

A Preliminary, Independent Evaluation of Equine Learning Experiences Australia (ELEA)

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Federation University Australia

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**Equine
Learning
Experiences
Australia**

'Horses helping Humans'

GROUNDING - ANCHORS
ORIENTING - HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

www.elea.com.au

Acknowledgements

Professor John Mc Donald, Faculty of Education & Arts, Federation University Australia

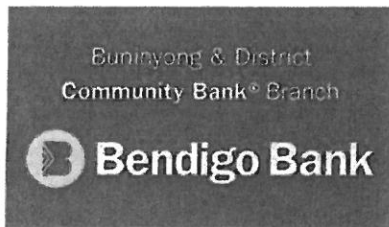
Emily McVeigh (ELEA)

The research participants

Ms Janet Phillips as research assistant

Michelle Hood, MSW(Q) student on 1st year placement as research assistant

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Executive Summary

"I pretty much imagined everybody around me were horses. It does sound crazy but I just imagined it. I put myself back in that situation and thought 'they're [people are] going to imitate to me how I'm treating them, so they'll treat me meanly if I'm treating them meanly and the horse is exactly the same thing'. So if I put off a mean or an angry vibe, they're going to sense that and do that to me. I just used my anchoring and my grounding. I did grounding every morning when I woke up or I laid in bed. You can do it laying down, standing up. You could sit down and do it. It's just that becoming one with yourself."

The conclusions that can be drawn from the current academic literature, is that all studies about equine therapies or equine experiential learning recommend that significantly more research, specifically longitudinal research, across age groups, genders, contexts and client cohorts needs to occur in all contexts. The studies mentioned in this report reveal that there is a measurable impact of equine-related programs for a range of cohorts, specifically; young children who have experienced abuse, some adolescents who have experienced abuse and family violence and adults who have experienced family violence, psychiatric disorders, social anxiety and social isolation.

The most common outcomes from the Equine Learning Experiences Australia (ELEA) program as expressed from the Most Significant Change case-studies and the thematic analysis in this report includes; ***behavioural changes, stress relief, mind and body awareness and control, forming a relationship with an intuitive practitioner, guided meditations as a means of creating independent meditation techniques and re-engagement with education, work, friendships and family relationships.***

The mind – body awareness that is gained by clients of the ELEA program provides skills and techniques for individuals (and families) to utilise in every-day life (Learning) is a crucial aspect of the program. Sometimes the initial contact by Emily as intuitive practitioner requires intensive observation and one-to-one communication. Noticing behaviours and allowing individuals to locate feelings that are hidden or suppressed (Therapy). The program then contributes to individuals engaging with the horses (Horse Education) and being led or trained to build their skills, reach out for assistance when stressed and then visioning a new way of feeling (Coaching).

There is significant buy-in for ELEA services from human services agencies and schools in the Ballarat and Grampians regions however, funding is difficult to locate for individual clients or families to participate. Information about the ELEA service to funding bodies does need to occur via various means that uses the evidence and case-studies in this report to convince funding organisations of the idea that ELEA is a successful intervention for children, young people and adults with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder(s) (PTSD).

Context

Equine Learning Experiences Australia (ELEA) is based at Napoleons in the western district of Victoria, Australia and is a service developed by Ms Emily McVeigh. ELEA has worked with a range of organisations in the Ballarat and Grampians region, including Finding Futures Disability Employment, Committee for Ballarat's Young Adult Empowerment Program, Phoenix P-12 Community College, Yuille Park Community College, Federation College, YMCA, School Focused Youth Service, Ballarat Child and Family Services (CaFS), Ballarat Health Service, Interact Employment Services and Grampians Partners in Recovery. Feedback about the ELEA program has been extremely positive, with human services and education practitioners reporting positive changes in clients who had resisted other forms of therapeutic interventions in the past. A case-worker from Grampians Partners in Recovery provided the following insights, based on their observations of the positive changes in an adolescent participant:

Although I have observed, learnt and participated in all forms of treatment for mental illness, Emily's approach and her results stand out as one of the most successful I have seen, with almost immediate results. As a clinician I was doubtful of the success. My opinion has changed and I would not hesitate to recommend her and her business to any client or health professional looking for something that is innovative and successful.

Two students from Phoenix Secondary College in Ballarat, who had an entrenched history of disengagement and school truancy, were nominated for 'student of the week' after participating in the ELEA program. A student from the Federation College VCAL program reflected on how the program has taught her to "calm down and go with the flow, not get so anxious." She further noted "I'm learning to take notice of what's going on in my head and what my thoughts are doing." (Henderson, 2014).

Across Australia, schools, human services organisations, and mental health providers are faced with increasing challenges in their efforts to assist children, adolescents and adults who experience complex mental health, family violence and behavioural issues. Overall, 6.3% of young Australians (aged 16-24) currently experience depression, 15.4% face an anxiety condition, and 24.6% currently have a mental health condition (beyondblue, 2015).

Ballarat has higher rates of behavioural risk factors (smoking, alcohol consumption at risky levels, drug abuse and obesity) as well as mental health issues (deaths due to suicide/self-inflicted injuries, and emergency department presentations for self-inflicted injuries) than Victorian state averages (City of Ballarat, 2013). A total of 10.8% of children in Ballarat are classified as 'developmentally vulnerable', as measured by having two or more domains on the Australian Early Developmental Index, compared to 9.5% Victoria-wide. Within Ballarat, particular suburbs reflect significantly concerning levels of developmental vulnerability – 24.3% in Wendouree, and 17.2% in Miners Rest and its surrounds (City of Ballarat, 2013).

A diverse range of specialist human services and educational services, programs and therapeutic approaches exist to address these challenges. Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) has shown positive results across a wide range of studies. Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) involves a credentialed treatment provider guiding interactions between clients and an animal to achieve specified goals (Chandler, 2005). EAT, which arose during the 1970s, involves using horses, requiring the client/group to convey particular skills (such as verbal communication, assertiveness, teamwork (Cantin & Marshall-Lucette, 2011). Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) "identifies itself as a psychotherapeutic program or session that includes the use of a horse as a part of the therapeutic team" (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005). EAT/EAP is most prevalent as a therapeutic program in the US, with smaller numbers in the UK, Northern Europe and Australasia (Cantin & Marshall-Lucette, 2011; Frewin & Gardiner, 2005).

As prey animals, horses are particularly sensitive to changes in humans, through body language, breathing and vocalising (Signal et al., 2013). Horses sense when a person's thoughts, feelings or behaviours are not congruent, thus perceiving them to be a threat (Burgon, 2011; Porter-Wenzlaff, 2007). In a therapeutic setting, horses respond positively when participants model qualities such as calmness, a sense of confidence, and fair leadership (Rashid, 2004 & Rees, 1984 cited by Burgon, 2011). EAT/EAP provides a vehicle for enabling participants to recognise, understand and focus on their emotions especially if facing anxiety and social isolation (Porter-Wenzlaff, 2007).

Resources for the research was a collaborative project with \$5,000 in funding and \$9,400 in-kind services provided by the Faculty of Education and Arts at Federation University Australia

to commence the project and then \$29,614 was funded to the project by Buninyong and District Community Bank (BDFSL) to employ a research assistant to manage data collection and analysis over a period of five months (November 2015 – April 2016). A Master of Social Work student was then engaged (May – November 2016) to further observe the ELEA program and complete a thematic analysis using Nvivo.

Literature Review

The history of the relationships between humans and horses is an extensive one encompassing the mythic horse (winged horses, unicorns), the horse as worker (farms, carriages), the horse as hero (light horseman of WWI) and the horse as competitor (equestrian, horse-racing, trotting), the horse as companion/pet and now the horse as therapeutic assistant (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005). The horse remains visible in popular and national cultures during modern times, Australian icons such as Phar Lap and more recently, Black Caviar are widely recognisable. The jackaroo and jillaroo of the Australian outback still attracts people of all ages to the romance of horses, cattle, bush and dust. The horse is visible on the streets when used by police to manage large crowds in urban areas. The horse is still used on the streets of Melbourne, Maldon, Echuca and Swan Hill in Victoria, pulling carriages and wagons for tourists and locals to evoke the feeling of Victorian life or the gold rush days of our history.

The horse has come to prominence over the past decade as a therapeutic assistant or tool in processes like 'Riding for the Disabled' and Equine Learning or Equine Therapy. However the question remains; is the horse any more effective as a therapeutic tool than the human counsellor, art as therapy, or the use of dogs working with children with autism? Reflective of its early developmental stage, much of the published literature on EAT/EAP is practice-based, rather than research or theory-based.

A meta-analysis of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), which examined 49 studies, concluded that:

Overall, AAT was associated with moderate effect sizes in improving outcomes in four areas: Autism-spectrum symptoms, medical difficulties, behavioural problems, and emotional well-being. Contrary to expectations, characteristics of participants and studies did not produce differential outcomes. (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007).

