and disorder. Traumatic experiences have led to increased difficulties in managing emotions, necessitating more rigorous coping strategies and soothing techniques, especially in children who have experienced traumatic

events.

QuincysPeppyJag often displayed anxiousness, scatteredness, and heightened emotions upon entering the arena. They described feeling 'scatterbrained,' and their body showed indications of a 'racing mind.' QuincysPeppyJag's work with the horses during a session quickly released the tension and high energies, allowing their body to relax and find contentment. QuincysPeppyJag sought solace in a moment of mindfulness and tranquility, allowing them to apply their coping skills to their situation. "I just really like the quiet. It was nice at the moment. You have to be in the moment" (QuincysPeppyJag).

Parish-Plass (2021) found that selfless actions stimulate neural regions associated with safe attachment, leading to connections between clients and therapists and promoting neural growth and learning. It is essential to understand the communication skills of children and adolescents who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to foster attachment and interpersonal connections, prevent relationship problems, impact self-esteem, and discourage risky behaviours (Craig, 2020). Brain plasticity also expands mindfulness and awareness through language development and self-reflection during therapy sessions, promoting brain and mind states (Parish-Plass, 2021). Developing skills like healthy relationships and mindfulness can significantly enhance health, career goals, and education (Craig, 2020). QuincysPeppyJag expressed gratitude for the opportunity to focus on the present moment with the horses in the arena, a rare occurrence, and for the mindful approach. "I focused on the here and now, and it's rare for me to have the chance to do that, so I'm choosing mindful, and I'm grateful for it" (QuincysPeppyJag, 2023). Mindfulness practice is a rare opportunity for adults and children to fully embrace its benefits as they navigate a chaotic and turbulent society with numerous tasks and responsibilities that surpass their initial plans, making it challenging to engage in

mindfulness fully. The farm's serene environment, influenced by nature and animal interactions, promotes personal, emotional, and social development (Punzo et al., 2022). Children can engage with their horses, disconnecting from anxiety sources, and fostering a relaxed lifestyle, encouraging self-reflection, personal growth, and transformation (Punzo et al., 2022).

Contemporary society is transforming significantly, with technology, screens, and digital influences shaping the world (Rempel, 2012). This societal shift has exposed children to overwhelming information, challenging their cognitive and educational capabilities (Rempel, 2012). The stress from technology's pervasive influence exacerbates cognitive and behavioural problems, making it a perfect disaster when combined with traumatic events (Rempel, 2012).

Rempel (2012) found that children during that time experienced higher stress levels, leading to increased feelings of rage, despair, and externalized behaviours. This stress affected their ability to engage in mindful meditation, which enhanced their well-being and development. The popularity of mindfulness-based activities among children and youth has increased due to research showing its positive impact on psychological, physiological, and social development (Rempel, 2012).

QuincysPeppyJag noted that horse-related activities enhance individuals' awareness, allowing them to fully immerse themselves in the present moment and appreciate their surroundings' tranquility. According to Rempel (2012), children's mindfulness exercises focus on their thoughts, actions, and environmental reactions. Therapeutic interventions like EAP help children develop mindfulness and self-management skills, empowering them to shape their growth and development (Rempel, 2012).

Children with complex trauma face challenges in cognitive processes like clear thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, and planning. These challenges lead to adaptive behaviours, such as

emotional regulation focusing on survival (Peterson, 2010). Mindfulness practices, such as those involving horses, help children focus and attend to tasks, enhancing their ability to adapt and thrive.

Children who engage with horses develop self-soothing abilities, emotional regulation, and enhanced awareness of their surroundings (Rempel, 2012). They also develop mindfulness, relaxation, and deep breathing, which improves their ability to be fully present, engage in activities, and communicate effectively. This learning process enhances their ability to recognize thoughts, emotions, and actions without judgment, improving overall well-being (Naste et al., 2017).

Let's Adapt and Let's Learn

The last theme covered was adaptation and learning. AllAboutRed suggests that these sessions can help showcase the potential to make life changes and conquer self-imposed obstacles. Experiencing trauma can have a profound impact on a child's ability to learn, think, behave, and maintain their overall well-being (Frieze, 2015). These issues can result in academic difficulties such as decreased performance, lower IQ scores, reduced GPA, reading skill impairments, and increased school absences (Frieze, 2015). Learning can be challenging for children who have experienced trauma, leading to struggles with tasks, teachers, and subject matter (Frieze, 2015).

Teachers often have limited training in effectively supporting students who have experienced trauma, necessitating an understanding of their physical, emotional, and cognitive needs (Frieze, 2015). Engaging students at Maslow's third level of the hierarchy of needs, the need for love, belonging, and inclusion, can provide significant support for children who have experienced different forms of trauma (Frieze, 2015). By connecting programs like EAP to an

educational foundation, students can safely explore Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emphasizing the need for love and connection. EAP programs highlight various safety levels and social aspects and support self-esteem and self-actualization.

Vosniadou (2003) developed a 12-stage learning process framework for individuals of different ages. To optimize learning capacity, a conducive environment with essential elements is crucial. These include active engagement, social interaction, meaningful activities, connecting new information with existing knowledge, strategic approaches, self-regulation, reflection, restructuring prior knowledge, prioritizing understanding over memorization, knowledge transfer, practice time, accommodating developmental and individual differences, and nurturing intrinsic motivation among learners. This approach ensures successful learning outcomes for all age groups.

EAP programs provide direct exposure to Vosniadou's 12 learning steps, allowing participants to learn about themselves quickly. AllAboutRed found that self-awareness, understanding of the learning process, and accepting different concepts promote personal growth and prosperity in modern society. "I learned a lot about myself" (AllAboutRed, 2023).

Children often face significant challenges in their educational setting due to constant strain, impairing their ability to concentrate, focus, retain, and recall new material (MacKillop Family Services). Teachers often face difficulties in helping children cope with traumatic experiences (Frieze, 2015). Mueller and McCullough (2017) proposed implementing EAP as an alternate approach to assist children who have experienced various forms of trauma. EAP allows youth to explore failure without fear of judgement, learn confidence through leadership, and gain self-esteem and mastery in providing healthy influence (Mueller & McCullough, 2017).

Tom Hanks' saying, " If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. It's the hard that makes it

great (Hanks, 1992).," emphasized the importance of overcoming challenges and feeling fulfilled. AllAboutRed shared a favourite learning moment by completing 'hard stations,' where participants followed specific rules to move through designated stations. These rules included using lead ropes for the horse, keeping pylons and flowerpots standing, and not allowing team members to cross any rails. These rules created various challenges for AllAboutRed and their team.

AllAboutRed's team decision-making process, where they considered working with a station but abandoned it due to perceived difficulty, was intriguing. They soon realized that the 'too difficult' stations were more achievable than initially thought and switched their efforts towards these stations despite significant barriers. Their ability to modify their strategy and engage in creative thinking guided their remarkable achievements and fostered a sense of success upon task completion.

As an EAP facilitator, I observed that adults tend to be more closed-minded. At the same time, children, according to Skillicorn (2023), have a cognitive ability for free thinking due to their limited absorption of societal norms. This free-thinking ability allows children to generate innovative problem-solving strategies (Skillicorn, 2023). Children can solve complex problems where adults will often times become confused and over analyze the situation (Skillicorn, 2023).

As an academic researcher, I frequently observed the differing viewpoints of children and adults regarding success at the 'triangle station' during EAP sessions, with the only rule being the prevention of crossing the defined boundaries. Children demonstrated a remarkable ability to expand and widen the triangle boundaries swiftly. At the same time, adults often face difficulties and exert significant effort to deal with their current circumstances, often needing to modify their situation.

EAP programs provide a secure, inclusive environment for children's educational journey, assisting them in making mistakes and encouraging their achievements. They foster an environment that acknowledges and celebrates their achievements as well as welcoming blunders to take place, as described by AllAboutRed. "My favourite moment in that arena was getting Red, well, learning how to finish" (AllAboutRed, 2023).

The EAP program participants, AllAboutRed and TallymansRoyalCat, learned to accept mistakes and utilize various strategies to overcome challenges, as observed through reflection. AllAboutRed shared their experience of completing a complex task with partner TallymansRoyalCat, stating that they were initially skeptical about how to fit their big horses in the small areas without modifying the first obstacle with the little triangle. However, after figuring it out and modifying the obstacle, they successfully completed the task, proving that modifying and adapting to different obstacles can lead to success.

The discussion on learning and education often revolved around participants' experiences, highlighting their openness and willingness to learn new concepts. AllAboutRed emphasized that an individual's learning style does not guarantee the same level of success, as a specific style may only be suitable for some. AllAboutRed highlighted the advantages of incorporating horses in learning, emphasizing their flexibility, allowing participants to tailor their learning experiences, and facilitating the exchange of various learning methods among equine partners.

The Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan (2016) stated that every school division and Conseil Scolaire in Saskatchewan needed to allocate 950 hours of instructional time for students in grades 1 through 12, recognizing the unique educational requirements of children who have experienced traumatic experiences and the need for additional support to address their learning capacity. Children with traumatic experiences often struggle with classroom activities due to fear

of errors and oppositional behaviour (Miller, 2018). The EAP program offers a supportive approach, allowing children to learn at their own pace and recognizing that mistakes can lead to significant learning breakthroughs.

Self-growth and emotional regulation skills are crucial for individuals to learn, be mindful of others, and consider their needs. Throughout various moments within the arena, TallymansRoyalCat shared that their favourite moment was "getting Honey to go over the logs. I felt excited for Honey for doing it, and I felt good once she did it." The incident showcased mindfulness, respect, and encouragement for others, allowing us to celebrate their successes and learn from their experiences, fostering a sense of excitement and understanding.

In the last session, the facilitator gave the participants the choice to work individually or as a team. Participants initially worked alone, interacting with their preferred equine partner. However, in the final phase, they were challenged to work as a team and guide a horse across raised rails without a halter or lead line, testing their ability to achieve success. The exercise was a valuable learning experience that fostered communication and teamwork at various levels, attracting enthusiastic participation from the participants. AllAboutRed emphasizes the significance of teamwork and learning in facilitating the recovery process for children after a traumatic event. Developing learning skills, trust building, and effective teamwork significantly impacts children's growth as they transition into adulthood.

The Umbrella of Emotional Regulation

Participants in this study consistently emphasized emotional regulation as a central theme in their sessions. Debriefing conversations often included terms like calm, mindful, self-awareness, happy, focus, peace, and patience. Emotional regulation refers to an individual's cognitive and behavioural processes in recognizing, experiencing, and expressing emotions

(Chowdhury, 2023). It can be automatic, controlled, conscious, or unconscious and may have effects at various points in the emotion-producing process (Chowdhury, 2023).

TallymansRoyalCat praised the EAP program for its relaxed environment, allowing them to feel loved and comfortable, similar to the horses, providing a sense of calm and relaxation. AllAboutRed found that staying calm in life is crucial for maintaining well-being. Anxiety and upset can worsen situations, escalating them. Participating in EAP programming may provide children tranquility, potentially leading to positive changes for many people. AllAboutRed supports the notion that maintaining calmness is beneficial in any situation, and incorporating EAP programs can enhance individuals' calmness and focus.

