

----- Original Message -----

From: Edmund J Nightingale [mailto:night002@umn.edu]
Sent: Saturday, June 14, 2008 12:16 PM
Subject: FW: [psychiatry-research] News: Healing through horses

Given our recent gift to "We Can Ride," I thought you might appreciate seeing these postings about "equitherapy" or the therapy of involvement with horses.

Ed

----- Original Message -----

From: psychiatry-research@yahoogroups.com
Sent: Wednesday, June 11, 2008 8:07 AM
To: psychiatry-research@yahoogroups.com
Subject: [psychiatry-research] News: Healing through horses

Temple Grandin in her 2005 book "Animals in Translation" argues for equitherapy. One interesting item - she mentions "problem-children" are often sent to military schools where horses ~used~ to be plentiful.

Richard Harper

----- Original Message -----

Healing through horses

Horses not only are fun to ride, but can help teach relationship skills as well as aiding people with physical or mental disabilities -- or so says equitherapy.

"Horses mirror the feelings people try to hide," the pioneer in the discipline, Linda Kohanov, who runs the Epona centre in Arizona in the United States, told AFP. "They teach relationship skills."

Two main disciplines come under the equitherapy umbrella -- equine-facilitated psychotherapy and equine-assisted personal development.

But therapeutic work with horses does not necessarily involve riding, said Brigitte Martin, co-president of France's Equine-Assisted Therapy Federation. "It can happen during grooming, or with the horse on a long rein. The horse acts as a mediator between the therapist and the patient."

Martin works with children who are autistic or blind or deaf, and facilitates their contact with a pony. "The child becomes less agitated, and more relaxed," she said.

Equitherapy can improve posture and well-being, added Josee-Laura Delacoux of the French National Equitherapy Society SFE. "You see people opening up, smiling more. Horses are very sensitive. They pick up on emotions, without being judgmental, and this allows people to

express themselves."

Claire Morin, from the French association Cheval Contact, says riding itself is not essential, but can be important.

"People's lives can be transformed by interaction with a horse. They see how they communicate with others, and what they need to change in themselves. They learn how to say no, and set limits, but in a natural way, without a power struggle."

-- 'There is intuitive communication between horses and humans' --

Morin says she is a facilitator while the horse plays the therapeutic role. "There is an intuitive communication that occurs between horses and humans. The horse brings people into the here and now."

Yves Rivet, who founded a riding school in Charente-Maritime where mentally handicapped people work as grooms and assist the instructors, says the initiative has given them a new vision of themselves.

"People who come to ride see them not as handicapped people, but as trained stable hands. The stigma is removed."

Therapeutic riding, he said, began in France in the 1970s and has been used to help the mentally handicapped since the 1980s. "It was used firstly by physiotherapists, then to help children with social or family difficulties or behavioral problems, and even personality disorders.

"These were children who refused to adhere to society's rules. When you ride a horse you need to accept the animal's rules, and transgressing those rules can be very unpleasant."

Rivet recalls the case of an autistic child who had been abandoned by his mother. "He would lie down on the horse's neck, and cling to its mane. One day he hid his face in the mane, and, in floods of tears, shouted for his mother. At a subconscious level, the horses' mane had reminded him of his mother and her long, black hair. From that day, his autism disappeared."

The horse is a very powerful symbol, added Vincent Folatre, of the Archipel Cheval Confiance association. "And it has a soothing rhythm akin to being rocked in the womb, or in a mother's arms.

Equitherapy has also been used to treat drug addiction and eating disorders, and even to help rehabilitate prisoners.

"It's no accident that so many of the world's great leaders were skilful riders," said Kohanov. "Horses invigorate your spirit and help you get in touch with the real beauty and power of life."