A growing number of studies using standardised measurements pre and post intervention reflect the potential of EAT/EAP for “increasing positive and reducing negative behaviours as well as in proving beneficial for those suffering from general mental health problems” (Cantin & Marshall-Lucette, 2011). EAT/EAP has shown positive impacts on children, adolescents and adults with histories of family violence, childhood sexual abuse and depressive symptoms as evidenced in some studies by changes in the Child Depression Index or Beck Depression Inventory (Kemp et al., 2013 Signal et al, 2013), social communication and sensory processing skills of primary-school aged children with autism (Gilliam Autism Rating Scale-Second Edition (GARS-2) and Sensory Profile School Companion (SPSC) (Ward et al., 2013).

Measurements have also been used for psychosocial variables in children with autism (Behaviour Assessment System for Children) (Garcia-Gomez et al., 2014); attention and memory in children with cerebral palsy (response times to “Numeric square test” and “Verbal learning test”) (Krejci, Janura & Svobada, 2015) and adults with mental health issues (Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) and Personal Orientation Inventory (POI)) (Klontz et al., 2007).

In recent years, more studies have been published that explore and analyse data around the participation of various cohorts of trauma-impacted individuals in processes managed by ‘hippotherapeutic centres’. Lojek et al (2015) explored different breed types of horses and their suitability for EAP concluding that of the 47 horses in 9 centres studied in Poland that geldings, commonly aged 10-15 years of age of diverse body size and heights were being used, connecting to the diversity of clients utilising these services.

Qualitative data from the TREAT program in the USA revealed that a form of therapeutic riding is typical of the programs that have been documented, whereby individuals engaged in equine experiential programs report outcomes such as muscle developing in children, behavioural change in individuals showing social isolation and individuals reporting feeling calmer and more confident (Christensen, 2014). Other studies explore parent's perception of change in children following participation in a program with horses, Hussey and Cowman (2015) interviewed parents of visually impaired children which revealed improvement in communications, concentration and general behaviour.

There are few clinical trials or those of pre and post testing evaluations but those that do exist are providing some early evidence of the effectiveness of EAP. Klontz et al (2007) tested 31 participants of an equine-assisted experiential therapy program, reporting statistically significant reductions in psychological distress and increases in psychological well-being which sustained through the 6 month period following the program. A mixed-methods exploratory pilot study of the impact of EAP of 13 females who had experienced family violence (Whittlesey-Jerome, 2014) revealed greater improvement across self-efficacy, depression and general function in the group that used EAP to supplement existing treatments. Nurenberg et al (2014) studied an animal assisted therapy program for 90 patients with recent in-patient violent behaviour and found that there were specific benefits of EAP with reduced violence amongst participants over the treatment period compared to those adult who didn't participate in the EAP.

Pendry, Smith and Roeter (2014) conducted a randomised clinical trial involving saliva testing pre and post participation in an 11 week equine facilitated program, testing afternoon cortisol levels following participation in weekly 90 minute sessions. Children in the group had lower afternoon cortisol, and lower total cortisol concentration compared to the children on the waiting list to attend the program. Cortisol is a steroid hormone produced by the adrenal glands. Whenever we experience something the body perceives as a threat, like a large dog barking, a chemical known as adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) is released into brain. This triggers the adrenal glands to release cortisol and adrenaline.

Cortisol is the main hormone involved in stress and the fight-or-flight response. This is a natural and protective response to a perceived threat or danger. Increased levels of cortisol result in a burst of new energy and strength. In the fight-or-flight response, cortisol suppresses any functions that are unnecessary or detrimental to that response. During a fight-or-flight response, individuals experience; rapid heart rate, dry mouth, stomach upset, diarrhoea and/or panic. Cortisol release also; suppresses growth processes, suppresses digestive systems, suppresses reproductive systems and changes how immune systems respond.

Pre and post testing for maladaptive behaviours in a comparison between Equine Assisted Counselling and classroom based counselling for 164 students at high risk of academic and social 'failure' (Trotter et al, 2008) found statistically significant improvement in 7 out of 17 behaviour areas, including; emotional symptom index, personal adjustment composite, social stress scale, self-esteem scale and the depression scale. Another study of 63 children who participated in a mean of 19 EAP sessions and tested using the Global Assessment Function (GAF) scale found that the greatest improvement was amongst the youngest children and there was a quick response to EAP amongst younger children especially those who had experienced physical abuse and neglect (Schultz, Remick-Barlow & Robbins, 2007).

The preliminary conclusions we can draw from this literature review is that all studies recommended that significantly more research, specifically longitudinal research, across age groups, genders, contexts and client cohorts needs to occur in all EAP and AAT contexts. The studies mentioned here reveal that there is a measurable impact of EAP on a range of cohorts, specifically; young children who have experienced abuse, some adolescents who have experienced abuse and family violence and adults who have experienced family violence, psychiatric disorders, social anxiety and social isolation. However, it should be noted that there has been no research into the comparison between what could be very different kinds of EAP or AAT, that is, all EAP and AAT programs seem to have different models depending on the influences and preferences of the facilitator. As such there has been no examination of the role of the EAP or AAT facilitator in each of the programs as compared to the role of the horse or animal in any specific program.

Research Methodology

This research used the Most Significant Change Technique (MSC), which was initially developed by Davies (1996) for the evaluation of social development programs in rural Bangladesh. MSC involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories at the “field” (or in this case direct practice) level where diverse and emergent outcomes are produced by a complex program. During the systematic story selection process, stories are assessed as the most significant by a panel of stakeholders (often comprising staff and funders), involving in-depth discussions about the value of the changes which have been reported (Davies & Dart, 2005).

SC stories are collected from the people most directly involved in the program under investigation, usually participants and staff, through responses to a broad question such as “During [specified time frame], in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in your program?” (Davies & Dart, 2005, p. 10).

The “domain of change” indicated in the question may vary from program to program (for example, changes in the quality of people’s lives; changes in the nature of their participation in the program). In the case of a small quantity of stories being collected ‘domains of change’ may unnecessarily complicate the process. The story selection panel then considers responses to this MSC question, and identifies the most significant change of all (by responding to a question such as “From among all these significant changes, what do you think was the most significant change of all?” (Davies & Dart, 2005, p. 10).

MSC is seen as a useful alternative where traditional evaluation techniques are not able to make sense of the effects of a program. MSC can be utilised as a continuous process of program monitoring and evaluation and does not merely focus on accountability, but also on learning (Davies & Dart, 2005). MSC also allows for the unique voice of the respondent when capturing the impacts of the program, and the story collection process can enable respondents to reflect on and articulate the SC that had occurred, thereby constructing meaning. During the process of story selection the review panel is able to construct additional meaning (Davies & Dart, 2005).

In this case, MSC has been utilised to evaluate, post intervention, the impact of a specifically customised service that was provided to a relatively small number of participants. Stories were collected from 16 participants by a field researcher over a three month period in 2016. The respondents related their observations from the perspective of the following backgrounds and relationships with ELEA.

Table 1: ELEA Respondent Background Information

Referring Service Provider	Relationship to Participant	No. of ELEA clients	Age of Participant/s	Gender of Participant/s
School	Administrator/Teacher/Health & Wellbeing Officer	Multiple	Child to Adolescent	Male & Female
School	Health & Wellbeing Teacher/Officer	Multiple	Child	Male & Female
Health/community service	Youth Support Worker	1	Adolescent	Male
Health/community service	Case Manager	2	Adolescent	Male & Female
Health/community service	Parent (Child)	1	Child	Male
Health/community service	Parent (Child)	1	Child	Female
School	Parent (Adolescent Child)	1	Adolescent	Female
Independent	Parents (same interview)	2	Adolescent	Male & Female (brother & sister)
Health/community service	Self	1	30-40yrs	Female
Employment service	Self	1	40-50yrs	Female
Education provider	Self	1	20-30yrs	Female
Employment service	Self	1	20-30yrs	Female
Employment service	Self	1	40-50yrs	Female
Disability service	Parent (Adult child)	1	Client 20-30yrs, parent 50-60yrs	Female

*Note Although Child clients were sought to contribute to the research, due to various reasons (ie: parental protection, anxiety, lack of language or unavailability) none were interviewed.

The sample consisted of five (5) adult clients of ELEA, five (5) parents of clients of ELEA, two (2) school well-being officers and two (2) community based case workers. The researchers conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews, with the aim of identifying the most significant change that took place for participants in the ELEA program. A central part of MSC is an open question to the respondent, allowing them to utilise their own judgment in selecting the significant change in the client. The researcher asked each interviewee: "In your opinion, during your involvement with ELEA what was the most significant change that took place for you/participants in the program?"

This was phrased informally in 4 questions:

1. Tell me how you (the storyteller) first became involved with this project (ELEA) and what your involvement in the project was.
2. From your point of view, describe a story that best describes the most significant change that has resulted from your involvement in this project.

3. Why was this story significant for you?
4. Have you participated in other types of therapies and/or Assisted Learning processes in the past, and how has this one differed from those?

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and the transcriptions systematically analysed by the selection panel. Due to timeframe constraints and potential conflict of interest from other stakeholders, this panel was the research team. MSC stories that articulated significant program impact were developed and along with the reasons for the choice of these stories are presented in this report.