Emotion regulation is a comprehensive strategy for controlling emotions, encompassing emotionally engaging or contextually realistic approaches that benefit children, as per Yorke et al. (2013). Parents or caregivers may informally label their child as 'an explosion of fury' or 'a drama queen' when communicating their internal emotions effectively. According to Yoke et al. (2013), parental interactions significantly impact children's emotional regulation and cognitive development.

Children without significant traumas often face challenges with emotional regulation due to limited development opportunities, unlike adults who have extensive opportunities. A 10-year-old child has nearly a decade to develop emotional expression skills, while adults have around 40 years to develop proficient methods, assuming they are 40. The concept of 'practice' is influenced by an individual's age and corresponding wisdom. When traumatic experiences occur, the child amplifies the difficulty as they manage their emotional state and navigate daily activities while dealing with the traumas in their life.

Peterson (2018) found that children who experienced trauma had deficits in impulse control and cognitive processes, leading to unpredictability, resistance, volatility, or extremity in their behaviours. This disruption of their sense of calm during early developmental stages disrupts their ability to regulate their emotions and make decisions.

When a child's body or mind has learned to survive in a chronic stress mode, it can lead to challenges in self-regulation, as individuals may struggle with calm thinking, as per Peterson (2018). AllAboutRed experienced a moment of self-regulation, feeling out of control and frustrated. They actively took in the moment by breathing with their horse and grounding themselves by placing their head into their horse's neck. This action provided AllAboutRed a sense of calm in an internal chaotic moment. During moments of frustration, we have two options: calm ourselves and re-assess the situation or react in a frustrated and reactive manner.

When individuals actively engaged in controlled breathing and achieved a calm state, I often referred to this as the thinking brain vs. the reacting brain. A person's autonomic nervous system (ANS) comprises the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems, key components of the body's stress response (Chong et al., 2023). The parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) induces relaxation, linked to the "Thinking Brain," while the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) triggers fight or flight reactions, linked to the "Reacting Brain" (Chong et al., 2023). Children who struggled with emotional regulation exhibited reactive responses rather than deliberate thought processes. Chong et al. (2023) suggest that youth exposed to high family conflict are more susceptible to have lower levels of PNS, while higher levels of SNS leads to higher anxiety.

The study conducted by Rosing et al. (2022) focuses on veterans with PTSD who often experience constant anxiety, alertness, and physical or emotional arousal. The researchers found

that being in the present moment and feeling calm is crucial for healing (Rosing et al., 2022). In their study, participants who attended EAT sessions gained the ability to self-regulate and relax their bodies (Rosing et al., 2022). AllAboutRed felt anxious and distressed during session three because of the rules that required them to remain silent. Despite their inclination to talk, they regained self-regulation and became calm again. Being with the horses may have enhanced the sense of calmness through hormone release, regulating heart rate and blood pressure, as noted in the study by Rosing et al. (2022). Chowdhury (2023) and Shanker (2013) highlight the importance of self-regulation and self-control skills in children's emotional management and ethical behaviour. They suggest that children who develop these skills are less likely to engage in behaviours that contradict their values or ethical principles. Shanker (2013) also highlights the role of calm, focus, and alertness in optimal cognitive and emotional functioning, enabling children to regulate emotions, sustain attention, and demonstrate empathy towards others.

FlyinMissSis significantly embraced self-awareness as they heightened their understanding of their abilities and those of their team members. FlyinMissSis enhances self-awareness by addressing their bossy behaviour and excessive control over the setting. FlyinMissSis comprehended that their actions elicited responses from their partner in the given scenario. FlyinMissSis further demonstrated self-awareness by reflecting on their horses during four sessions. Initially choosing Honey due to her palomino colour, they quickly learned about their partner's body language, their partner's preferred horses and their environment.

FlyinMissSis observed that equine teammates could read a person's intuition, feelings, and emotions, acting as a sponge and filter. Saillant (2023) states that horses serve as therapeutic agents by connecting with individuals' mental states through facial expressions, energy, and body movements. Horses reflect human states or turn away until they are at ease enough to handle the

situation safely (Saillant, 2023). FlyinMissSis used words like relationship building, patience, teamwork, communication, attachment, confidence, strength, calm, intuition, body language, and environment to express emotions and personal encounters during EAP sessions. McCullough et al. (2015) found that horse interactions led to clarity and honesty due to the horses' authenticity and directness in responding to human behaviours and intentions.

QuincysPeppyJag faced challenges in their experience, including maintaining the entire presence and concerns about task accuracy. However, they found enjoyment in the sessions after engaging, despite initial concerns about their ability to perform the task correctly or incorrectly. This experience highlights the importance of being present and focused during tasks.

QuincysPeppyJag often chose Red as a horse due to his endearing nature, which helped them achieve mental slowdowns and focus on present experiences. Red and other equines used in the research study provided a soothing and consistent level of support, creating a sense of encouragement and acceptance among individuals, regardless of their identities. Following session one, QuincysPeppyJag shared, "I felt thrilled and maybe at ease, joyful; it was just a nice experience that filled my bucket."

Implications

This research study aims to increase public awareness and expand mental health services globally for families. It emphasizes the importance of children participating in EAP to support their healing process. The study also aims to strengthen credibility and clarify the nature of EAP, enhancing transparency. The findings will inform service providers and families that therapy is not limited to verbal communication and that EAP can be a valuable support for children with traumatic experiences.

Limitations

Despite its genuineness, the study had limitations due to its use of professional expertise from four individuals rather than a group of twelve children who could have shared their experiences. The research on equine-assisted intervention is crucial due to the lack of data, particularly from children and young individuals' perspectives, emphasizing the need for further investigations (Punzo et al., 2022). The original plan was to include six adult professionals as participants. Two participants had withdrawn due to life circumstances, allowing only four participants to engage in the research study. Longitudinal studies allow a more in-depth response from the participants and their experience with EAP.

Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies' curriculum is a twelve-session program, allowing individuals to explore multiple healing tiers and personal growth. As a researcher, I recommend clients engage in twelve EAP sessions, based on previous observations within my practice. The rationale for my observations in the past is that during the first four sessions, clients typically display enthusiasm and energy towards working with horses, often showing their best behaviour. The middle section, consisting of sessions five through eight, is the stage where I have seen authentic behaviours emerge, enabling the client to commence the process of addressing internal aspects that are frequently difficult. In the last four weeks, specifically weeks nine through twelve, the clients are given the opportunity to experience a sense of accomplishment and apply their recently acquired knowledge in real-life scenarios that may lead to conflicts.

Stolz et al. (2022) highlight the challenges in evaluating equine assisted therapies (EAT) due to language, country, and target group variations. EAT and its subdisciplines for therapeutic purposes is beneficial but ensuring that EAT rehabilitation outcomes can be compared with other global health services is crucial (Stolz et al., 2022). Craig (2020) suggests that EAP shows

promising results, but more research on its impact on communication skills is necessary.

Research primarily centres on children and adolescents with communication difficulties related to autism spectrum disorder (Craig, 2020). Studying the communication processes in EAP could connect horse communication with essential communication skills for human mental health and positive interpersonal relationships (Craig, 2020).

Studies on EAP have shown positive results in improving social interaction and communication skills and reducing problematic behaviour, autistic severity, and stress levels in individuals despite some limitations (Punzo et al., 2022). Punzo et al. (2022) assert that there is a worldwide increase in mental disorders among children and teenagers, leading to a more significant number of psychiatric medications being prescribed. Despite limitations in research, there is a positive trend towards programs like EAP, as young individuals can gain long-lasting health benefits from holistic health-promoting interventions (Punzo et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The study investigated the effectiveness of EAP programs for trauma-affected children, specifically perceived by that of the adult research participants, focusing on themes such as attachment, relationships, connection, confidence, safety, communication, learning, and emotional regulation. Research participants' claims are supported by Hauge et al. (2014) who discovered that natural environments, like those with horses, assist young people in handling life difficulties, enhance engagement and boost emotional regulation skills. Using horses to assist in therapy shows great potential for helping children who have gone through trauma. Participants perceived that different learning opportunities and internal factors, such as confidence and attachment, are beneficial for children overcoming behavioural challenges.

Experiential therapy, specifically equine therapy, improves motivation for change, reduces anxiety, enhances social skills, strengthens resilience, and promotes enjoyment in the therapy process (Rosing et al., 2022). This therapy benefits individuals who have experienced trauma or exhibit aggressive behaviours, as it encourages self-expression and discovery (Netherton, 2021). Xue-Ling Tan and Simmonds' (2017) study demonstrates that EAP sessions improve executive functioning, sensory perception, and emotional control while fostering empathy for the equine species.

Burgon (2011) proposes that comprehending the fear of horses helps individuals understand their emotional states in similar situations. Youth frequently grasp the emotions horses may experience during sessions, demonstrating empathy and establishing emotional connections with newly introduced horses (Burgon, 2011). In this study, research participants commonly react by actively working to include the horse that was 'left out,' enabling them to understand various mental and emotional experiences.

Punzo et al. (2022) study found that equine-assisted therapy reduces anxiety, increases social competence, and improves social context handling skills among participants. The therapy is described as beneficial and symptom-relieving due to its pleasurable and positive activities. In addition, Punzo et al. (2022) state that equine-assisted interventions are commonly used globally as a substitute or addition to conventional therapies, overcoming the limitations of therapies relying on verbal communication.

The research conducted in Saskatchewan is unique in its focus on EAP practices. There are currently only a small number of practitioners in the province of Saskatchewan who are actively offering EAP based therapies. Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies is one of the few facilities in the province offering an EAP program focusing on youth. An informal search

suggests that there are a select few active EAP programs in Saskatchewan (EAGALA, 2018, Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies, 2020; Wild Blue Psychology, 2021), and only three facilities specifically offering services for first responders dealing with Operational Stress Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (OSI-CAN, 2024). Even though many individuals in Saskatchewan have EAL training, the EAL program is not therapy-based.

EAP offers significant benefits for both children and individuals, regardless of circumstances. Studies indicate that animals offer comfort, reassurance, and security because of their competence and understanding. The ability of horses to respond to nonverbal cues enhances self-awareness. Punzo et al.'s 2022 study support current research by demonstrating that equine-assisted therapy reduces anxiety, enhances self-esteem, and increases self-confidence in children and adolescents.

The study investigated the therapeutic benefits of EAP for children under 10 who have recently experienced trauma. It used qualitative descriptive data from narrative interviews with adult professionals and examines the literature on childhood trauma, its causes, manifestations, and therapies. The research is informed by emotion-focused therapy, reality theory, gestalt theory, and social constructivism. The study used four EAP sessions with four participants, narrative interviews, and group debriefs. The data was analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis to identify recurring themes. Participants reported growth in attachment, confidence, safety, communication, adaptability, and learning from EAP sessions. They believed EAP could help traumatized children because it offers a secure, accepting, and hands-on approach to learning and healing. The study acknowledges the limitations of the research design, including a small sample size, lack of firsthand information, and potential researcher? bias. Future research directions include using different populations such as, contexts, and formats in longitudinal and

comparative studies. The findings suggest EAP has great promise as a therapeutic approach for traumatized children, but further research is needed before widespread use.

