Building Resiliency:
Combining Social-Emotional Learning & Equine Assisted Learning for Youth at Risk

Jacy Layton
Youth Services Coordinator
PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Tamara Merritt
Director of Program Innovation & Research
PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor, ESMHL
What Will We Accomplish Today?

- Brief History of the Program
- Partnering with Schools
- Defining the Population
- Creative Programming
- Tracking Outcomes
- Program Sustainability
- Preliminary Research Findings
Mission Statement
At Hearts & Horses Therapeutic Riding Center, our mission is to promote the physical, cognitive, emotional and social well-being of individuals with special needs through equine-assisted activities and therapies.

Hearts & Horses - Center Highlights

- Founded in 1997
- 23-acre ranch, 30 Equines
- Serving 200 participants
- 250 volunteers per week
Program Diversity

- Veterans
- Therapy Services
- Changing Leads

Pie chart showing:
- 38% Riding in the Moment
- 33%
- 18%
- 8%
- 3% (Therapeutic Riding)
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History of Changing Leads

Designed to help youth-at-risk find friendship, develop trust and form a deep connection through partnering with a horse.
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Full Day Program

Social Emotional Learning and Equine Assisted Learning to help youth THRIVE

- By exploring the themes of respect, empathy, self-respect and confidence, accountability, and conflict resolution the youth participating in our program are learning to navigate school and life with more success.
- These successes in turn radiate out to the greater community.
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Partnering with the Schools

“Changing Leads has really been life changing for our students. They have learned to place their trust in their horses and adult volunteers, be real, and open-up their hearts to positive change. Thank you!”
Communication Through Weekly Newsletters

What We Accomplished

This week we continued exploring emotional literacy, self-awareness, and empathy. Each day we began and ended our session with the “mood meter” in order to bring awareness to our emotions. This practice helps students to identify new words for emotions and also to gain perspective of how emotions may change throughout the day. In our activities with our horse herd today we focused on continuing to build a relationship with our horse through care and leadership. We learned about how horses communicate through body language, and how we can empathize with how they are feeling. We also learned The Masterson Method, a form of equine bodywork that builds trust with the horse. In addition to the Masterson Method, students further connected with their horse through grooming and spending one on one time together. Students were asked to find similarities between themselves and their horse, allowing them to practice empathy for themselves and others.

In addition to teaching responsibility, research indicates that the human-animal bond has the potential to stimulate empathy. Considering how to keep a horse safe, healthy, and happy, can lead to new feelings of wanting to care for another being. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another’s shoes (whether horse or human!) and imagine how they feel. As students begin to build a bond with their horses and learn what it takes to care for their horse, their own capacity for empathy can begin to grow.

Reflections & Transferable Learning

- What does it mean to have empathy for someone?
- Do you know anyone in your life who could use a little empathy right now?
- How could you show empathy for this person?

Competencies Practiced

- Empathy
- Emotional Literacy
- Self-awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

Thought for the Week

Think of something you can do to take care of yourself or someone else this week. Notice when you are being mindful and feeling empathetic.
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Nuts and Bolts of the Program
3 schools:
one bus
8 weeks - Spring & Fall
Visit schools
Circle up at the beginning and end
Horse Hook
Ground & Mounted Work
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Our Population

- Middle School Students
- Emerging Youth at Risk
- High Ace Scores
- Early Childhood Trauma
- Tier 2-3 kids
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The Team – Pairing horse, rider & volunteer
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“Social, emotional and academic skills are all essential to success in school, careers, and in life, and they can be effectively learned in the context of trusted ties to caring and competent adults.”
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Building Healthy Relationships

- Volunteer recruitment and training are critical
- Relationship between volunteer and rider
- Continuing relationship after program ends
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CASEL
Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning
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Self-Awareness

The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior.

- Identifying emotions
- Recognizing Strengths
- Self Confidence
- Self Efficacy
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Why is it important to tune into your feelings when working with the horses?

The Rock Check-In
Youth choose a rock from the center of the circle that best describes how they are feeling at this very moment.

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MOOD METER APP
BUILD EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE THAT LASTS A LIFETIME

Build greater self-awareness to make more informed decisions
Increase your emotion vocabulary to communicate more accurately
Learn effective emotion regulation strategies to manage stress
Track your emotions over time to notice patterns at home and work

Developed by Researchers at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence  www.ei.yale.edu
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Self-Management

The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.