ELEA Model of Service Delivery

Emily McVeigh has personally been involved with horses and riding of horses for over 30 years, since she was three years old. Up until 2010 Emily had been a traditional horse-person, riding stock-work on the family farm and for 6 years she rode racehorses in track-work at the racetrack. Her respect of the horses sensitivity and intelligence has changed significantly over the past 6 years, being influenced by James French and his trust technique, she now approaches her relationships and connections with horses from a greater awareness that honours mind, body and spirit of both the horse, the individual and the interaction between the two of them.

As the sole facilitator of ELEA, Emily has participated in a Wisdom Horse Apprenticeship (customised to ELEA needs and client base) with Lynn Baskfield (<http://www.equinecoaching.com>) and influenced also by Barbara Rector, Linda Kohanov and Ariana Strozzi (www.skyhorseranch.com). She has been mentored by Cindy Jacobs for four years from Free Rein Australia (www.freereinaustralia.com), who has a strong background in corporate coaching and uses the Equine Assisted Learning model (www.eagala.org).

Emily worked with Cindy for many years in co-facilitating women's programs, corporate team building and leadership programs. Emily has completed Level 1 and 2 training with Kathy Pike at The Academy for Coaching with Horses (www.coachingwithhorses.com) and has been influenced by somatic practitioners such as Richard Strozzi from the Somatic Institute and Gabriel Kram.

Emily's specific human services coaching and counselling training has included: Certificate IV in Disability; Advanced Diploma in Transpersonal Counseling (Phoenix Institute of Australia); MBIT - Mind Body Integration Coach; Level 1 – Reiki, Certified Life Coach and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Emily's specific animal and horse training has included: liberty training/coaching with Michelle Dennis (www.firehorseinspirations.com.au); an animal communication program with James French (<https://trust-technique.com>) and Carolyn Resnick's, Liberty horse trainer extended circle program.

Current horse trainers who mentor Emily are Maria Millikan, a Dressage Victoria coach, and Blair Ireland. The ELEA model of delivery with Emily as the sole facilitator includes processes outlined in the following diagrammatic forms, with processes being adapted to suit each client's needs. The process for each client is not necessarily linear, clients have mostly experienced traumatic events and subsequent emotions are triggered during any process of intervention which means the facilitator can return to a prior phase, as required.

ELEA Model of Service

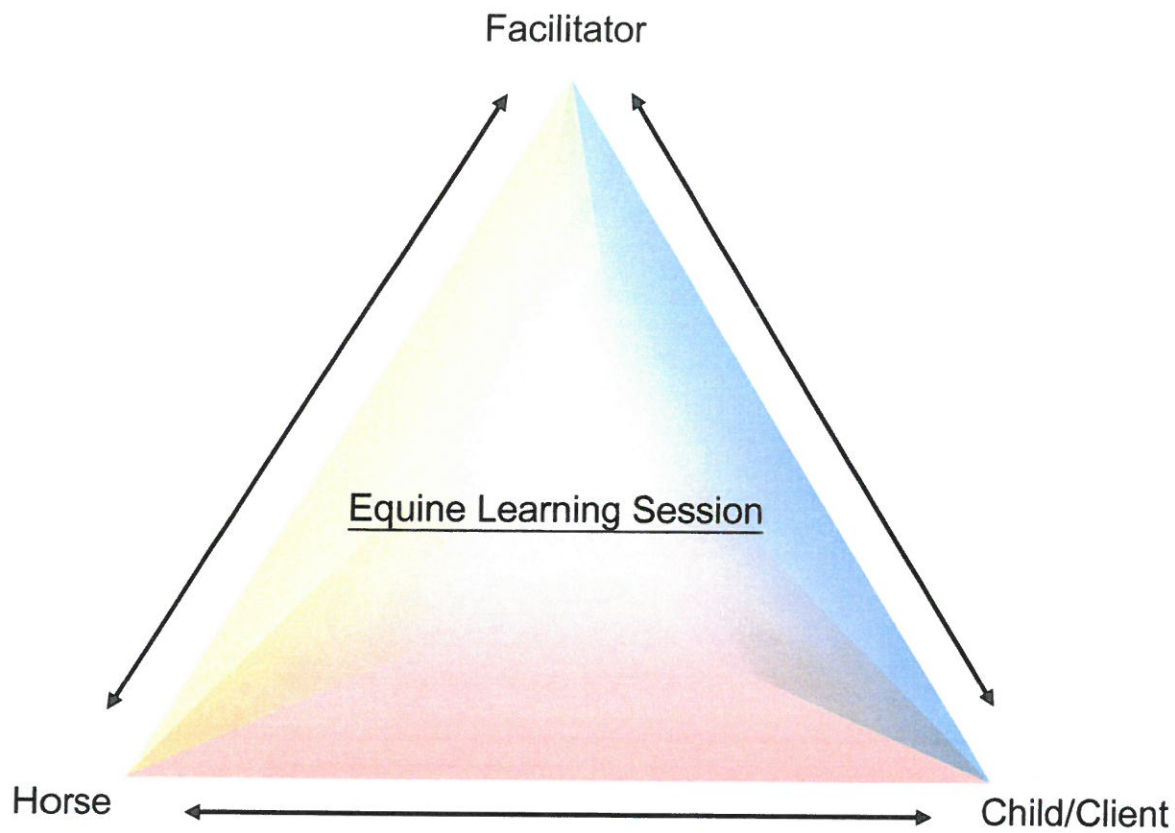


Diagram 1: Illustrates the interaction between Facilitator, Child and Horse during an Equine Learning Session at ELEA. This represents the first phase of the program which can last for 2-3 sessions

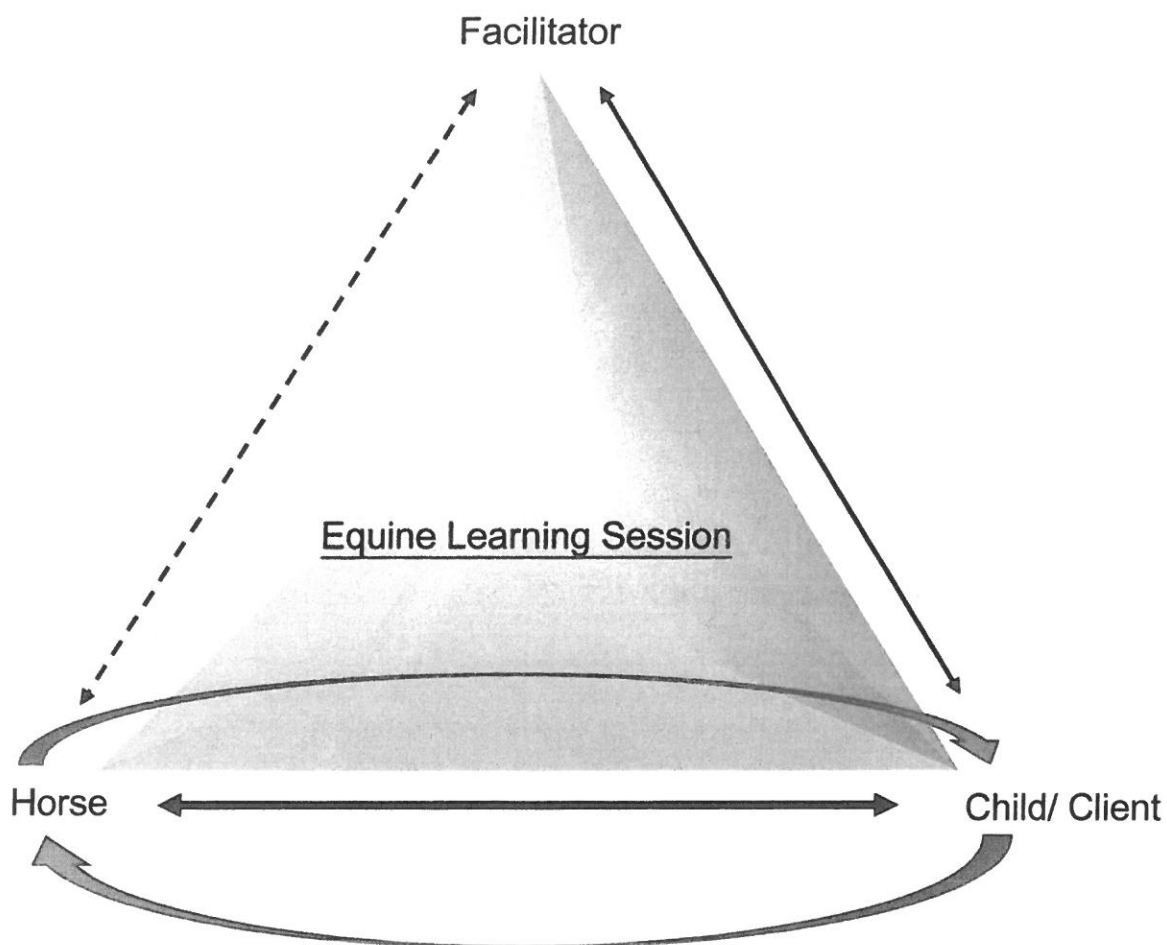


Diagram 2: Illustrates the interaction between Facilitator, Child and Horse during an Equine Learning Session at ELEA. This change in dynamics occurs when mutual trust has been established between Horse and Child creating a stronger bond. The link between Horse and Facilitator changes and the dynamic between all three becomes more about mind and body experiences. The Facilitator steps back when this has been achieved. Re-establishing connection when the current process is integrated and next task needs facilitation.