References

- Adams, C., Arratoon, C., Boucher, J., Cartier, G., Chalmers, D., Dell, C. A., Dell, D., Dryka, D., Duncan, R., Dunn, K., Hopkins, C., Longclaws, L., MacKinnon, T., Sauve, E., Spence, S., & Wuttunee, M. (2015). The helping horse: How equine assisted learning contributes to the wellbeing of first nations youth in treatment for volatile substance misuse. *Human animal Interaction Bulletin*, 1(1), 52–75.
- Anderson, E. M., & Lambert, M. J. (2001, January 1). A Survival Analysis of Clinically Significant Change in Outpatient Psychotherapy. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 57(7), 875–888.
- Andrews, M. (2021). Quality indicators in narrative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 353–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769241>
- Arabi, S., MA. (2022, July 1). *All about equine assisted psychotherapy*. Psych Central. <https://psychcentral.com/health/equine-assisted-psychotherapy#equine-assisted-therapy-defined>
- Association, A. P. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5®)* (5th ed.) [PDF]. American Psychiatric Pub.
- Baratti, N. (2021, June 7). *Community Spotlight: Rocky Hill Stables & the HALT Foundation*. WHSV3. <https://www.whsv.com/2021/06/07/community-spotlight-rocky-hill-stables-halt-foundation/>
- Bark, J. (2011). *Therapists working together with horses: Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: Treating Youths with Addiction*. [Independent thesis Basic level, University of Gävle]. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:499300/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

- Barnstable, J. (2021). *Equine-Assisted psychotherapy promotes resilience in children and adolescents impacted by interpersonal trauma* [MC Thesis, City University of Seattle].
<https://repository.nusystem.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c0b55393-5746-4f71-a756-85243ac6decf/content>
- Bennett, B., & Woodman, E. (2019). The potential of Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy for treating trauma in Australian Aboriginal peoples. *British Journal of Social Work, 49*(4), 1041–1058. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz053>
- Blocksdorf, K. (2018, October 11). *What is a gelding?* The Spruce Pets.
<https://www.thesprucepets.com/definition-of-gelding-1886645>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brownell, P. (2015). Gestalt therapy. In M. A. Stebnicki, *The Professional Counselor's Desk Reference* (2nd ed.). Springer Publishing Company.
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGJjbGU6NDI0MDA3NA==?aid=152896>
- Buck, P. W., Bean, N., & De Marco, K. (2017b). Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: an emerging Trauma-Informed Intervention. *Advances in Social Work, 18*(1), 387–402.
<https://doi.org/10.18060/21310>
- Bunker, L. K. (1991). The Role of Play and Motor Skill Development in Building Children's Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(5), 467–471.
- Burgon, H. L. (2011). “Queen of the world”: experiences of “at-risk” young people participating in equine-assisted learning/therapy. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 25*(2), 165– 183.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2011.561304>

- Burns, K. M., Burns, N. R., & Ward, L. (2016). Confidence—More a Personality or Ability Trait? It Depends on How It Is Measured: A Comparison of Young and Older Adults. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00518>
- Breidenstine, A. S., Bailey, L. O., Zeanah, C. H., & Larrieu, J. A. (2011). Attachment and Trauma in Early Childhood: A Review. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 4(4), 274–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361521.2011.609155>
- Cagle-Holtcamp, K., Nicodemus, M. C., Parker, J., & Dunlap, M. H. (2019). Does equine assisted learning create emotionally safe learning environments for at-risk youth? *Journal of Youth Development*, 14(4), 232–252. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2019.727>
- Cartier Farms - equine assisted learning. (2002). *What is equine assisted learning?* Cartier equine assisted learning. <https://www.cartierfarms.ca/what-is-eal.html>
- Cartier Farms - equine assisted learning. (2019). *Standards of practice*. Cartier equine assisted learning. <https://www.cartierfarms.ca/standards-of-practice.html>
- Caulfield, J. (2023, June 22). *How to do thematic analysis | Step-by-Step Guide & Examples*. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>
- Chamberlin, J. (2015). *Are your clients leaving too soon?* American Psychology Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/04/clients>
- Chowdhury, M. R. (2023, August 11). *Emotional regulation: 6 Key skills to Regulate Emotions*. Positive Psychology. <https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-regulation/>
- Chitic, V., Rusu, A.S., & Szamoskozi, S. (2012). The effects of animal assisted therapy on communication and social skills: A meta-analysis. *Transylvanian Journal of Psychology*, 13(1), 1-17.

Chua, P., Krams, M., Toni, I., Passingham, R. E., & Dolan, R. J. (1999). A functional anatomy of anticipatory anxiety. *NeuroImage*, 9(6), 563–571.

<https://doi.org/10.1006/nimg.1999.0407>

Clarke. (2022). *What is Gestalt Therapy?* Very well Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-gestalt-therapy-4584583>

Cook, A., Spinazzola, J., Ford, J. D., Lanktree, C., Blaustein, M. E., Cloitre, M., DeRosa, R., Hubbard, R. A., Kagan, R. J., Liataud, J., Mallah, K., Olafson, E., & Van Der Kolk, B. A. (2005). Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35(5), 390–398. <https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20050501-05>

Cox, J. (2022, April 29). *The Hidden Benefits of Silence*. Psych Central.

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-hidden-benefits-of-silence>

Coffin, J. (2019). The Nguudu Barndimanmanha Project-improving social and emotional wellbeing in aboriginal youth through equine assisted learning. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2019.00278>

Contreras, A. (2020, August 31). *What is The Difference Between Fear, Phobia, and Trauma?*

Antonieta Contreras. <https://www.antonietacontreras.com/post/what-is-the-difference-between-fear-phobia-and-trauma>

Craig, E. (2020). Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy Among Adolescents with ACEs: Cultivating Altercentrism, Expressiveness, Communication Composure, and Interaction Management. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 37(6), 643–656.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00694-0>

Craig, E., Nieforth, L. O., & Rosenfeld, C. (2020). Communicating Resilience among Adolescents with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) through Equine Assisted

- Psychotherapy (EAP). *Western Journal of Communication*, 84(4), 400–418.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2020.1754451>
- Crenshaw-Williams, N. P. (2023). Aiding teachers in understanding and reducing trauma for children in foster care in an educational setting. *SRATE Journal*, 32(1).
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1391148>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Fourth Edition). SAGE Publications.
- D’Agostino, J. H. F. (2019). Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy for Childhood Trauma: a randomized controlled trial of the EAGALA model [PhD Dissertation, Pace University]. In *DigitalCommons@Pace*. <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/dissertations/AI27545495>
- Dampsey, L. (2018). *Somatic equine therapy - therapeutic qualities of horses*. Sierra Tucson.
<https://www.sierratucson.com/about/news-media/articles/somatic-equine-therapy/>
- D’Andrea, W., Ford, J., Stolbach, B., Spinazzola, J., & Van der Kolk, B. A. (2012). Understanding interpersonal trauma in children: Why we need a developmentally appropriate trauma diagnosis. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82(2), 187–200.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2012.01154.x>
- Dawes, M. (2021). Anticipatory Anxiety. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 78(1), 69–72.
- D’Cruz H, & Stagnitti K. (2010). When parents love and don’t love their children: some children’s stories. *Child & Family Social Work*, 15(2), 216–225.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00662.x>
- Diamond, G. M., Shahar, B., Sabo, D., & Tsvieli, N. (2016). Attachment-based family therapy and emotion-focused therapy for unresolved anger: The role of productive emotional processing. *Psychotherapy*, 53(1), 34-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pst0000025>

Dixon, T. (2020). *What is a “narrative interview?”* IB Psychology. <https://www.themantic-education.com/ibpsych/2018/03/09/what-is-a-narrative-interview/>

Dym Bartlett, J. D. B., & Steber, K. (2019, May 9). *How to implement trauma-informed care to build resilience to childhood trauma - Child Trends*. ChildTrends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/how-to-implement-trauma-informed-care-to-build-resilience-to-childhood-trauma>

Dziak, M. (2020). Trauma-informed care. *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*.

EAGALA (2018). *Family Counselling Centre*. EAGALA.

<https://www.eagala.org/programs;d=None>

Ehmke, R. (2022, September 9). *Helping children cope after a traumatic event*. Child Mind Institute. https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-after-a-traumatic-event/#block_88371e1b-a327-4216-8085-df338d500969

Equine Assisted Learning Canada. (2024). *EAL Canada*. <https://www.ealcanada.com>

Equine-Assisted Therapy. (2022). Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/therapy-types/equine-assisted-therapy>

Fagan, A. (2021, January 12). *How to Trust People Again*. Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-be-yourself/202101/how-trust-people-again>

Feurman, M. (2021). *What is emotionally focused therapy (EFT)?* Very well Mind.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/emotionally-focused-therapy-for-distressed-couples-2303813>

Fischer, S. L. (2017). Relational attitudes in gestalt theory and Practice. *Gestalt Review*, 21(1), 2–6.

- Flynn, E., Gandenberger, J., Mueller, M.K., Morris, K. N., (2020). Animal-assisted interventions as an adjunct to therapy for youth: Clinician perspectives. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00695-z>
- Frederick, K., Ivey Hatz, J., & Lanning, B. (2015). Not just horsing around: The impact of equine-assisted learning on levels of hope and depression in at-risk adolescents. *In Community Mental Health Journal*, 51(7), 809-817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-015-9836>
- Frieze, S. (2015). How Trauma Affects Student Learning and Behaviour. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 7(2), 27–34.
- G. Leicht, personal communication, November 22, 2022
- Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2019). Enduring themes and future developments in emotion-focused therapy. In L. S. Greenberg & R. N. Goldman (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of emotion-focused therapy*. (pp. 513–520). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000112-023>
- Greene, A. N. (2008). *Horses at work. [electronic resource]: harnessing power in industrial America*. Harvard University Press.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2004). Emotion–focused therapy. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy/Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 11(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.388>
- Greenberg, M. T., & Harris, A. R. (2012, January 1). Nurturing Mindfulness in Children and Youth: Current State of Research. *Child development perspectives*, 6(2), 161–166.
- Haavardsholm, I., & Nåden, D. (2009). The concept of confidence - the nurse’s perception. *European Journal of Cancer Care*, 18(5), 483–491. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2354.2008.00993.x>

- Hallberg, L. (2018). *The clinical practice of equine-assisted therapy: Including horses in human healthcare*. Routledge Publications.
- Hallings-Pott, C. (2021, July 21). *Developmental trauma disorder*. The Oxford Development Centre. <https://www.oxforddevelopmentcentre.co.uk/developmental-trauma-disorder/>
- Hanks, T. (1992). *A League of Their Own*. Movie Quotes. Retrieved February 21, 2024, from <https://www.moviequotes.com/s-movie/a-league-of-their-own/>
- Hartley, E. (2022). *What is horsemanship?* Pet Helpful. <https://pethelpful.com/horses/What-Is-Horsemanship>
- Harvey, C., Jedlicka, H., & Martinez, S. (2020). A program evaluation: Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy Outcomes for children and adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 37(6), 665–675. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00705-0>
- Heidinger, L. (2022, December 12). *Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018*. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00016-eng.htm>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hershberger, J. M. (2022). *“It’s like Bluetooth. I felt like I was in rhythm with him.” An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the lived experiences of Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY) in a residential Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) program*. [Doctor of Philosophy, North Dakota State University of Agriculture and Applied Science]. https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrFAWiXsMpl1YgAUR1XNyoA;_ylu=Y29sbwNiZjE

[EcG9zAzEEdnRpZAMEc2VjA3Ny/RV=2/RE=1707811095/RO=10/RU=https%3a%2f%2flibrary.ndsu.edu%2fir%2fbitstream%2fhandle%2f10365%2f33515%2fHershberger_ndsu_0157D_13164.pdf%3fsequence%3d1/RK=2/RS=uRCLHYthSi5bXqaBg3wu_0NQwyE-](https://library.ndsu.edu/bitstream/handle/10365/33515/Hershberger_ndsu_0157D_13164.pdf?sequence=3&RK=2/RS=uRCLHYthSi5bXqaBg3wu_0NQwyE-)

Jegatheesan, B., IAHAIO, Beetz, A., Ormerod, E., Johnson, R., Fine, A., IAHAIO, Yamazaki, K., Dudzik, C., Garcia, R. M., Winkle, M., & Choi, G. (2018). *IAHAIO White Paper*.