- Impulse control
- Self-management
- Self-discipline
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Self-Management - Mindfulness
Self-Management

Brain Science and the Six Second Pause

“It takes six seconds to manage anger. It takes six seconds to create compassion.”

~ Six Second Emotional Intelligence Network ~
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Half-halt

Trigger

List 6 Items
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Responsible Decision Making
The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions.

- Identify Problem
- Solve Problem
- Analyze Situations
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What Do We Value?

Pick three VALUES that help you be your best self.

Belonging  Diversity  Health  Optimism
Caring  Excellence  Honesty  Peace
Collaboration  Fairness  Hope  Perserverance
Community  Faith  Humor  Respect
Compassion  Family  Independence  Risk Taking
Confidence  Friendship  Kindness  Self-expression
Connection  Generosity  Learning  Sportsmanship
Courage  Giving Back  Love  Teamwork
Creativity  Gratitude  Loyalty  Well-being
Curiosity  Harmony  Nature  Wisdom

These are the values I hold that help me be my best self.
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Responsible Decision Making

~ Building a Challenge Course ~
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Relationship Skills

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Relationship Building
Relationship Skills - Horse Hook
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Social Awareness

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds.

- Empathy
- Perspective Taking
- Respect for Others
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Social Awareness through the Masterson Method
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Riding Boot to Boot
Walk The Line

Shared Humanity – Realizing we are not alone
SEL Goals

- Communication and social skills to interact effectively
- Awareness and understanding of our own emotions
- Skills to manage and express emotions, thoughts and stress in more effective ways
- Empathy for others
- Awareness of external supports
- More engaged citizenship
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Monitoring Change: DESSA Assessment (Devereux Student Strengths Assessment)

In conjunction with the school district, we are now using the DESSA to measure program outcomes.

- Standardized social & emotional competence assessment for students in grades K-12.
- Assesses eight domains of social-emotional wellness: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, goal-directed behavior, personal responsibility, decision making, optimistic thinking.
- Completed by teachers, parents or staff members pre and post session.
- Strength-based assessment of 72 questions.
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Our program is currently using the following assessments to monitor change. These surveys are completed by the students pre and post session.

### Monitoring Change: Assessments

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<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **Participant Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)** | 9 question survey  
Survey topics: interest/pleasure in doing things, feeling depressed, trouble sleeping, feeling tired, appetite issues, trouble concentrating, and thoughts of harming yourself. |
| **General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7)** | 7 question survey  
Survey topics: feeling nervous/anxious, worrying, trouble relaxing, being restless, irritability, and feeling afraid. |
| **Self-Efficacy**                  | 10 question survey  
Survey topics: problem solving, goals, doing a good job, staying calm when faced with difficult tasks, and finding different solutions. |
Hearts & Horses - Volunteer Assessment Tool

Significant Improvements in Communication, Trust & Attitude
Marking the Moment in Time
~ Graduation Celebration ~
The Importance of Healthy Closure

Curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.

— Walt Disney

HEARTS & HORSES
Therapeutic Riding Center

“Where the wisdom of the horse moves us to develop and deepen our greatest potential.”
Funding the Program

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"My horse makes me feel like a somebody on a day when I feel like a nobody."
Resource Information

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Youth Services Coordinator
PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor
jacy@heartsandhorses.org

Tamara Merritt
Director of Program Innovation & Research
PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor
tamara@heartsandhorses.org

January 2024:
Changing Leads Curriculum & Implementation Manuals

163 N CR 29, Loveland, CO  80537     Phone: 970-663-4200
www.heartsandhorses.org
The Study

Evaluating the efficacy of an equine-assisted social-emotional learning program for youth with a history of trauma and/or adverse childhood experiences.

SEL is one of the most universally adopted, evidence-based approaches to address student well-being (Cook et al., 2015) across five domains.
The Study

This study explored the impacts of a social-emotional learning program in an equine setting on the following measures:

1. Social-Emotional Competencies (Parent & Teacher DESSA)
2. Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression (GAD-7 and PHQ-9)
3. Self-Efficacy (GSE)

https://www.heartsandhorses.org/
Behavioral indicators can be the FIRST sign of mental and/or physical stress.
The Physiology

Physiological measures can confirm what we might see.

Salivary Cortisol
• Acute Stress
• Minimally Invasive

Thermal Imaging
• Sympathetic Activation
• Non-Invasive
Work Cited