ELEA program: a multi-faceted approach.

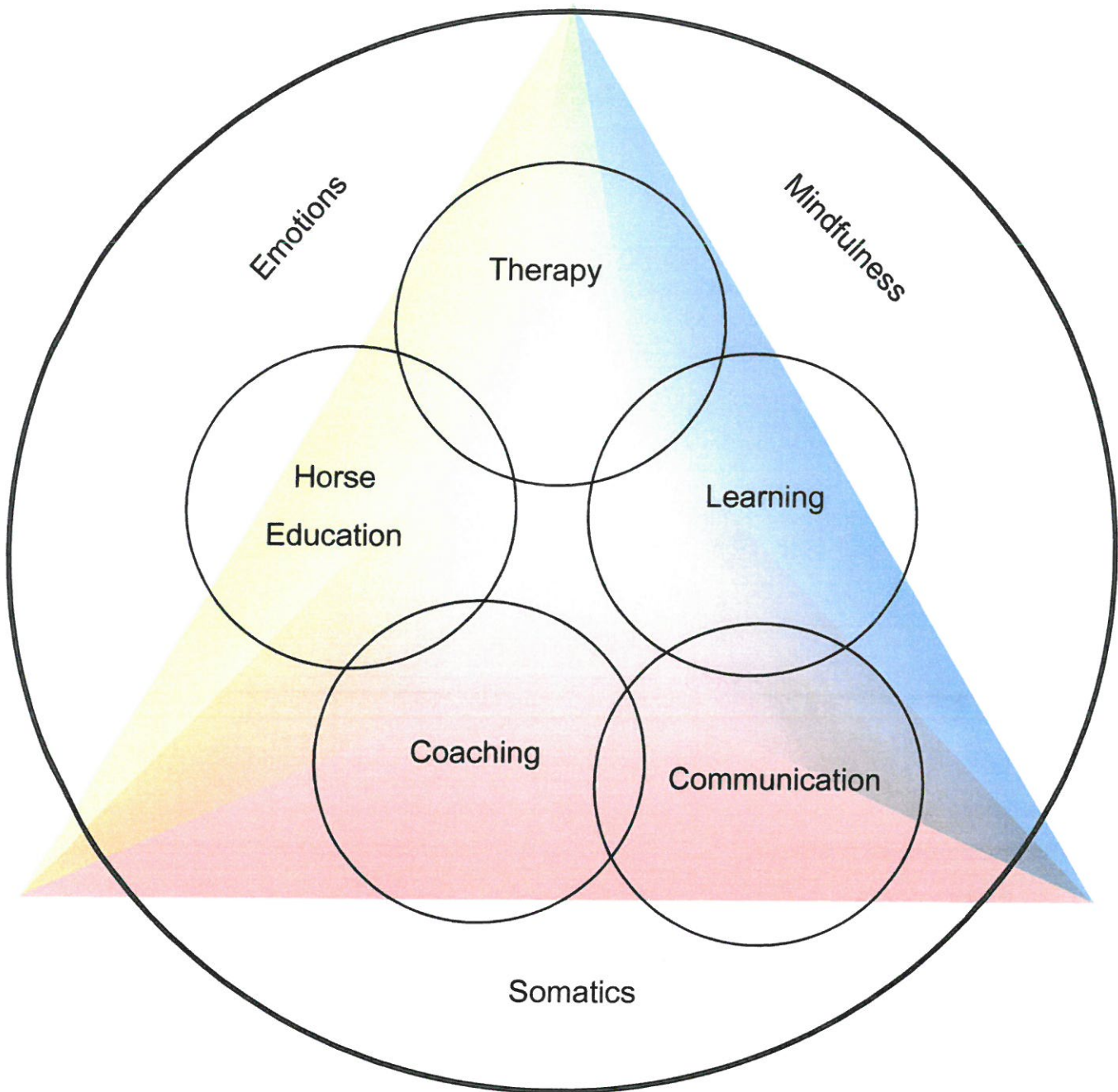


Diagram 3: Describes the multi-faceted factors that are part of the process during Equine Learning Programs at ELEA. Each program is multi-faceted as it acknowledges the trauma of the client and engages in a range of mind-body experiences that are client-centred and based on techniques from other therapeutic frameworks

The multi-faceted ELEA equine learning program as illustrated in the previous diagrams is described here in Table 2, as a linear process, even though for many clients it may be a circular process. Also noteworthy is that the clients who cannot access the ELEA program include clients of Child Protection (DHHS), TAC and adult clients of mental health services who are unable to self-refer, due to cost and the lack of subsidies available by these agencies. The limitations of referrals tends to be about a perceived lack of knowledge and evidence of the validity and effectiveness of equine experiential learning/interventions. This report aims to address some of those concerns.

Table 2: ELEA as a linear client process

Client referral to ELEA	Adult clients are self-referred via the ELEA web-page or Facebook page. Adolescents and children are referred to ELEA from school well-being officers, DHHS, employment agencies. Problem identification (PTSD, anxiety, social isolation, negative behaviours) has occurred via case-worker.
Session 1	Assessment of client's ability to 'orient self as safe' at the ELEA venue, which is outdoors in a bush setting with a horse arena, a small enclosure, horses, ponies and other small animals (dog, sheep). This session will/may include activities to get the client to focus on their breath and breathing, to slow the heart rate and calm emotions.
Sessions 2,3,4	Mindfulness activities; introducing and developing a relationship with a horse chosen by the client to work with. Mindfulness involves a series of attention-training practices and cognitive strategies that can help individuals unhook from unproductive thought patterns and behaviours. It involves learning to pay attention to the present moment rather than worrying or dwelling on the past (monash.edu.au)
Sessions 4-8	Somatics; mind and body activities with a horse guided by Emily. Somatics is a path, a methodology, a change theory by which people can embody transformation. Activities concentrate on resilience and survival strategies against a background of views, habits, ways of relating, automatic actions have become 'normal' even though contributing to anxiety, social isolation, depression, anger.
Sessions 8-10 or 8-12	Emotions; learning new processes of managing destructive, negative emotions that produce stress, anxiety, isolation, anger and associated behaviours.
Refresher sessions	Clients can often require refresher sessions in the 6-12 months following the ELEA program as their emotions and/or behaviours can slowly 'slide' back as normality compared to the newer emotions and behaviours developed through the program.

Participant Case-Studies

Four (4) case studies of most significant change: **AC3, AC6, YS2, CP1**

"It's not that magic pill that just fixes everything, but it's this awesome tool that she's been given and I can see her progressing..."

Story #1 - AC3

Background – This female respondent is in the Adult cohort, in her early 20's. She identified issues with anger, depression, lack of motivation and school non-attendance. The respondent has significant experience with horses. She attended one series of sessions (10-12) with the horses at ELEA, which each ran for approximately 1 hour and has maintained ad hoc contact.

"I knew a horse obviously has a brain, it's got a mind of its own but I never knew that they actually imitate what you're feeling. So if you're angry, they're angry, and they'll bite. If you're sad, they really don't want to do anything. If you're happy, they're more than happy to do what you want them to do. I had just not long come out of a really bad break-up and I was feeling really down and miserable, and I was angry ... I was an angry person ... I was trying to touch the horse and pat it and be there and pretty much see what it was going to do. I turned my back for two seconds and it pretty much almost bit my shoulder, made me more alert and more aware that something was going on. The horse wouldn't have done that for no reason ... I didn't - what's the word? I didn't provoke it to happen. I was being what I thought was myself, but it wasn't. Then ... I'm like whoa, this is not happening. After that I started to really be more one with myself and actually found that when I was calm and collected and really not faked to be happy, but actually felt happy, the horse was happy too.

There was a few times there that I couldn't get the horse to do absolutely anything and that was due to the way I was feeling. [I needed to] come back to the exercises that Emily had previously told us about, like the grounding or anchoring where you rub with your thumb and your pointer together and you just anchor yourself. You just take a couple of deep breaths and do either one, or both of them and for a couple of minutes and then come back to it. The difference was mind blowing. You walk in there and it's like this horse could have this totally different attitude and then you do all of that and the horse has got a completely different attitude.

Yeah, because once you start to anchor and get within yourself, like calm and collected and you're happy to be there and you're happy to think that you [have] come to terms that you have a bit of a problem kind of thing, the horse was able to then show you that it was okay and you could actually go from the horse's neck all the way down to his bum and he wouldn't move, wouldn't do nothing. I've never done anything like that before. Never.

I pretty much imagined everybody around me were horses. It does sound crazy but I just imagined it. I put myself back in that situation and thought 'they're [people are] going to imitate to me how I'm treating them, so they'll treat me meanly if I'm treating them meanly and the horse is exactly the same thing'. So if I put off a mean or an angry vibe, they're going to sense that and do that to me. I just used my anchoring and my grounding. I did grounding every morning when I woke up or I laid in bed. You can do it laying down, standing up. You could sit down and do it. It's just that becoming one with yourself.