<https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/iahaio-white-paper-2018-english.pdf>

Khaleghi, N., Amiri, M., & Taheri, E. (2017). Effectiveness of group reality therapy on symptoms of social anxiety, interpretation bias and interpersonal relationships in adolescents. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health, 19*(2), 77–83.

Kingham, N. (2022). Stories matter: The power of storytelling in the patient journey. *Audiology Today, 34*(6), 12–19.

Lac, V. (2016). Horsing around: gestalt equine psychotherapy as humanistic play therapy. *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 56*(2), 194.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167814562424>

Laska, K. M., & Wampold, B. E. (2014). Ten things to remember about common factor theory. *Psychotherapy, 51*(4), 519-524. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038245>

Lawson, D. M., & Quinn, J. (2013). Complex trauma in children and adolescents: Evidence-based practice in clinical settings. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 69*(5), 497–509.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.21990>

Lebow, H. I. (2021, June 10). *How childhood trauma may affect adult relationships*. Psych

Central. <https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-childhood-trauma-affects-adult-relationships>

- Lefevre, M., Hickle, K., Luckock, B., & Ruch, G. (2017). Building Trust with Children and Young People at Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation: The Professional Challenge. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(8), 2456–2473.
- Lester, N. (2023, February 13). *Staying composed under pressure and still project confidence*. The Method. <https://the-method.com/news/staying-composed-under-pressure-project-confidence/#:~:text=Staying%20calm%20and%20composed%20when%20under%20pressure%20includes,able%20to%20instill%20confidence%20in%20those%20around%20you>.
- Levine, P. A., & Kline, M. (2002). *It won't hurt forever: Guiding your child through trauma*. EBSCOhost. Retrieved October 2, 2022, from <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=9c165fcd-842c-4e71-b94b-ed58f8b20517%40redis&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPXVybCxpCxl1aWQmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZI#AN=5966093&db=f5h>
- Lindberg, S. (2021, March 4). *How therapy for childhood trauma can help*. Healthline. Retrieved October 1, 2022, from <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/therapy-for-childhood-trauma>
- Lockhart, S. (2020). *Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies*. Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies. <https://dsltherapies.ca/>
- Loggins, B. (2022). *What is reality therapy?* Very well Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/reality-therapy-definition-types-techniques-and-efficacy-5191995>
- Lohman, L. (n.d.). *Social constructivism: Theory, benefits, techniques & examples*. Study. <https://study.com/learn/lesson/social-constructivism-theory-examples.html>

Mackesy, C. (2019). *The Boy, the mole, the fox and the horse*. Ebury Press.

MacKillop Family Services. (n.d.). *How childhood trauma affects learning and how to help children overcome it*. MacKillop Family Services.

<https://www.mackillop.org.au/stories/how-childhood-trauma-affects-learning-and-how-to-help-children-overcome-it#:~:text=Trauma%20can%20also%20affect%20a,little%20space%20left%20for%20learning>

Marchand, W. R., Smith, J., Nazarenko, E., Joubert, K., Black, H., Osborne, M., Andersen, S. J., Bell, K., Baldwin, S., Klinger, W., Connelly, H., Sheppard, S. R., & Hoopes, K. H. (2023). A pilot replication study of implementing an Equine-Assisted services program within a VA Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment Program. *Military Medicine*.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usad274>

Mayo Clinic Staff. (2018). *Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - symptoms and causes*. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>

McCullough, L., Risley-Curtiss, C., & Rorke, J. (2015). Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy: A pilot study of effect on posttraumatic stress symptoms in maltreated youth. *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 14(2), 158–173.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15289168.2015.1021658>

McFarland, C. (2013). Earn Your Horse's Respect with Clinton Anderson. *Horse Illustrated Magazine*. <https://www.horseillustrated.com/horse-experts-natural-horsemanship-advice-earn-your-horses-respect>

- Megusta. (2023, October 18). *Liberty Work with Horses: Unleashing the Power of Trust and Freedom*. Horse mastery pro.com. <https://horse mastery pro.com/liberty-work-with-horses.html>
- Meneses, C. W., & Greenberg, L. S. (2019). Emotion-focused therapy. In *Forgiveness and letting go in emotion-focused therapy*. (pp. 31–50). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0000144-003>
- Mertens, D. M. (2019). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*, 5th Edition. [VitalSource Bookshelf version]. Retrieved from vbk://9781544333755
- Meyer, J. F. (2017, February 17). *World Equestrian Games? you bet!* Horse and Rider. <https://horseandrider.com/western-horse-training-tips/world-equestrian-games-you-bet/>
- Miller, C. (2018). How trauma affects kids in school. *Child Mind Institute*, 1-15.
- Mueller, M. K., & McCullough, L. (2017). Effects of Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy on Post-Traumatic stress symptoms in Youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26(4), 1164–1172. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-016-0648-6>
- Mullenbach, L. E., Andrejewski, R. G., & Mowen, A. J. (2019). Connecting children to nature through residential outdoor environmental education. *Environmental Education Research*, 25(3), 365–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1458215>
- Naste, T. M., Price, M., Karol, J., Martin, L., Murphy, K., Miguel, J. L., & Spinazzola, J. (2017). Equine Facilitated Therapy for Complex Trauma (EFT-CT). *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 11(3), 289–303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-017-0187-3>
- Nelson, A., Signal, T., & Wilson, R. (2016). Equine assisted therapy and learning: A survey of methodologies in Australia. *Society & Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies*, 24(4), 337–357. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-12341418>

OSI-CAN. (2024). *Equine Assisted Therapy*. 211 Saskatchewan.

<https://sk.211.ca/services/being-among-horses/equine-assisted-therapy/>

Palmer, K. A. (2011, November 1). *Gestalt therapy in Psychological practice*. Inquiries Journal.

<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/595/gestalt-therapy-in-psychological-practice>

Palomar-Ciria, N., & Bello, H. J. (2023). Equine-Assisted Therapy in Post-Traumatic-Stress

Disorder: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Equine Veterinary*

Science, 128, 104871. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jevs.2023.104871>

Parish-Plass, N. (2021). Animal-assisted psychotherapy for developmental trauma through the

lens of interpersonal neurobiology of trauma: Creating connection with self and others.

Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 31(3), 302–325.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/int0000253>

Pelyva, I. Z., Kresák, R., Szovák, E., & Tóth, Á. L. (2020). How equine-assisted activities affect

the prosocial behaviour of adolescents. *International journal of environmental research*

and public health, 17(8), 2967. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17082967>

Pendry, P., Carr, A. M., & Vandagriff, J. L., (2018). Adolescents' affective and physiological

regulation shape negative behavior during challenging equine assisted learning activities.

Frontiers in Veterinary Science, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2018.00300>

Perkins, B. L. (2018). A pilot study assessing the effectiveness of equine-assisted learning with

adolescents. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 13(3), 298–305.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2018.1427168>

Perry, B. (2009). *More moments in time*. Athabasca University Press.

<https://www.aupress.ca/books/120158-more-moments-in-time/>

Peterson, A. (2020). *What is Hippotherapy*. American Hippotherapy Association.

<https://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/what-is-hippotherapy>

Peterson, S. (2018, June 11). *Effects*. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma/effects#:~:text=The%20child%20may%20struggle%20with%20self-regulation%20%28i.e.%2C%20knowing,ways%20that%20appear%20unpredictable%2C%20oppositional%2C%20volatile%2C%20and%20extreme.>

PHILO-notes. (2020, September 6). *Vygotsky's Social constructivism* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3lv-DBh4w8>

Pizzolongo, P. J., & Hunter, A. (2011). I Am Safe and Secure: Promoting Resilience in Young Children. *YC Young Children*, 66(2), 67–69.

Pohl, L. (2021, January 5). *Experts agree on renaming of equine-assisted services*.

Horsetalk.Co.Nz. <https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2021/01/06/experts-renaming-equine-assisted-services/>

Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan. (2016). Education—School Instruction Time for Students.

In *Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan* 1st ed., Vol. 2016, pp. 243–246.

Punzo, K., Skoglund, M., Carlsson, I., & Jormfeldt, H. (2022). Experiences of an Equine-Assisted Therapy Intervention among Children and Adolescents with Mental Illness in Sweden - A Nursing Perspective. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 43(12), 1080–1092.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2022.2126571>

Psychology Today. (2022). *Animal-Assisted Therapy*. Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapy-types/animal-assisted-therapy>

Qian, J. (2018, March 5). Qualitative data gathering and analysis. *Medium*.

<https://medium.com/@jiangtianqian/qualitative-data-gathering-and-analysis-f40e6726d4bd>

Ranch, D. H. (2021). What is a mare horse? Everything you should know. *Deep Hollow Ranch*.

<https://www.deephollowranch.com/mare-horse/>

Rempel, KD (2012). Mindfulness for Children and Youth: A Review of the Literature with an Argument for School-Based Implementation. *Canadian Journal of Counseling & Psychotherapy / Revue Canadienne de Counseling et de Psychotherapy*, 46 (3), 201–220.

Rivera, A., Jr MD. (2021, March 14). *What is talk therapy?* Thrive Talk. Retrieved October 8, 2022, from <https://www.thrivetalk.com/what-is-talk-therapy/>

Robinson, S. (2022, May). *Equine assistance as a psychotherapy tool for adolescents with trauma experiences*. RED: A Repository of Digital Collections. Retrieved September 18, 2022, from <https://red.mnstate.edu/thesis/663/>

Rodrigo-Claverol, M., Manuel-Canals, M., Lobato-Rincón, L. L., Rodriguez-Criado, N., Roman-Casenave, M., Musull-Dulcet, E., Rodrigo-Claverol, E., Pifarré, J., & Miró-Bernaus, Y. (2023). Human–Animal bond generated in a brief Animal-Assisted therapy intervention in adolescents with mental health disorders. *Animals: An Open Access Journal From MDPI*, 13(3), 358. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13030358>

Rosing, T., Malka, M., Brafman, D., & Fisher, P. (2022). A qualitative study of equine-assisted therapy for Israeli military and police veterans with PTSD —impact on self-regulation, bonding and hope. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30(6).

