How Equine Facilitated Wellness Practice enhances mental health Social Work Programs

Equine facilitated wellness practice in conjunction with the WFHT clinical counselling model of mental health care is a collaboration between physician, social workers, patients and horses. The EFW practice potentially can reduce emergency room visits as it often accelerates healing. Patients present with mood disorders, often anxiety with poor somatic awareness in areas of depression, grief, boundaries, childhood neglect/sexual abuse. The trauma focus is benefited by the equine engagement in the areas of attachment, self-esteem and self-soothing strategies (see handout for research). The program is available to anyone enrolled in OHIP, reducing financial barriers and resulting in fewer missed appointments.

2016 Participant Data (complete)

Participant #: 16
Total Visits #: 43
Total Hours #: 86

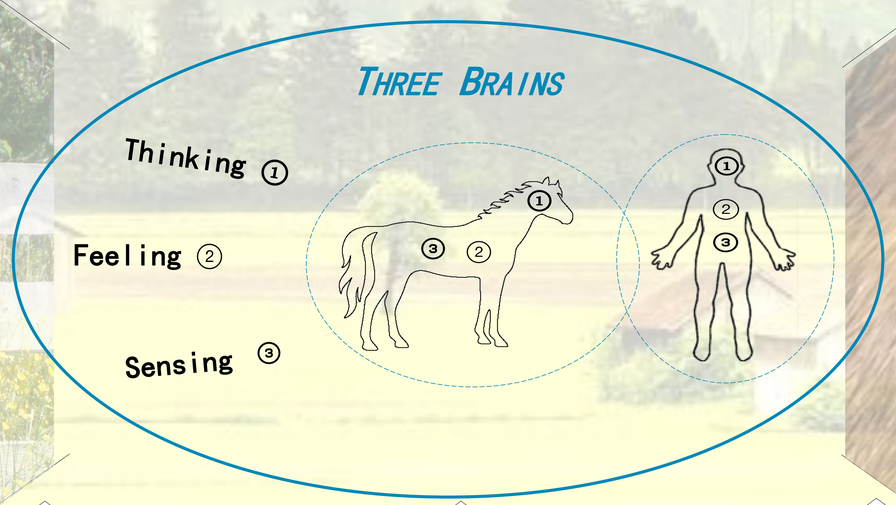
2017 Participant Data (incomplete)

Participant #: 12
Total Visits #: 37
Total Hours #: 51.5

SESSION FRAMEWORK

- Providing a Safe Container
- Bottom up as well as Top Down Experience
- Redirect Cognitive Trauma Story
- Encourage a Present Moment Focus
- Introduce 5 Senses Body Scan
- Learn to Slow down – The Pause
- Recognize the Window of Tolerance
- Notice Boundaries as Proximity and Felt Sense
- Locate Feeling Memories as Information
- Experience 2 YESES: the horse and participant
- *The Horse is Never Sacrificed for the Goals of the Participant*

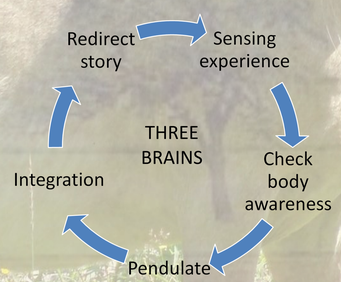
THREE BRAINS



WHY HORSES?

- The EFW Horse is a Willing Partner/Co-Facilitator
- Naturally Suited to Emotional and Somatic Work
- Present Focused and Connected to their Environment
- Large Capacity for Social Connection and Relationship

TOP DOWN – BOTTOM UP



EFW-CANADA
is the National Certifying Body

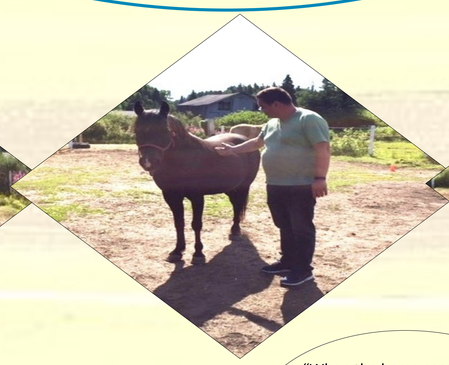
EQUINE FACILITATED WELLNESS PRACTICE and Social Work

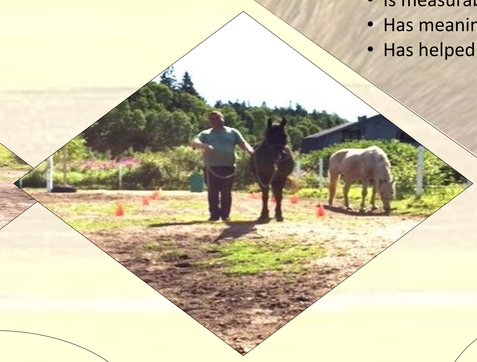
- Looks like playing with horses
- Looks like nothing is happening
- Looks like horsemanship skills
- Is connection with good results
- Is measurable
- Has meaningful 'aha' moments
- Has helped when feeling 'stuck'

EQUINE ETHICS

- We recognize the horse as a sentient being with emotions, preferences and gifts
- Horses need to be allowed to "express opinions"
- Horses are treated as individuals
- We never abuse a horse physically or emotionally or allow anyone else to abuse a horse in our care

(Samples taken from EFW-CAN Code of Ethics: www.equinefacilitatedwellness.org)





"Felt horse wanted to connect with me".

"About 3 days afterwards I could sense Dyna in my deep dream state; I saw her main and tail. I felt the influence of the activity with her and it filled my mind when I woke."

"I learned a lot about trauma and how it affects me and Sonny and how to cope with uncomfortable feelings".

"When the horse came to me, my whole body felt weird – heart started racing. Just an amazing feeling of joy. I was scared at first and then I was able to relax and breathe".

"When Charlie came between Dyna and me I felt protected".

"I felt Foxy's heartbeat in my hand when I was brushing her; Foxy could say no by walking away from me. I remembered feeling her heartbeat when my brother tried to bully me – I could say no!"

WAWA Family Health Team
Équipe de santé familiale
"Together...a healthier Community"