There was a huge improvement in my schooling. I was actually showing up to school. I started to show up to school because I woke up and I was like I love this day, instead of waking up and going 'yeah, I'm not moving'. It was a complete change."

The reason this story was chosen: realisation that respondent's behavior was affecting her relationships with others, shift in attitude to others, consciously reflecting on school and learning, work and social life, utilising techniques outside sessions.

Story # 2 - AC6

Background – This female respondent is in the Adult cohort, in her late 40's. She identified issues with anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance addiction, family violence, and long term unemployment. The respondent has some experience with horses. She attended one series of sessions (10-12) with the horses at ELEA, which each ran for approximately 1 hour and has maintained ad hoc contact.

"I was with a job provider that once I began with them and started looking for work, I realised that I just had way too much anxiety, to the point where I would have panic attacks just even thinking about leaving my house to go and see another person. The more that my job provider expected from me, the more panicky I got until they recommended that I start with the ELEA Program. The first day that I ever went was the best day of my whole life.

I went out there lost... and just in five minutes of this therapy, you're feeling just totally just at peace. Of course you have to train yourself to feel like this, which is learning about how to be in the here and now. I'm not angry anymore and I'm not hurt. I don't have this personal hurt that other people used to put on me and I would take ...and be hurt by.... Now I just have access to whole different part of my brain, that I didn't even know existed and it's...an inspiring place to be.

We don't ride [the horses], they're free to wander around, and horses pick up energies...they feel... they don't think 'so-and-so's hair looks funny, or where's my next meal coming from'. When any feeling of danger is around, they sense it, like that. Just like the snap of a finger, they can tell. I actually had a panic attack at the horses one day...it was maybe four sessions in [to the program]. As I started to have this panic attack, the horses all started kicking and bolting, biting each other and just running around the arena ...like they would in a thunderstorm!

Now I have post-traumatic stress syndrome and for five years I've had that. In five years, I didn't go within three blocks of my home and don't have any friends or family. I had one of the kids' friend's mother rang me in an emergency and needed me. I had to go outside of my comfort zone. I thought I was going to be brave enough to do it, because I've been attempting braver things as I go along. I've been doing shopping on my own sometimes, which is a big step, and seeing a male doctor, that was a big step, so I had hope. But I only made it to the roundabout and the panic attack was already starting, but if I had have listened to my body originally and done what my lessons had taught me, I would have said, 'No, my body can't do it. I can't help you out', but God always says never deny anybody when they ask you for help.

I got to maybe three blocks away from my home, and I had four kids in the car, I started having this major panic attack; the tears, the shaking, almost blacking out, the heart just racing and just quivering all over. I could hardly press the brake, I could hardly steer. So I'm crawling along at 10 kilometres [until I] got home. I sat in my car because I had not enough strength to get out.

So, I rang Emily and it rang out...she rang me straight back. I could hardly talk ... I was just stammering and stuttering and just spluttering words. I just said to her, 'Panic attack. Help me'. She just went straight into my therapy [and] reminded me of the last therapy that I'd had where I was working with a particular horse and I had actually come to this feeling like I was connected to the earth, and like I belonged. I [had] stood before this gigantic horse, that was snuggling into me and nibbling on my hair and smooching up against me and giving me kisses and hugging me...She asked me to envision, find something soft in the car, which I felt the woolly car seat. She told me to rub it and imagine that it was Lola the horse, and within a minute, my heart rate had slowed, my breathing had slowed. Within two minutes, I was feeling calm. By the end of the conversation, I was feeling so relieved that I laughed and laughed with tears, because it spins me out how quickly it works and why didn't I know this before? Why did I have to spend 40 years not knowing this? So I was so blessed that day. I went and painted Emily a painting... started that day and finished two days ago.

So I've got proof of something that works and I'm sticking with that. I'm almost drug free, as in my health. I was on so many different medications and vitamins. I was deficient in every single nourishing goodness in the body, because of bad heavy thoughts that I used to carry around, bad feelings. For 40 years I carried them around. I look back and I just go, I can't believe that I used to feel like that and now I don't, just in a year. It's amazing. If you imagine a mountain with a little creek flowing down it, the creek is your thought pattern, which the way that I was living was all anger and questions. Why? Why? Why? Why? The water just flowed down there. The more water there was, the bigger crevice. I've now blocked off that and I'm making a new pathway for the water to flow. That [other] one is still there and sometimes water gets through ... it's very deep. But I'm making a new one and the more water I put down that one, the more it will get deeper, the less that [other] one will get used."

Reason for selection – Able to clearly articulate changes and describes how she now has an understanding of the "how's and whys" – change in attitude toward safety and confidence, sees concrete changes in how she approaches life and perceives challenges that she experiences in her day-to-day living and recognises ability to change her own feelings.

Story 2 also revealed the following to ELEA in her own words:

I have post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, CFS, Fibromyalgia, chronic pain, severe depression, the list goes on. Over the years I have tried many different types of medication, therapy programs, lifestyle changes and I have researched and tired as much as I could to help myself.

My job search provider offered me a program that they were trying out called ELEA, I jumped at the chance. When I first met Emily at session one she blew my mind, as she offered my 20 year old son who drives me everywhere I need to go, join in the sessions pro bono every week (instead of sitting in the car for 2 hours waiting for my session to finish). Emily showed so much compassion and understanding towards me and my son and her horses are amazing!

Week one with the horses and I could feel a transformation within myself. MY son and I would discuss the amazing changes with us both and we were eager to be with the horses every week.

The personal development has surprised me, I have learnt so much about myself and the 40 years of conditioning from life's events circumstances. After ELEA I had more tools to move forward.

I have learnt to quiet my mind, relax my body, which has helped me immensely with my panic attacks and anxiety and in turn has helped the fibromyalgia pains decrease in severity and frequency.

The reduction in my pain and panic attacks is amazing. My quality of life increased with every session with Em and the horses. They really have changed our life for the better! I thank god every day for giving me this opportunity to heal, for giving me Emily, the horses and ELEA.

Story #3 - YS2

Background: This respondent is a female Human Services Officer in her mid-30's. She works with a caseload of 8 families. The respondent's client is female in the Adolescent cohort. She attended one series of sessions (12+) with the horses at ELEA, which each ran for approximately 1 hour.

"The young girl [15yrs] I was working with is developmentally delayed; her IQ was 69. She had been taken out of mainstream school and home-schooled...she was homeless a few times there. Family violence between herself and her parents, parents had separated as well because of it all. She got bullied at school, so there was a lot of school refusal. There was a lot going on for this young lady who didn't know how to appropriately express her anger.

She had the Step Up program, which addressed youth committing family violence in the home; she didn't engage. She was in Reconnect, which are children that are at risk of homelessness; she didn't really engage there either. HEAL [other Equine service] - she's had multiple programs; she had the school counsellors working with her as well. She'd seen psychologists and didn't connect. The horse program was the only program that worked for her, or made any change at all. [They were] all one-on-one, and all either in the home or at the school or in an office, and no animals involved.

The family weren't really willing to have services involved and through conversation I'd found that she actually had a love for horses and had done since she was a little girl. She grew up on Saddle Club, so it was a great way in. Getting her out into an open environment one-on-one with the horses worked for her. I think the environment changed it as well...no cars buzzing up and down, no reason to become hyper-vigilant to assess where you are...you're in a secluded spot, so relaxed with where you are...It took an hour to get there so by the time I'd pick her up in Bacchus Marsh...and drove her out to the program and then back, so there were two hours of conversation and an hour at the program...an amazing connection through the travel.

What was amazing was she's quite a quiet, subdued girl and when I got her in the car she's sort of go 'blah'. For the first 20 minutes for the first four weeks I would hear every bullying story again, and I thought this is going to go on forever. At week five there was not one bullying story....she spoke positively and she was able to stop the post-traumatic memories and start breathing and thinking positively, because that's what she'd learnt in the actual horse program. Emily would talk to us before the session and gauge how she was today, how the week had been... because she was quite shy and wouldn't verbalise... If she wasn't having a good day or she had...a slight headache or was up all night, she was happy for me to voice that, and then Emily would take that into consideration in how far to push in the actual sessions.

But week four was the last time I'd heard the stories; week five was when it all turned positive and she could actually go back and look at memories of the positive parts that she had at school. I think for the first four weeks it was validation that someone had actually heard her stories, and that her stories didn't define her. Then through the mindfulness and the horses...in the sessions, she was learning that she had to own what emotion she had, and stick with it. [It] taught her how to separate her bullying memories [from] her being herself, to her being a person. It was amazing.