<https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13922>

- Sciaraffa, M. A., Zeanah, P. D., & Zeanah, C. H. (2017). Understanding and promoting resilience in the context of adverse childhood experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 46(3), 343–353. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0869-3>
- Seehusen, C. (2018). Using reality therapy with clients experiencing chronic pain. *International Journal of Choice Theory & Reality Therapy*, 38(1), 6–12.
- Seidman. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences, Third Edition: Vol. 3rd ed.* Teachers College Press.
- Shameli, L., Mehrabizadeh Honarmand, M., Naa'mi, A., & Davodi, I. (2019). The effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy on emotion regulation styles and severity of obsessive-compulsive symptoms in women with obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology*, 24(4), 356–369. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32598/ijpcp.24.4.456>
- Shanker, S. (2013). Calm, alert and happy. *Queen's Printer for Ontario*, 3, 27.
- Sheade, H. (Ed.). (2023, July 17). *Equine assisted counseling: a culturally-sensitive approach to mental health*. S.T.E.P.S. With Horses. <https://www.stepswithhorses.org/blog/equine-assisted-counseling-a-culturally-sensitive-approach-to-mental-health#:~:text=Engaging%20with%20equines%20allows%20for%20alternative%20modes%20of,language%2C%20grooming%2C%20and%20being%20present%20with%20the%20horses.>
- Shelef, A., Brafman, D., Rosing, T., Weizman, A., Stryjer, R., & Barak, Y. (2019). Equine assisted therapy for patients with post-traumatic stress disorder: A case series study. *Military Medicine*, 184(9/10), 394–399. <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usz036>

- Signal, T., Taylor, N., Botros, H., Prentice, K., & Lazarus, K. (2013). Whispering to Horses: Childhood Sexual Abuse, Depression and the Efficacy of Equine Facilitated Therapy. *Sexual Abuse in Australia & New Zealand*, 5(1), 24–32.
- Skillicorn, N. (2023). *Evidence that children are more creative than adults (and the opposite)*. Idea to Value. <https://www.ideatovalue.com/crea/nickskillicorn/2023/06/evidence-that-children-are-more-creative-than-adults-and-the-opposite/>
- Souilm, N. (2023). Equine-assisted therapy effectiveness in improving emotion regulation, self-efficacy, and perceived self-esteem of patients suffering from substance use disorders. *BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies*, 23(1), 363. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-023-04191-6>
- Stapleton, P., & Grimmett, K. T. (2021). Australian community and health professionals' perceptions of equine-assisted psychotherapy. *Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine (ECAM)*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/2217761>
- Stolz, I., Anneken, V., & Froböse, I. (2022). Measuring Equine-Assisted therapy: validation and confirmatory factor analysis of an ICF-Based Standardized Assessment-Tool. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(5), 2738. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052738>
- Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies*. (2020). Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies. <https://dsltherapies.ca/>
- Tallis, N. (2012, May 22). *Horses and human history*. The British Museum. Retrieved April 22, 2024, from <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/horses-and-human-history>

- Tedeschi, P. (2019). Chapter 8: Horses in the Treatment of Trauma. In *Transforming Trauma: Resilience and Healing Through Our Connections With Animals*. Purdue University Press.
- Thompson, K. (2018). Evidence for Applying Contemporary Gestalt Theories to a Business Consulting and Executive Coaching Practice. *Gestalt Review*, 22(2), 249–263.
<https://doi.org/10.5325/gestaltreview.22.2.0249>
- Townsend, R., & Hood, M. (2019). Horse talk: Equine based learning programs and their engagement with individuals. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 59(2), 254– 268.
- Truscott, D. (2010). Gestalt. In D. Truscott, *becoming an effective psychotherapist: Adopting a theory of psychotherapy that's right for you and your client* (pp. 83-96). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/12064-006>
- Turner, S., & Harder, N. (2018). Psychological Safe Environment: A concept analysis. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 18, 47–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2018.02.004>
- van der Kolk, B. A., Roth, S., Pelcovitz, D., Sunday, S., & Spinazzola, J. (2005). Disorders of extreme stress: The empirical foundation of a complex adaptation to trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 18(5), 389–399. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20047>
- Vosniadou, S. (2003). How Children Learn? In *Successful schooling* (pp. 16–33). Discovery Publishing House.
https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=tJpD4AAa_GoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA16&dq=when+children+learn+best&ots=f18bYRCTWN&sig=d26Jx4CQnF08QJvZUrAGBH3K2fw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

- Watson, J. C., Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2011). Humanistic and experiential theories of psychotherapy. In *History of psychotherapy: Continuity and change* (2nd ed., pp. 141–172). <https://doi.org/10.1037/12353-005>
- White-Lewis, S. (2019, September 27). Equine-assisted therapies using horses as healers: A concept analysis. *Nursing Open*, 7(1), 58–67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.377>
- Wild Blue Psychology. (2021). *Services*. Wild Blue Psychology Services. <https://wildbluepsychology.com/services/>
- Wubbolding, R. E. (2010). Reality therapy. *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470479216.corpsy0780>
- Yeary, J. (2018). The Calm in the Storm: Supporting Young Children before, during, and after a Community Disaster or Trauma. *YC Young Children*, 73(5), 84–86.
- Yorke, J. (2010). The significance of human–animal relationships as modulators of trauma effects in children: a developmental neurobiological perspective. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(5), 559–570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430802181189>
- Yorke, J., Adams, C., & Coady, N. (2008, January 1). Therapeutic Value of Equine-Human Bonding in Recovery from Trauma. *Anthrozoos*, 21(1), 17–30.
- Yorke, J., Nugent, W. R., Strand, E. B., Bolen, R. M., Im, P., & Davis, C. (2013). Equine-assisted therapy and its impact on cortisol levels of children and horses: a pilot study and meta-analysis. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(7), 874–894. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2012.693486>
- Xue-Ling Tan, V., & Simmonds, J. G. (2017). Parent Perceptions of Psychosocial Outcomes of Equine-Assisted Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of*

Autism and Developmental Disorders, 48(3), 759–769. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3399-3>

Appendix A – Liability Waiver

CLIENT INTAKE FORM 18 + YEARS OF AGE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RISK AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY (AR-0103)

For Participants Over the Age of Majority in the Province or Territory in which the Equine Activities are provided by the Host (Participants over 18 years of age in Saskatchewan).

WARNING: THIS AGREEMENT WILL AFFECT YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS. READ IT CAREFULLY!

The Client Must Read and Understand this Waiver Prior to participating in Equine Activities. The following waiver of all claims, release from all liability, assumption of all risks, agreement not to sue and other terms of this agreement is entered into by me -

_____, (Name of adult participant) and for the benefit of **Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies**, its directors, officers, employees, volunteers, business operators, agents, and site property owners or lessees (the "Host"). Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, "Equine Activities" includes coaching and training of on ground only activities with said equine for the adult participant.

Initial each item below after reading and understanding each item:

1. _____ I am aware that there are inherent dangers, hazards and risks ("Risks") associated with "Equine Activities" and injuries resulting from these "Risks" are a common occurrence. I am aware that the "Risks" of "Equine Activities" mean those dangerous conditions which are an integral part of "Equine Activities", including, but not limited to: (a) the propensity of any equine to behave in ways that may result in injury, harm or death to persons on or around them and to potentially collide with, bite or kick other animals, people or objects; (b) the unpredictability of an equine's reaction to such things as sounds, sudden movement, tremors, vibrations, unfamiliar objects, persons or other animals and hazards such as subsurface objects; and (c) the potential for other participants to behave in a negligent manner that may contribute to injury to themselves or others, including failing to act within their abilities to maintain control over an equine. (d) the potential of natural or man-made hazards being present that can cause me harm, **including communicable disease**.

2. _____ I freely accept and fully assume all responsibility for all "Risks" and possibilities of all personal injury, sickness, disease, medical payments, death, property damage or loss resulting from my participation in "Equine Activities". I agree that although the "Host" has taken steps to reduce the "Risks" and increase the safety of the "Equine Activities", it is not possible for the "Host" to make the "Equine Activities" 100%, completely safe. I accept these "Risks" and agree to the terms of this waiver even if the "Host" is found to be negligent or in breach of any duty of care or any obligation to myself participation in "Equine Activities".

3. _____ In addition to consideration given to the "Host" for my participation in "Equine Activities", I and my heirs, next of kin, executors, administrators and assigns agree: (a) to waive all claims that the Participant has or may have in the future against the "Host"; (b) to release and forever discharge the "Host" from all liability for personal injury, death, property damage, or loss that I, adult Participant, or our "Legal Representatives" might suffer as a result of the my participation in "Equine Activities" due to any cause, including, but not limited to negligence (failure to use such care as a reasonably prudent and careful person would use under similar circumstances), breach of any duty imposed by law, breach of contract or mistake or error in judgment of the "Host"; and (c) to be liable for and to hold harmless and indemnify the "Host" from all actions, proceedings, claims, damages, costs demands, including court costs and costs on a solicitor and own client basis, and liabilities of whatsoever nature or kind arising out of or in any way connected with the clients participation in "Equine Activities".

4. _____ I agree that this waiver and all terms contained herein are governed exclusively and in all respects by the laws of the Province or Territory of Canada in which the "Equine Activities" are provided by the "Host". I hereby irrevocably submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the courts of that Province or Territory of Canada, and I agree that no other court can exercise jurisdiction over the terms and claims referred to herein. Any litigation to enforce this waiver will be instituted in the Province or Territory of Canada in which the "Equine Activities" are provided by the "Host".

5. _____ I confirm that I have had sufficient time to read and understand this waiver in its entirety. I understand that this agreement represents the entire agreement between the "Host" and myself is binding on myself, and our "Legal Representatives".

Please Print Clearly

Client Name _____

Client signature _____

Signed this _____ Day of _____ 20____

Witness Name _____

Witness Signature _____

Signed this _____ Day of _____ 20____

Appendix B – Media Release form for adults 18+ years

I permit images or audio of myself, captured during Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies through audio, photo, and digital camera, to be used solely for the purposes to promote Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies Program. I understand that images of myself may be used in print publications, online publications, presentations, websites, and social media. Images of only good taste shall be shared or used. I also understand that no royalty, fee, or other compensation shall become payable to me because of such use.

Clients Name: _____

Clients Signature: _____

Date: _____

The MEDIA Release Form for adult participants will be effective from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023.

Lockhart, S. (2020). *SuccessRanch:DSL Therapies*. SuccessRanch:DSL Therapies.
<https://dsltherapies.ca/>

Appendix C– Farm Rules / Dress Code

Farm Rules

- We tie horses with a quick-release knot on wall rails. Please ask for support if you are unfamiliar with this knot.
- When working with the horses, we will WALK, KEEP OUR VOICES QUIET, AND WILL MOVE IN A CAUTIOUS CONTROLLED MANNER.
- We leave all the flammables in our vehicles.
- Drugs and Alcohol will not be allowed on the premises.

- If you or your horse makes a mess, clean it up - If you use it, take care of it - If you borrow it, return it

- If you open it, close it - If you move it, put it back - If you turn it on, turn it off - If you break it, tell someone - If it doesn't concern you, mind your own business.

_____ Signature of Client

Dress Code

Dress in clothing suitable and comfortable to work around horses in as well as easy to wash and repair if soiled or torn.

Please ensure that you wear proper attire for the current weather conditions. Even though we work in an indoor facility, the air is still similar to the air outdoors. Please consider that when coming out; If it is -5 degrees outside, it will be -5 degrees inside - just no wind!

Comfortable sleeve t-shirts are ideal, although too baggy and they might get caught or hang up on something, then you could get injured.

Comfortable jeans are okay, wear pants appropriate for working around horses. Remember if they are too loose or baggy, they could get caught on something and easily torn. Shoes must be closed toe (think runners or boots). **ABSOLUTELY NO FLIP-FLOPS/SANDALS.** Rubber Boots, low-heeled boots, and running shoes are ok.

Dress Modestly. The directors and staff will be respectful of you as an individual; please be respectful of them in return. Instructors, directors, and staff will stand next to you for assistance and dress with safety in mind and modesty. For example, low-cut jeans are currently fashionable and stylish, although when you are working with horses, it is easy for them to slide down and show too much. The same is true with low-cut blouses, bending over to brush a horse, pick up a foot or pick up hay can easily show more than intended in this type of environment and activity. Dress according to the weather. **Winter - mitts, toques, winter jackets, Boots. Summer - T-shirt and Jeans/shorts, runners.**

Remember, equestrian facilities can be dirty and a harsh environment for clothing; please don't wear something that can become ruined if it gets stained, torn, or damaged.

_____ Signature of client

Lockhart, S. (2020). *SuccessRanch:DSL therapies*. SuccessRanch:DSL Therapies.
<https://dsltherapies.ca/>



Appendix D: Certification of Ethical Approval

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 25202

Principal Investigator:

Ms. Stephanie Lockhart, Graduate Student

Faculty of Health Disciplines\Master of Counselling

Supervisor/Project Team:

Dr. Murray Anderson (Supervisor)

Project Title:

Therapy Is More Than Talk: A Qualitative Research Study on How Equine Assisted Psychotherapy Is Therapeutic for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma.

Effective Date: March 31, 2023

Expiry Date: March 30, 2024

Restrictions:

Any modification/amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval prior to proceeding.

Any adverse event or incidental findings must be reported to the AUREB as soon as possible, for review.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

An Ethics Final Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

Approved by:

Date: March 31, 2023

Paul Jerry, Chair

Faculty of Health Disciplines, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

Appendix E: Referrals for Local Mental Health Services

Mental Health Services
In an Emergency call 911 or proceed to the nearest emergency medical centre
Yorkton Regional Health Centre 270 Bradbrooke Dr, Yorkton, (306) 782-2401
Mental Health Services - Yorkton 270 Bradbrooke Dr, Yorkton Toll Free 1-888-989-8444 or 306-786-0558
SIGN Yorkton – Walk-in Counselling Inquiries: 306-782-1440 SIGN Next Steps Program –previously known as Sexual Assault Counselling, this program provides free specialized counselling for women, men, youth and children who have been victims of sexual violence and/or sexual abuse. Inquiries: 306-783-9428; nextsteps@signyorkton.ca
Online Therapy Available to Saskatchewan Residents www.onlinetherapyuser.ca
Healthline 811 confidential, 24-hr health and mental health services via telephone and online Saskatchewan Suicide Hotline 211
To locate services in other parts of the Saskatchewan Health Authority https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/Services-Locations/Pages/Home.aspx
Private Psychologists in Yorkton Area
Evolve Functional Rehabilitation and Performance - Elizabeth Hove (306) 782-5194
Wallis Psychology Yorkton -Rebecca Wallis (306)620-6288
Grayston Counselling Service Yorkton -Norm Grayston (306)782-2151
Pure Fusion Health Services Yorkton -Jeff Heshka (306)782-7820

Appendix F – Equine Behavioural Assessment



EAL Horse Evaluation / Checklist

Name: _____ Age: _____ Previously used for: _____

Breed: _____ Color/Markings: _____

Owners should demonstrate what the horse is capable of. Safety is always first. Be aware of what the horse's body language is saying at all times during the evaluation. Is the horse safe? First ask yourself does the horse..... and check off yes or no. Then pick from 1 to 5, with number 1 being very good , 3 being moderate, 5 being bad.

Tied to the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Patience							
Does horse tie							
Does he pull							
Does horse handle 2 or more people around him							
Accepts Brushing							
React when approaching							
Is respectful							
Is trusting							
Interaction - Personal Zone							
Interaction - Intimate Zone							
Interaction - Social Zone							
Does horse move over using direct pressure & release on both sides							
Does horse move over using indirect pressure & release on both sides							
Pressure & Release -moves over both sides without releasing pressure							
Pressure & Release - moves with a person on each side							
Reacts when patted everywhere							
Reacts when jumping up & down or any quick movements beside horse							
Reacts to loud voice							
Reacts to rope around legs, back, neck							
Reacts to sacking out on rail (flag, blanket)							
Reacts to running up to horse							
Has definite boundaries							
Aware of surroundings							
Will horse pick up his feet							
Other							

Overview:

Off the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lead from left side							
Does horse lead from right side							
Does horse lead with hand on snap							
Does horse lead with extra long rope & what does he do when steps on it							
Is the horse the leader							
Does horse stop on whoa							
Does horse back up							
Does horse back up with pressure on right shoulder							
Does horse back up with pressure on left shoulder							
Does horse back up with pressure on both shoulders							
Does horse back up with 2-4 people all around him							
Does horse follow a feel (leading / any pull)							
Does horse ground tie							
Does horse turn left							
Does horse turn right							
Does horse move over with direct pressure & release - both sides							
Does horse move over with indirect pressure & release - both sides							
Does horse react when pressure is not released							
Does horse react to jumping up and down or any quick approach							
Does horse react when you have mixed messaging							
Does horse react when you have lots of pressure (aggressive)							
Does horse trot when leading							
Does horse trot with other person running beside							
Can you sack horse out - what are his reactions (flag, blanket)							
Does horse move hip around							
Does horse react to rope- desensitization in legs and body							
Is horse sluggish							
Is horse reactive							
Does horse React to obstacles							
Does he react to surrounding							

Overview:



Lounge and /or Round Pen:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lounge							
Does horse round pen							
Is horse willing to move forward							
Does horse come into you							
Is horse respectful							
Is horse trustful							
Responsiveness - Is horse sluggish							
Responsiveness - Is horse Reactive							
Aware of surroundings							
Can you catch horse							
Is horse easy to catch							
Is horse rideable							
Other							

Overview:

Note: Sometimes horses appear to be respectful until pressure is added or the horse is asked to do something they are not familiar with. The de-escalation time of the horse will tell you a lot about him and his attitude. It will help determine what you are dealing with. But you have to be aware of what you are willing to work with and you must always be evaluating:

- Is the horse safe and will the horse be safe for the participants?
- When working the horses, are they getting better or worse?
- How did the horses react to the different situations?
- How does the horse react with different people?
- How patient is the horse?
- When escalating how quickly does the horse come down?
- What does the horse do when you take the halter off?
- How much time will you have to invest in re-schooling?

Deal Breakers:

- 1) Safety is number one
- 2) If horse is aggressive towards humans: kicking, rearing, biting, pulling back, striking.
- 3) the time that you have to put in to make this an EAL horse. (How much re-schooling would the horse need to be suitable for an EAL lesson horse)
- 4) health issues
- 5) Other

Cartier Farms - equine assisted learning. (2002). *What is equine assisted learning?*
 Cartier equine assisted learning. <https://www.cartierfarms.ca/what-is-eal.html>

Appendix G – Session Layout

Sessions have been adopted through Cartier Farms EAL program and adapted to Success Ranch: D.S.L. Therapies EAP program.

Session 1; April 22, 2023

Theme: Relationship Building and Skill Development

Objective:

- Introduce group members, therapist, and program assistants.
- Introduction to developing relationships.
- Introduction to basic skill development (with the horse)
- Evaluation of participants abilities, horse handling skills, and addressing safety concerns

Discussion:

- Introduction to the program and the EAP session
 - Go over general equine safety.
 - Review the expectations for the session.
 - Review of the arena rules and dress code
 - Participants are asked “what is your personality like?”
 - Briefing of the proposed activities
 - Partnering participants

Activities:

- EAP In Arena Activity
 - In teams of two, groups will choose a horse, and as a team, navigate through a variety of stations with their horse partner such as:
 - Grooming
 - Haltering
 - Stepping on a glove
 - Tying the quick release knot
 - Maneuvering over rails
 - Pressure and Release
 - Participants will be encouraged to write down a variety of personality traits that their chosen horse might possess.
 - Encouraged to change out horses throughout the session.
- Debriefing Activity
 - Conversations around:
 - Horses’ personality – do the horse remind you of anyone?
 - What kind of friend would these horses make?
 - If the horse was a human, how would you treat said person?
 - Pressure and Release
 - How much pressure was needed to move the horse?
 - What did that pressure look like?

- Were you asking enough? Asking too much?
- How was the horse responding?
- What happens if you ask a person to move, but continue to keep pushing?
- Picking of word from the word wall

Materials

- 4 horses (Jackson, Lady, Red, Honey)
- Obstacle materials
- Word Wall
- Post Debrief Interview – Paper copies AND electronic means to online interview.

Intended outcomes.

- Introduction of relationship development
- Value associated with teams (either people and people or people and horse)
- Observation of personalities and ‘what qualities makes a good friend?’
- Learning of basic horsemanship skills
- General comfort and excitement generated.
- Confidence gained through accomplishing new tasks and gaining new knowledge.

Session 2; April 29, 2023

Theme: Teamwork and Communication

Objective:

- Learning about self as a part of teams or relationships
- Developing and exploring negotiation skills
- Exploring effective communication strategies
- Further Relationship development

Discussion:

- Welcome and review from session one.
- Briefing of the proposed activities
- Partnering participants
- Rules for the session

Activities:

- EAP In Arena Activity
 - In teams of two, groups will choose a horse, and as a team, navigate through a variety of stations with their horse partner such as:
 - Obstacle Course
 - Puzzle Table
 - Participants will be given the rules of:
 - Holding their rope at the knot

- No team members to be stepping over the rails (boundaries are important!)
- No team member to knock over any pylons or flowerpots.
- Participants cannot drop their ropes.
 - If a rule is broken, the team receives a clothespin as a reminder of the rule.
- Upon completion of a station, the team is encouraged to go to the puzzle table and put puzzle pieces into their bag.
 - After 30 minutes of navigating through stations, teams will be encouraged to try and build their puzzle.
 - Soon they realize they need to negotiate with other teams to build their puzzles.
- Debriefing Activity
 - Conversations around:
 - How people perceived the session
 - Did teams formulate plans?
 - Were they actively listening to their teammates?
 - Were they aware of their horse?
 - Was the horse a part of the team?
 - Did participants self-impose boundaries that were not there?
 - Did anyone earn bonus puzzle pieces?
 - How did the negotiations go?
 - How can we negotiate if we do not have tangible items to ‘trade?’
 - Did you allow your horse to choose puzzle pieces?
 - Picking of word from the word wall

Materials

- 4 horses (Jackson, Lady, Red, Honey)
- Obstacle materials & Puzzles
- Word Wall
- Post Debrief Interview – Paper copies AND electronic means to online interview.