And the confidence level; from the first week of leading the horse with the rope, both [the client] and the horse head down, just like in a slumping. To week four where you wear the crown, it was around there somewhere, and head high, and holding yourself in positive regard. Just the confidence in her, it was like a completely different child. The transformation was unbelievable. Then she could get the horse to do all these sorts of things, and if the horse wandered or fidgeted then Emily would give a gentle reminder 'Are you still centred, do you need to...?' and she'd stop and she'd breathe. This kid traditionally couldn't do any homework, nothing academic, but every time Emily set her a little exercise, whether it be with the rocks or the breathing or working with the dog, she would do it. No trouble, just get it done, and she could see her [own] improvements...she could stop and scan her body when trouble was arising, she could feel it building. She would learn to take herself away, compose herself and then come back to the situation, which was life-changing. By the time we'd finished she was a completely different child. She would have the horses cantering in the round yard just by moving her feet. Just how proud she was that she could get this massive animal to do these things just by willing it and [with] generally minimal [effort]. That she was in control and that these people that had ruined her life, in her words, were no longer in control, that she could own it. So her whole [perspective] on her life changed. [She] is still home-schooled [and] she did change her mind throughout the horse program and wanted to give school another go; that's how confident she was.

Mum was invited to come along to see what the sessions were for and to do the grounding exercises and actually see what [the client] does and how confident she was and how much of a different child that she was in the sessions...So we'd go back and we'd talk about it, and it was hard for Mum to relate to it because she hasn't actually seen what was going on. Then I couldn't make one session and mum took her to the next one, so mum was then confident to drive out there and hang out there for the time and was supportive of the program. She thought it was amazing. Mum...was amazed at how good [the client] had come just in that short time...totally noticeable differences...her mannerisms around the home. Before, she would seclude herself in her bedroom and spend most of her time on her laptop. She was [now] more involved with her little sisters, she was playing with them more, she was helping around the house more, she was beginning to cook dinners for the family. She was taking on a different level of responsibility and grew up in that 13 weeks.

We did have homework that we had to do where we had to find some words that if she went to her 100th birthday party, what would people say about her. Which was quite challenging for [her] and it took us a couple of weeks to get her to get into that space and that mindset, because it was still quite early and she was still beating herself up a bit, you know, well why would people bully me if I was a worthwhile person.

Okay well, this is a projection, this is fantasy and we're allowed to have that. I think that was the trick to get her to change her train of thought to actually consider going back to school but also consider that she's worthy enough to get a job...her confidence went through the roof with that stuff. It was a great space... because it's non-confrontational, beside each other."

Reason for selection – in-depth description of very noticeable changes in the young person's behaviours and mannerisms, and her capacity to participate more fully in life.

Story # 4 - CP1

This respondent is the client's Mother. The client is from the Child cohort, currently 11 years of age, and has been diagnosed with oppositional defiance disorder. The client has attended 2 programs (10-12 sessions each) as an individual. The client is currently attending a school that send groups of students along to ELEA programs.

"[My daughter is] 11yrs old currently. She started having problems with school, I think really basically from Grade Prep. She was really ready socially to go, but...sort of perfectionist... then progressively things got worse and she just didn't want to go to school anymore. She was having major meltdowns at home, which would last for up to two hours. So we moved from Melbourne to Ballarat to access a school in Sebastopol. Things deteriorated quite quickly there...She had one incident and then it became very political. She started [and] I think she did two months and then was excluded right until the end, which was really debilitating for us, I think and for her as well personally. I think in the beginning a lot of people just assumed it was bad parenting and that there was 'oh, your child's just naughty'. It's just difficult trying to communicate to people that 'no, I'm not a silly person', I know I make educated decisions about how to parent my daughter. I've tried everything

So I approached [another] two schools after that. So things went really well with [School A], but she didn't actually achieve full-time. First year went well so they increased her hours for the second year and decided to concentrate more on the academic side of things, but again confidence [was an issue]. Her anxiety levels really peaked and I think they were missing her anxiety cues, thinking it was just behavioural...She was diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder. [There was] another massive meltdown and so we were kindly moved on. We weren't having much success with conventional appointments with her psychologist. She wasn't very interested. I think she found it a negative experience in a sense. It was just ...she wasn't comfortable and I think it made her feel a bit more insecure about her issues, in the sense it was validating there's something wrong with you. In that time though [my daughter] had been having sessions with Emily.

She started seeing Emily during the time at [School A], we did the first program [there was] a massive improvement in home life. She...didn't have much awareness of anything that was happening outside of what was going on in her mind. So no body awareness, we think she's got a really high pain threshold when she's not very well and she's sick and things like that. So all those cues that your body gives you when you're stressed or anxious or anything like that, she was totally missing. So her triggers and her reaction rate, I suppose, from being calm to meltdown mode was really, really quick.

I noticed almost immediately with the sessions with Emily that those had improved, but we did come home for the first four or five and it she'd have a meltdown that night. I spoke to Emily about that and she said that she thought...that it was just an overload of all those built up emotions, but that eased off.

Home life had improved almost immediately, I think, it was within a couple of weeks I noticed that she was managing when she was stressed a bit better. It was almost like she felt more empowered and she realised that she did have tools, that she could control these things. Because that was one of the things that she was most upset about prior to meeting Emily, was that she had no control.

She felt like she had no control and she didn't like being the way she was when she was upset about things or had meltdowns. Well instead of just going straight into a reaction for things that had upset her, she would move herself away. I think particularly at school, if she was anxious about the work she'd go to the toilet. [She was] recognising when she [was just] prior to being at that point of no return.

She...made an instant connection with the horses, in particular Mia, which I think is the alpha mare there, which is really interesting, that of all the horses that she connected most with was the leader. I observed a lot of them, sat down and had a cup of tea. Emily would talk to me during the sessions at different stages when [my daughter] was performing different tasks and things like that. It was really, really interesting because you could see instantly if [my daughter's] mind had wandered away from what she was meant to be doing... the most minor thought that is a distraction from being really present in the moment is instantly recognised by the horse and there's a shift straight away. Her reaction or her response to that was to get back into it and okay, refocus, understanding what had happened in that situation. Whereas I think in other circumstances with her psychologist and things like that, she'd get defensive. But having that horse be a reflection of her was non-judgemental for her...It was just really positive.

[She learned] grounding exercises and orienting herself, learning how to breathe and bring awareness to her body. I think the biggest thing was recognising where she felt things...in her physical body. So if she was feeling anxious it wasn't just recognising I'm feeling anxious...it was my chest is tight or my stomach. I'm trying to think what else. She was focused. Sometimes she'd be a little bit edgy in other activities that she does, or a bit hyper.

She plays basketball and has done other activities, that physical exercise and even sports at school would heighten her - she'd be quite hyper and her energy would be really, really high, I guess and hard to focus. But with the sessions with Emily, once she got into it, it was instant, just focused and relaxing shoulders, sort of straight - just her whole posture was much more relaxed. But I noticed what she took home as well after learning how to do the grounding exercises and then the orienting. The orienting is picking - Emily will say can you see anything that's round? So it's just picking an object or a shape or a colour or a texture and finding things that are around you that matches whatever that description is. So it's just focusing your attention, bringing your awareness down to the moment, I guess.

Her psychologist had given her mindfulness exercises... but [she thought] it was boring. But with the exercises that Emily had given her, she was practising that at home off her own initiative. Big moments for us were she'd say 'Mum, when I'm feeling stressed now, do you know what I do? I just go into my room and I lay down and I just breathe.' She said 'I do the grounding exercises'...The same exercises, but how can I work this for me in wherever I am, which was phenomenal for her to even just be willing to do something like that and understanding, or recognising that it works. She [now] does the grounding or orienting on the way to school sometimes if she's feeling a bit anxious, so she's got a lot of energy that she needs to - and I have noticed at home that if she is feeling frustrated, that she breathes.

It's not that magic pill that just fixes everything, but it's this awesome tool that she's been given and I can see her progressing - I get teary - using that. From a parent's point of view it's amazing, because I think that it gives me a lot of confidence that she has had this experience. I think that that's something, which she's learnt so much about herself. I know adults who don't have the same sort of self-awareness that she has now. It's something that I know that she's going to carry on through life and be able to utilise and access when she needs to.

Just the progress that I could see her making was absolutely huge to us as a family, but to outsiders I suppose it would have looked relatively small. I think the biggest impact is feeling confident that they're [School B] confident with her and what they're doing and their approach and how she responds to it. That's the biggest impact and I think that's got a lot to do with the fact that the school's heavily involved in the ELEA program and understanding it. They've got a real focus on well-being, they're probably progressive in the way that they go about having their students participating in things like that.

So that program has been life changing for us. Seeing her realising and accessing tools that she didn't know that she had and utilising them, just her overall sense of wellbeing is amazing. There are still going to be things that she struggles with developmentally and socially, things that she struggles with, but that empowerment of having those tools and those inner resources and outer resources and all of that, self-awareness and knowledge, you can see the impact that it's having on her. Friendships at school and experiences at school, education full stop, she's aware of what she struggles with, but she also knows that she can cope with it now. It's massive, really, really, powerful."

Reason for selection: Describes the changes as life-changing, able to clearly articulate specific changes in her child (child being able to identify when she is stressed and taking herself to her room to do grounding techniques), child with history of school exclusion, with profound changes which enable her to participate more fully in her education and life in general.

Thematic Analysis:

"it's not just the horses"

"there's a whole range of things..."