Intended outcomes.

- Boundaries
- Active listening
- Negotiation
- Communication
- Articulation
- Reading body language

Session 3; May 6, 2023

Theme: Body Language & Communication

Objective:

- Understanding communication through body language
- Relationship development
- Power of understanding

Discussion:

- Welcome and review from session two.
- Briefing of the proposed activities
 - Importance of body language and communication
- Partnering participants
- Expectations for the session

Activities:

- EAP In Arena Activity
 - In teams of two, groups will choose a horse, and as a team, navigate through a variety of stations with their horse partner such as:
 - Obstacle Course
 - Participants will be given the rules of:
 - Once entering the arena, no verbal communication is allowed.
 - All communication must be done silently.
 - Explained as playing a game of charades.
 - If a rule is broken, the team receives a clothespin as a reminder of the rule.
- Debriefing Activity
 - Conversations around:
 - Can you talk with your eyes?
 - How do you impact others with your body language?
 - Did your horse understand what you were asking?
 - What did the horse's body language tell you?
 - Were you clear on what you wanted your teammate to do?
 - Picking of word from the word wall

Materials

- 4 horses (Jackson, Lady, Red, Honey)
- Obstacle materials
- Word Wall
- Post Debrief Interview – Paper copies AND electronic means to online interview.

Intended outcomes.

- Respecting the power of body language
- Enhanced communication skills
- Listening and Observing

- Leadership
- Problem Solving Skills

Session 4; May 13, 2023

Theme: Appropriate Assertiveness & Decision Making

Objective:

- Appropriate assertiveness
- Leadership
- Respect
- Trust
- Self-Evaluation
- Having Choices
- Making Decisions

Discussion:

- Welcome and review from session three.
- Briefing of the proposed activities
- Partnering participants

Activities:

- EAP In Arena Activity
 - In teams of two, groups will choose a horse, and as a team, navigate through a variety of stations with their horse partner such as:
 - Obstacle Course
 - Participants will be given the rules of:
 - Observe the horses as they are free in the arena.
 - Take note of the horses' behaviours when they are not haltered or tied.
 - Teams are asked to go catch their horse, bring their horse to Stephanie, and then begin navigating through the stations.
 - Stations will have the option to do:
 - Basic communication
 - Two ropes and not stepping over a rail.
 - Silent Communication
 - Without a halter on the horse
- Debriefing Activity
 - Conversations around:
 - What were the horses doing when they were free?
 - Did anyone ask for help or support in catching their horse?
 - How did you get your halter on? Did you refer to Charlie Horse?
 - Did you remember to bring your horse, once caught, back to Stephanie?

- How did it feel going into the horse's world today?
 - How well did you work with your team?
 - Tell me about how you and your partner communicated to catch your horse?
 - What choices did you choose to do the stations?
 - Was there trust and respect within the team? People and horse?
 - Which is the most 'difficult' way to do an obstacle?
- Picking of word from the word wall

Materials

- 4 horses (Jackson, Lady, Red, Honey)
- Obstacle materials
- Word Wall
- Post Debrief Interview – Paper copies AND electronic means to online interview.

Intended outcomes.

- Appropriate assertiveness
- Self-evaluation
- Leadership
- Recognized value in motivation towards your teammates.
- Choosing and decision making
- Confidence
- Patience
- Self-discipline
- Self-control
- Choices and Consequences are part of daily life.

Appendix H – Narrative Interview Questions

1. Tell me about YOUR experience from today's session.
2. How do you envision a session like you just experienced to being beneficial, or not, for children under the age of ten with trauma?
3. What horse did you/your team choose? Why?
4. Referring to the word board – Are there any words that stand out for you in relation to today's session?
5. What role do you envision EAP playing, if any, in a child's healing journey post traumatic event?
6. Tell me about your favourite moment in the arena.
7. Tell me about any challenges you may have faced during today's session.

Appendix I – Word Wall Words

Compromise	Steady	Colorful	Leadership
Ability	Motivation	Imagination	Insight
Possibilities	Fun	Dramatic	Reassuring
Outcomes	Playing	Joyful	Assurance
Creative thinking	Active	Amazing	Serenity
Inspirational	Energetic	Awesome	Tranquility
Artistic	Supportive	Loves horses	Faith
Understanding	Encouraging	Proud	Hope
Mindful	Fortunate	Honour	I don't know
Deadly	Super	Wicked	Friendship
Boundaries	Evaluation	Education	Spectacular
Relationship building	Consequences	Learning	Humour
Appropriate assertiveness	Accountability	Wisdom	Wittiness
Pressure and release	Epic	Experience	Attachment
Direction	Happy	Knowledge	Love
Compassion	Kindness	Connections	

Cartier Farms - Equine Assisted Learning. (2002). *What is equine assisted learning?* Cartier equine assisted learning. <https://www.cartierfarms.ca/what-is-eal.html>

Lockhart, S. (2020). *SuccessRanch:DSL therapies*. SuccessRanch:DSL Therapies. <https://dsltherapies.ca/>

Appendix J: Completed Equine Behavioural Assessments

EAL Horse Evaluation / Checklist
 Name: Jackson Age: _____ Previously used for: _____
 Breed: _____ Color/Markings: _____

Owners should demonstrate what the horse is capable of. Safety is always first. Be aware of what the horse is body language is saying at all times during the evaluation. Is the horse safe? Free ask yourself does the horse ... and check off yes or no. Then tick from 1 to 5, with number 1 being very good - 3 being moderate, 4 being bad.

Tied to the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Patience	✓						
Does horse lie	✓						
Does he pull	✓						
Does horse handle 2 or more people around him	✓						
Accepts Blending	✓						
React when approaching	✓						
Is respectful	✓						
Is leading	✓						
Interaction - Personal Zone	✓						
Interaction - Intimate Zone	✓						
Interaction - Social Zone	✓						
Does horse move over using direct pressure & release on both sides	✓						
Does horse move over using indirect pressure & release on both sides	✓						
Pressure & Release - moves over both sides without releasing pressure	✓						
Pressure & Release - moves with a person on each side	✓						
Reacts when pulled everywhere	✓						
Reacts when jumping up & down or any quick movements beside horse	✓						
Reacts to lead voice	✓						
Reacts to rope around legs, back, neck	✓						
Reacts to walking out on rail (flag, blanket)	✓						
Reacts to running up to horse	✓						
Has definite boundaries	✓						
Aware of surroundings	✓						
Will horse pick up his feet	✓						
Other							

Off the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lead from left side	✓						
Does horse lead from right side	✓						
Does horse lead with hand on whip	✓						
Does horse lead with extra long rope & what does he do when steps on it	✓						
Is the horse the leader	✓						
Does horse stop on whips	✓						
Does horse back up	✓						
Does horse back up with pressure on right shoulder	✓						
Does horse back up with pressure on left shoulder	✓						
Does horse back up with pressure on both shoulders	✓						
Does horse back up with 2-4 people all around him	✓						
Does horse follow a lead (leading / any pull)	✓						
Does horse ground tie	✓						
Does horse turn left	✓						
Does horse turn right	✓						
Does horse move over with direct pressure & release - both sides	✓						
Does horse move over with indirect pressure & release - both sides	✓						
Does horse react when pressure is not released	✓						
Does horse react when jumping up and down or any quick approach	✓						
Does horse react when you have moved messaging	✓						
Does horse react when you have lots of pressure (aggressive)	✓						
Does horse trot when leading	✓						
Does horse trot with other person running beside	✓						
Can you sack horse out - what are his reactions (flag, blanket)	✓						
Does horse move hip around	✓						
Does horse react to rope desensitization in legs and body	✓						
Is horse sluggish	✓						
Is horse reactive	✓						
Does horse React to obstacles	✓						
Does he need to surrender	✓						

Lounge and for Round Pen:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lounge	✓						
Does horse round pen	✓						
Is horse willing to move forward	✓						
Does horse come into you	✓						
Is horse respectful	✓						
Is horse trustful	✓						
Responsiveness - Is horse sluggish	✓						
Responsiveness - Is horse Reactive	✓						
Aware of surroundings	✓						
Can you catch horse	✓						
Is horse easy to catch	✓						
Is horse trainable	✓						
Other							

Overview:

Great Horse!
 Jackson
 Tom

Note: Sometimes horses appear to be respectful until pressure is added or the horse is asked to do something they are not familiar with. The de-escalation time of the horse will tell you a lot about him and his attitude. It will help determine what you are dealing with. But you have to be aware of what you are willing to work with and you must always be evaluating.

- Is the horse safe and will the horse be safe for the participants?
- When working the horses, are they getting better or worse?
- How did the horses react to the different situations?
- How does the horse react with different people?
- How patient is the horse?
- When escalating how quickly does the horse come down?
- What does the horse do when you take the halter off?
- How much time will you have to invest in re-schooling?

Deal Breakers:

- 1) Safety
- 2) If horse is aggressive towards humans: kicking, rearing, biting, pulling back, striking.
- 3) the time that you have to put in to make this an EAL horse. (How much re-schooling would the horse need to be suitable for an EAL lesson horse)
- 4) health issues
- 5) Other

EAL Horse Evaluation / Checklist
 Name: Kacey Age: _____ Previously used for: _____
 Breed: _____ Color/Markings: _____

Owners should demonstrate what the horse is capable of. Safety is always first. Be aware of what the horse is body language is saying at all times during the evaluation. Is the horse safe? Free ask yourself does the horse ... and check off yes or no. Then tick from 1 to 5, with number 1 being very good - 3 being moderate, 4 being bad.

Tied to the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Patience	✓						
Does horse lie	✓						
Does he pull	✓						
Does horse handle 2 or more people around him	✓						
Accepts Blending	✓						
React when approaching	✓						
Is respectful	✓						
Is leading	✓						
Interaction - Personal Zone	✓						
Interaction - Intimate Zone	✓						
Interaction - Social Zone	✓						
Does horse move over using direct pressure & release on both sides	✓						
Does horse move over using indirect pressure & release on both sides	✓						
Pressure & Release - moves over both sides without releasing pressure	✓						
Pressure & Release - moves with a person on each side	✓						
Reacts when pulled everywhere	✓						
Reacts when jumping up & down or any quick movements beside horse	✓						
Reacts to lead voice	✓						
Reacts to rope around legs, back, neck	✓						
Reacts to walking out on rail (flag, blanket)	✓						
Reacts to running up to horse	✓						
Has definite boundaries	✓						
Aware of surroundings	✓						
Will horse pick up his feet	✓						
Other							

Off the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lead from left side	✓						
Does horse lead from right side	✓						
Does horse lead with hand on whip	✓						
Does horse lead with extra long rope & what does he do when steps on it	✓						
Is the horse the leader	✓						
Does horse stop on whips	✓						
Does horse back up	✓						
Does horse back up with pressure on right shoulder	✓						
Does horse back up with pressure on left shoulder	✓						
Does horse back up with pressure on both shoulders	✓						
Does horse back up with 2-4 people all around him	✓						
Does horse follow a lead (leading / any pull)	✓						
Does horse ground tie	✓						
Does horse turn left	✓						
Does horse turn right	✓						
Does horse move over with direct pressure & release - both sides	✓						
Does horse move over with indirect pressure & release - both sides	✓						
Does horse react when pressure is not released	✓						
Does horse react when jumping up and down or any quick approach	✓						
Does horse react when you have moved messaging	✓						
Does horse react when you have lots of pressure (aggressive)	✓						
Does horse trot when leading	✓						
Does horse trot with other person running beside	✓						
Can you sack horse out - what are his reactions (flag, blanket)	✓						
Does horse move hip around	✓						
Does horse react to rope desensitization in legs and body	✓						
Is horse sluggish	✓						
Is horse reactive	✓						
Does horse React to obstacles	✓						
Does he need to surrender	✓						

Lounge and for Round Pen:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lounge	✓						
Does horse round pen	✓						
Is horse willing to move forward	✓						
Does horse come into you	✓						
Is horse respectful	✓						
Is horse trustful	✓						
Responsiveness - Is horse sluggish	✓						
Responsiveness - Is horse Reactive	✓						
Aware of surroundings	✓						
Can you catch horse	✓						
Is horse easy to catch	✓						
Is horse trainable	✓						
Other							

Overview:

Reacts/Attentive to her surrounding
 Expressive but respectful

Kacey
 Tom

Note: Sometimes horses appear to be respectful until pressure is added or the horse is asked to do something they are not familiar with. The de-escalation time of the horse will tell you a lot about him and his attitude. It will help determine what you are dealing with. But you have to be aware of what you are willing to work with and you must always be evaluating.