This thematic analysis reinforces the multi-faceted nature of the ELEA program where we can group the words of the participants, their phrases and meaning into the elements outlined in Diagram 3. The facets of Therapy – Learning – Communication – Coaching – Horse Education as indicated by the yellow highlights above. This thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted both manually and using Nvivo (6.0) during May – August 2016. The main themes emerging were:

Being taken (139) – as in taken somewhere else, lessons, being accepted, bringing, holding, learning, taking something away from the program, turning up, engaging, being guided (Learning).

See(ing) (125) – attending (the program), being asked to, bringing something, engaging, guided, guiding, holding, being involved, training, taking away (from the program), making needs visible (Coaching).

Like(d) (107) – care, cared (for), similar, a wish (for something better) (Therapy).

Feeling (104) – experiences, (the) experience (of the program), (finding) feeling, feels, fingers, impressed, sense and senses, touch, touched (Therapy).

Horses (96) – horse, horses, buck (Horse Education).

Think (95) – believe, cerebral, guess, imagine, reason, meaning, reasoning, remembering, thinking, thought, thoughts (Communication).

Make (happen) (83) – build, builds, clear, clearly, crap, doing, fixed, gives, giving (a) hit, making, pretend, pretending, reached, reaching, throwing (away) (Coaching).

Know(ing) (73) – bang, bed, experiences, knowing, knowledge, love, loved, loved ones, recognising (Learning).

Now (49) – immediate, immediately, instant, the present, being present, straightaway (Communication).

How much (48) – lots, much, often, practical, practice (Learning).

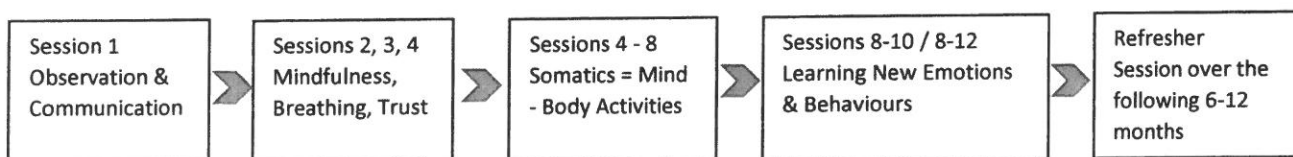
Emily (44)

Summary

The participants are clearly reflecting on these components and of the trauma-informed nature of the communication style and learning. The ELEA equine learning program encompasses facilitated observation, communication and embodied experiences that relate human to horse and human to human. The most common outcomes as expressed from the Most Significant Change Case-studies and from the thematic analysis includes:

1. Behavioural changes;
2. Stress relief;
3. Mind and body awareness and control;
4. Relationship with an intuitive practitioner;
5. Guided meditations as a means of creating independent meditation techniques;
6. Re-engagement with education, work, friendships and family relationships.

The mind – body awareness that is gained by clients of the ELEA program provides skills and techniques for individuals (and families) to utilise in every-day life (Learning) is a crucial aspect of the program. Sometimes the initial contact by Emily as intuitive practitioner requires intensive observation and one-to-one communication. Noticing behaviours and allowing individuals to locate feelings that are hidden or suppressed (Therapy). The program then contributes to individuals engaging with the horses (Horse Education) and being led or trained to build their skills, reach out for assistance when stressed and then visioning a new way of feeling (Coaching). The patterns of Communication are important as they are human to human and horse to human and human to horse, this transference of emotion is a complex phenomenon which highlights to all the vulnerability of the client via the vulnerability of the horse. The horse then becomes role model as the facilitator guides the client into behaviour patterns recognised by the horse as calm and measured. This acts as a mirror for the client, who can then proceed to further activities that strengthen relationships within the program and then within their lives.



Conclusions

Equine Learning Experiences Australia (ELEA) is an emerging form of trauma informed practice contrasting against established forms of human services and therapeutic relationships. It is not unique, in that programs are developing across Australia, Europe and the USA. The horse plays a central role in the process of establishing a relationship plus power, the response of the individual and the sentient.

However, it is the philosophies, experiences and role of the facilitator (Emily), her passion, her process of engaging with each individual client and her flexibility in adjusting the program for each client or group of clients plus her ability to recognise trauma in each individual that allows the process to work. There is no evidence of long-term impact of ELEA, however, there is some evidence of short-term impact and significant behaviour change by mostly female participants. There is evidence of the need for participants to participate in 'top up' sessions at 6 months and 12 months following participation in the whole program. This aligns with the international research evidence.

There is significant buy-in from human services agencies and schools in the region however, funding is difficult to locate for individual clients or families to participate. Information about this service to funding bodies does need to occur via a seminar that uses the evidence and case-studies in this report to 'sell' the idea that ELEA is a successful intervention for children, young people and adults with PTSD specifically. Claims about treating depression or any other diagnosable mental illness should not be made at this time, further research is required. However the effectiveness for individuals with PTSD is being proven internationally and with this research.

Clients are reporting and demonstrating to others, significant changes in their engagement with education, work and their relationships following participation in the ELEA program. This is most often the aim of referral agencies, case-workers and schools, to get individuals to re-engage with their services so that further learning and development for individuals can occur. Although this research has been limited in terms of gender, ELEA is ideal to include men engaged in family violence or other behaviour impacting others as self-awareness of emotions is a factor in patterns of family violence.

Recommendations

2016

Distribution and further presentation of this report and current data via:

1. Local seminars (CEOs of community agencies, school principals, DHHS, TAC, insurance companies, Medicare, private practitioners) at ELEA to release the report and demonstrate the program;
2. Conferences (regional, state-wide, national);
3. Publication of a journal article (Social Work/Psychology/Social Learning).

2016 – 2017

A pre and post-test research project that targets a specific 10-12 week program aimed at a specific cohort (Male adolescents/ Men), and a continuation of collecting case-study data (2017 FedUni MSW student placement).

2018 – 2021

Longitudinal research (PhD project) that examines all emerging research and incorporates further pre and post-test research of specific cohorts (children) and the long term benefits of ELEA for adolescents transitioning into adulthood via case-study data.

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Appendix

- 1) HREC information
- 2) Human Services workers' perspectives (from interviews with SIG and SAG)
- 3) A testimonial from a father
- 4) A testimonial from CaFS



Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee

Principal Researcher:	Dr Robert Townsend
Other/Student Researcher/s:	Dr Christina Sadowski Janet Phillips
School/Section:	Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Faculty of Education & Arts
Project Number:	A15-179
Project Title:	Equine Learning Experiences Australia Evaluation
For the period:	15/12/2015 to 30/06/2016

Quote the Project No.A15-179 in all correspondence regarding this application.

Please note: Ethics Approval is contingent upon the submission of a **Final Project Report** at the completion/discontinuation of the project. **Annual Project Reports** must also be submitted if the duration of the project exceeds twelve months. It is the responsibility of researchers to take note of the following dates and submit these reports in a timely manner, as reminders may not be sent out. Failure to submit reports will result in your ethics approval lapsing.

REPORTS TO HREC:

A final report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:

30 July 2016

These report forms can be found at:

<http://federation.edu.au/research-and-innovation/research-support/ethics/human-ethics/human-ethics3>

Fiona Koop



Ethics Officer

15 December 2015

Please see attached 'Conditions of Approval'.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

1. The project must be conducted in accordance with the approved application, including any conditions and amendments that have been approved. You must comply with all of the conditions imposed by the HREC, and any subsequent conditions that the HREC may require.
2. You must report immediately anything which might affect ethical acceptance of your project, including:
 - Adverse effects on participants;
 - Significant unforeseen events;
 - Other matters that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
3. Where approval has been given subject to the submission of copies of documents such as letters of support or approvals from third parties, these must be provided to the Ethics Office before the research may commence at each relevant location.
4. Proposed changes or amendments to the research must be applied for, using a '**Request for Amendments**' form, and approved by the HREC before these may be implemented.
5. If an extension is required beyond the approved end date of the project, a '**Request for Extension**' should be submitted, allowing sufficient time for its consideration by the committee. Extensions cannot be granted retrospectively.
6. If changes are to be made to the project's personnel, a '**Changes to Personnel**' form should be submitted for approval.
7. An '**Annual Report**' must be provided by the due date specified each year for the project to have continuing approval.
8. A '**Final Report**' must be provided at the conclusion of the project.
9. If, for any reason, the project does not proceed or is discontinued, you must advise the committee in writing, using a '**Final Report**' form.
10. You must advise the HREC immediately, in writing, if any complaint is made about the conduct of the project.
11. You must notify the Ethics Office of any changes in contact details including address, phone number and email address.
12. The HREC may conduct random audits and / or require additional reports concerning the research project.

Failure to comply with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007) and with the conditions of approval will result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.

SAG

I chose one of my boys and started taking him and just was blown away from the very first session, as a professional watching. Our kids are incredible traumatised and all that stuff and being able to see the work happening as in the horses give instant feedback. So I could see what was going on for him and where he was at. It was incredibly powerful.

He was 11 at the time. Really significant trauma history. Traditional therapies don't necessarily – we don't see results. For kids with attachment and trauma issues, that's a lifelong commitment. I'm certainly not suggesting that equine therapy healed him of those things, but he did take stuff away from that that he wouldn't from traditional therapists, I think.