- Is the horse safe and will the horse be safe for the participants?
- When working the horses, are they getting better or worse?
- How did the horses react to the different situations?
- How does the horse react with different people?
- How patient is the horse?
- When escalating how quickly does the horse come down?
- What does the horse do when you take the halter off?
- How much time will you have to invest in re-schooling?

Deal Breakers:

- 1) Safety
- 2) If horse is aggressive towards humans: kicking, rearing, biting, pulling back, striking.
- 3) the time that you have to put in to make this an EAL horse. (How much re-schooling would the horse need to be suitable for an EAL lesson horse)
- 4) health issues
- 5) Other

EAL Horse Evaluation / Checklist
Name: Lady Age: _____ Previously used for: _____
Breed: _____ Color/Markings: _____

Checklist should demonstrate what the horse is capable of. Safety is always first. The degree of what the horse's body language is saying at all times during the evaluation. Is the horse safe? First pass yourself down the horse... and check off yes or no. Then tick from 1 to 5, with number 1 being very good, 2 being moderate, 3 being bad.

Tied to the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Patience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does he pull	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse handle 2 or more people around him	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Accepts Blowing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
React when approaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is respectful	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is leading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Interaction - Personal Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Interaction - Intimate Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Interaction - Social Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over using direct pressure & release on both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over using indirect pressure & release on both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Pressure & Release - moves over both sides without releasing pressure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Pressure & Release - moves with a person on each side	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts when pulled everywhere	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts when jumping up & down or any quick movements beside horse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to loud noise	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to rope around legs, back, neck	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to backing out on rail (flag, blanket)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to running up to horse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Has definite boundaries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Aware of surroundings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Will horse pick up his feet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Other							

Overview:
wonderful mare, slightly more on sluggish side but still lively. sometimes stubborn
Lee Ann Tar

Off the Rail

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lead from left side	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lead from right side	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lead with hand on trap	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lead with extra long rope & what does he do when steps on it	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is the horse leader	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse stop on whom	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with pressure on right shoulder	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with pressure on left shoulder	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with pressure on both shoulders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with 2-4 people all around him	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse follow a lead (leading / any pull)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse ground tie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse turn left	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse turn right	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over with direct pressure & release - both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over with indirect pressure & release - both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react when pressure is not released	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react to jumping up and down or any quick approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react when you have moved messaging	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react when you have lots of pressure (aggressive)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse trot when leading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse trot with other person running beside	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Can you sack horse out - what are his reactions (flag, blanket)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move hip around	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react to rope - desensitization in legs and body	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse sluggish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse reactive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react to obstacles	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does he react to surrounding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Other							

Overview:

Lounge and/or Round Pen:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lounge	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse round pen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse willing to move forward	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse come into you	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse respectful	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse tractable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Responsiveness - Is horse sluggish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Responsiveness - Is horse Reactive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Aware of surroundings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Can you catch horse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse easy to catch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse reliable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Other							

Note: Sometimes horses appear to be respectful until pressure is added or the horse is asked to do something they are not familiar with. The de-escalation time of the horse will tell you a lot about him and his attitude. It will help determine what you are dealing with. But you have to be aware of what you are willing to work with and you must always be evaluating:

- Is the horse safe and will the horse be safe for the participants?
- When working the horses, are they getting better or worse?
- How did the horses react to the different situations?
- How does the horse react with different people?
- How patient is the horse?
- When escalating how quickly does the horse come down?
- What does the horse do when you take the halter off?
- How much time will you have to invest in re-schooling?

Deal Breakers:

- 1) Safety is number one
- 2) If horse is aggressive towards humans: kicking, rearing, biting, pulling back, striking
- 3) The time that you have to put in to make this an EAL horse. (How much re-schooling would the horse need to be suitable for an EAL lesson horse)
- 4) Health issues
- 5) Other

EAL Horse Evaluation / Checklist
Name: Red Age: _____ Previously used for: _____
Breed: _____ Color/Markings: _____

Checklist should demonstrate what the horse is capable of. Safety is always first. The degree of what the horse's body language is saying at all times during the evaluation. Is the horse safe? First pass yourself down the horse... and check off yes or no. Then tick from 1 to 5, with number 1 being very good, 2 being moderate, 3 being bad.

Tied to the Rail:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Patience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does he pull	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse handle 2 or more people around him	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Accepts Blowing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
React when approaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is respectful	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is leading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Interaction - Personal Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Interaction - Intimate Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Interaction - Social Zone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over using direct pressure & release on both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over using indirect pressure & release on both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Pressure & Release - moves over both sides without releasing pressure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Pressure & Release - moves with a person on each side	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts when pulled everywhere	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts when jumping up & down or any quick movements beside horse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to loud noise	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to rope around legs, back, neck	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to backing out on rail (flag, blanket)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Reacts to running up to horse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Has definite boundaries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Aware of surroundings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Will horse pick up his feet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Other							

Overview:
- Lovely gelding, very sensitive horse, but, very respectful!
Lee Ann Tar

Off the Rail

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lead from left side	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lead from right side	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lead with hand on trap	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse lead with extra long rope & what does he do when steps on it	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is the horse leader	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse stop on whom	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with pressure on right shoulder	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with pressure on left shoulder	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with pressure on both shoulders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse back up with 2-4 people all around him	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse follow a lead (leading / any pull)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse ground tie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse turn left	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse turn right	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over with direct pressure & release - both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move over with indirect pressure & release - both sides	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react when pressure is not released	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react to jumping up and down or any quick approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react when you have moved messaging	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react when you have lots of pressure (aggressive)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse trot when leading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse trot with other person running beside	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Can you sack horse out - what are his reactions (flag, blanket)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse move hip around	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react to rope - desensitization in legs and body	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse sluggish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse reactive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse react to obstacles	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does he react to surrounding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Other							

Overview:

Lounge and/or Round Pen:

	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Does horse lounge	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse round pen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse willing to move forward	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Does horse come into you	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse respectful	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse tractable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Responsiveness - Is horse sluggish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Responsiveness - Is horse Reactive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Aware of surroundings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Can you catch horse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse easy to catch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Is horse reliable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Other							

Note: Sometimes horses appear to be respectful until pressure is added or the horse is asked to do something they are not familiar with. The de-escalation time of the horse will tell you a lot about him and his attitude. It will help determine what you are dealing with. But you have to be aware of what you are willing to work with and you must always be evaluating:

- Is the horse safe and will the horse be safe for the participants?
- When working the horses, are they getting better or worse?
- How did the horses react to the different situations?
- How does the horse react with different people?
- How patient is the horse?
- When escalating how quickly does the horse come down?
- What does the horse do when you take the halter off?
- How much time will you have to invest in re-schooling?

Deal Breakers:

- 1) Safety is number one
- 2) If horse is aggressive towards humans: kicking, rearing, biting, pulling back, striking
- 3) The time that you have to put in to make this an EAL horse. (How much re-schooling would the horse need to be suitable for an EAL lesson horse)

Appendix K: Definition of Terms

The following terms were key concepts in my study. They are defined as follows:

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT): Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a therapeutic method aimed at enhancing physical, cognitive, behavioral, and socio-emotional abilities by psychologists and social workers, who must comprehend the animals' behavior, health, and stress management (Jegatheesan et al., 2018).

Arena: Indoor, sand-based area where EAP sessions unfolded. The arena that was used for research purposes was at Success Ranch. D.S.L. Therapies (<https://dsltherapies.ca>).

Developmental Trauma Disorder: The presentation of a significant number of behaviours resulted from trauma experienced in a child's early development (Hallings-Pott, 2021).

Eagala: An organization with inclusion of a licensed mental health professional and a qualified equine professional to address treatment plans for clients (Eagala - a Global Standard in Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy and Personal Development, n.d.).

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL): Programs such as EAL are specifically designed as educational, experiential learning exercises in which equine-assisted specialists observed the non-verbal communications of the horse and acted as translators to facilitate the learner/client in achieving the desired outcomes of each exercise (Cartier Farms - Equine Assisted Learning, 2002, Equine Assisted Learning Canada, 2024).

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP): Stapleton and Grimmett (2021) describe EAP as a “collaborative process where a licensed mental health professional works alongside an equine specialist and therapy horse/s to address psychotherapeutic objectives” (p.3).

Equine-Assisted Services (EAS): Psychotherapy and occupational therapy that involve horses in therapeutic interventions (Palomar-Ciria & Bello, 2023).

Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT): Supervised equine activities involving horses, overseen by a mental health professional and an equine specialist or horse trainer (*Equine-Assisted Therapy*, 2022).

Gelding: A gelding is a castrated male horse (Blocksdorf, 2018).

Gestalt Equine Psychotherapy: Gestalt equine psychotherapy (GEP) is a unique combination of Gestalt therapy and equine facilitated psychotherapy, involving qualified therapists in individual, couples, families, or groups (Lac, 2016).

Hippotherapy: The use of equine movement as a therapy tool to support occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech language pathology by engaging sensory, neuromotor and cognitive systems (Peterson, 2020).

Horsemanship Skills: The ability to handle horses both under saddle and on ground activities (Hartley, 2022).

Mare: a mare is an adult female horse (Ranch, 2021).

Narrative Exchange: “Narrative exchange is a method that can make a lived experience understandable to self and others and a means by which this understanding can be communicated” (Perry, 2009, p. 232).

Narrative Interview: Narrative interviewing has the primary goal of collecting data on an individual's experience through specified questions encouraging the participant to respond in a narrative or story-like format (Dixon, 2020).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): “the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to one or more traumatic events” (Association, 2013, p. 274).

Self-regulation: refers to an individual's capacity to regulate their behaviours, physiological responses, cognitive processes, interpersonal interactions, and self-attributions (Cook et al., 2005).

Trauma: A person who has experienced a negative event or situation in their life that overwhelmed their ability to cope. (Dziak, 2020).