I do remember with this boy there was this one worker in particular he really wanted to come to watch him. He was really proud of how well he was doing because he felt like he was learning to control the horse. But actually what he was doing was regulating himself and in turn the horse would then do what he wanted the horse to do. So we brought this worker out and he dried afterwards. This boy was so dysregulated.

Afterwards when he and I dropped the boy off and then went and had coffee, he had tears in his eyes and he was really emotional, going, 'that kid just sat for 20 minutes and fully engaged in what he was doing and he didn't even realise that he was engaging.' So it was a really powerful thing to watch that happened. As I said, you get instant feedback.

As a worker who did work with these incredibly traumatised kids, you'd drop them off at a psychology session and pick them up 50 minutes later. They'd never talk about it, you're not meant to ask and psychologists very rarely provide feedback about that stuff. So in this, it was just I see it, I see it happening.

I think everyone should go to equine therapy because it doesn't even feel like therapy, it feels like a practice rather than an intervention. Kids with trauma and attachment don't trust adults and they don't form attachments easily, they don't create bonds with people. They only have to do that with a horse and a horse isn't going to hurt them, so it works.

They want to have that relationship with the animal. So watching the kids and you know the kids will generally choose the same horse because they build a relationship with that horse and the horse gives them back, it is pretty amazing. Some horses will go, 'there's that kid' and go up and greet them and they have this bond. If you've been traumatised and abused by the adults in your world who are meant to love you and look after you, then you've got this horse that's not going to hurt and will walk up... Then as a result they build a relationship with Em because they're Em's horses and they love Em.

SJG (Human Services Worker)

He'd been violent to his mother, then I started working 0 he was notorious for not engaging, not at school, escalating violence at home. He was 13 at the time. This time last year, around this time last year, he wasn't at school, mum had a history of domestic violence. I'd suspected there'd been some stuff happened with the young boy as well but he was completely disinterested in actually sitting down and talking. So I thought this young person needs some really intense intervention and the traditional methods aren't going to work for him, it's just not going to happen. So then I thought equine therapy – now that may be – so I had to do a bit of investigation and found out that (CaFS) was running it or helping kids get in.

So I rang the worker there. Got my young man into equine therapy and after an initial "I'm not going, I'm never going back there again, don't even bring me out here again" Yeah he went along and got a lot out of it. He had an initial series of 10 lessons and then was also offered another 10 and he only attended 2 of these (2nd 10).

I would see him once a week in that time and transport him out to his equine therapy which was a lovely thing to do. Because I'd go out there and wait, watch and see what was happening. Then talk with Emily and him afterwards and then we'd take him back into town and drop him off.

I saw – so this young fellow was really anxious, had a lot of social anxiety, just had suffered a lot from anxiety. I would see him go out, work with the horses and he's – like it was like he was able to shed a weight. He completely relaxed and was in the moment, not thinking, not worrying. Completely in the moment, for the whole time he was there. That was really quite astonishing to see. It was fabulous, I also saw him, we'd spoken about it, where he was able to – he'd got into situations where his anxiety would get triggered and he was able to use the techniques that he was learning to combat that anxiety, quite successfully.

Also when he was at home and there would be an incident at home, he was also able to use that kind of de-escalate himself so it didn't trip over into abusive behaviour towards his mum. So some really positive things were happening for him.

He was more relaxed, not nearly as anxious, everywhere yeah. You could see that he would be visibly relaxed after and much calmer after the sessions. Also when I was seeing him on the days when he wasn't going out to equine therapy.

One of his big triggers for his anxiety would be walking into supermarkets. He found that just very, very difficult to do unless he was with a group of friends. He was telling me that he was able to that by himself. Where they live there's a supermarket, literally around the corner and he was able to do that by himself using some of the techniques that Emily had been teaching him with the horses. He also developed a really clear insight to his behaviour and what was motivating his behaviours.

He spoke a lot about grounding and being a king. Kind of recognising what the emotion for what it was. Because that was one of the things that I was really impressed with, with the equine therapy was that you could see the kids were getting an absolute concrete, in the moment response, to whatever emotion they were feeling. So it was reflected back to them straight away. The horses don't judge that stuff. People will often put on a smiley face and go, oh your behaviour is really weirding me out but I'll smile because then it'll be okay.

The horses don't do that, they just go, you're being a dick. Him getting that feedback which he – I don't know whether he ever got that really honest feedback about how his emotional state was affecting other people. That was a huge eye opener, not only for me but it was for him as well, to be

able to understand, oh, what I do really affects other creatures in my world. I think that was a really big thing for him.

When horses are really comfortable they'll really relax, they'll drop their heads, they'll have a long lead, they're just walking along behind, no issues, no problems. Then the horse, a couple of times, the pace got a bit quicker, he got a bit closer, the head got up. It was just, I'm not sure about you anymore. Emily and I were talking to him about that afterwards. After that session, he's gone, yeah, in that spot, I started thinking about something else.

Rather than being here I just started thinking about something else, something I was worried about. The horse fed that back to him, straight away. He kind of said, I was worried that that's what happened, that the horse was able to tell me that I wasn't feeling okay, right then at that time.

As you're probably getting the gist of, I think it's a fabulous program. If I had the funding I would have most of my clients doing it. I think it's fabulous for young people, even if they think they're afraid of horses. It's just a really fabulous program with some – the results that I saw with him were just incredible. I've worked with another young girl, still working with her, who did some equine therapy through the school with another provider and she spoke about how much she loved it and how much it helped her for the same kind of reason. I think Emily is really, really good with the young people. I think she's able to communicate with them in a way that's authentic, real and isn't condescending or patronising at all.



Equine
Learning
Experiences
Australia

Wednesday 28th September 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

My 10 year old son and I, on reaching our appointment, there is a sight of open valleys and mountains in the distance, the serenity is one to be hold in memories.

We were greeted by Emily of Equine Learning Experiences Australia in Napoleons. After introduction's and a cuppa, my son and I were introduced to 'Mia' and 'Summer', both lovely mares, who in return greeted us both with a few licks. The joy on my son's smile said it all.

You see, my son has ADHD and associated behavior differences. After the loss of his sister, my daughter to a traumatic road accident, his and my own mixed emotions of grief and loss are needing another form of therapy. I had an open mind that my son would fully understand, what was spoken about in regarding to our equine sessions.

Emily's professionalism in intrusting methods to deal with my own and my son's issues have been practiced now on a daily basis. And in doing so, has bought my son and I, to a point in our lives which allows us both to breathe much easier in our approach to daily activities.

The connection between horses and human , being Mia, Summer , Emily my son and I has truly been very honest , knowledgeable with powerful body sensing, mindfulness and emotionally healing feelings. My experience in joining in on my son's equine learning program with Emily and Mia and Summer, has brought out in a controlled manner all of my Traumatic PTSD and grief issues, all that was building up inside of me which is affecting my physical and mental wellbeing. I am now able , through methods taught by Emily and my horse Summer to channeling my deepest darkest feelings that have affected my personal life, and to deal with them and release them, instead of bottling them all up inside.

The reality of learning to change has been very welcoming and rewarding. Finally to see and notice the change in my son and I , will always be a big part of our lives. In thankfulness.

Sincerely,

M.T Maguire and Son.



Ballarat Business Awards Committee 2015

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Equine Learning Experiences Australia Program – Director Emily McVeigh

I would like to express my support for this fantastic program. I work with at-risk children and young people through the care collaboration component of the School Focused Youth Service program.

Any school can ring me to discuss therapeutic options for students at risk of dis-engaging from school. They may already be attending alternative programs such as REAL school or be on limited hours at the school due to various issues, usually behaviour based.

I have researched evidence-based therapeutic experiential programs world-wide and have found equine therapy to have the most profound effect on participants of all ages who are experiencing a wide range of difficulties – depression, low self-esteem, violence, abuse, body image, low confidence, alcohol and other drugs etc.

Approximately 18 months ago, Karen Snibson, Vice-Principal of Phoenix College here in Ballarat recommended that I look at ELEA as the equine program I was searching for. She was so enthusiastic when she spoke about the results they were seeing at their school. Paul Deacon, DEET's Behavioural Visiting teacher also talked to me about equine therapy and the positive impact it had on some of the most disadvantaged, dis-engaged children.

Since that time, I have taken many children from 8yo through to 13yo to her program with amazing results. But what I would really like to stress is that Emily never stops trying to improve her program to meet the changing needs. She is self-reflective, passionate and a great advocate for children in her program. The door doesn't close when they finish their session. Emily connects with schools, carers, parents and other workers trying to effect positive outcomes for these children. Research shows that programs in isolation will only have so much effect – an holistic approach will always work better. Emily goes above and beyond what you would expect. She does so much in her own time with these students.

I consider Emily's program to be a foundation program that all students could gain benefits from – as an early intervention, as a leadership program, as a therapeutic intervention etc.

Emily is paving the way with this program to see Ballarat shine. To help our disconnected families connect and contribute to schools and community.

Where would they be without this program?

Leanne Carr
School Focused Youth Service Co-ord.



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