

## **WHAT IS EQUINE FACILITATED LEARNING?**

Equine Facilitated Learning is a forward-looking approach (based in phenomenology and gestalt) working with individuals on life skills. Participants are encouraged to closely observe and interact with the horses, to understand and challenge their own assumptions and habits. EFL provides real time experience of what it means to make a choice in how you turn up and receive instant non-judgemental feedback from the horse.

## **WHY HORSES?**

Horses provide a practical experience for learning, the difference between theorising or rationalising how to do something (talking about it) and doing it. The horse is the partner, sensing the subtle cues in our behaviour and providing instant, honest, and accurate feedback in the moment – creating experiences which get to the core issues quickly, powerfully, and effectively.

## **COULD THIS APPROACH BE USED WITH ANY ANIMAL?**

Horses are highly sensitive beings who react in the moment to subtle changes in energy, intention, emotion, breathing and body language. This is all due to their need to survive as prey animals - giving them the ability to sense energy and intention very acutely.

## **WHEN WAS THE CHARITY ESTABLISHED?**

The charity was established in 2013 and grew from LeadChange our corporate delivery partner. Our ethos is one of partnerships, from the community of practitioners and stables that enable our delivery to the bespoke services we create for our funding and delivery bodies – such as the NHS and Veteran Services.

## **WHAT ARE THE MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE CHARITY?**

We help individuals see in real time how thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviour interact to produce how you turn up – and that with awareness and presence you have a choice in how you turn up and the impact that has on the relationships around you.

Our work is self-directed, where the learning needs are expressed, and solutions found by the learner. We empower individuals to understand and

manage who they are, and to produce more effective solutions to life's dilemmas and challenges, transforming themselves and the lives of those around them. To date we have supported 1600+ disadvantaged women, children and adults to increase their economic independence.

### **WHAT WORK ARE YOU DELIVERING WITH THE NHS?**

NHS Charities Together has provided HorseHeard with funding to support the Buckinghamshire community through working with Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust (BHT) and their social prescribing team. The funding is to support the most vulnerable in the wider community, helping them explore their emotions and mindset, and providing them with different self-management strategies in order to thrive.

### **WHO HAVE YOU WORKED WITH?**

We create partnerships with local community organisations such as NHS Pennine Care Military Veterans Service, Royal British Legion, local Veteran Breakfast Clubs, Help for Heroes, Blind Veterans UK, Combat Stress and BLESMA. These groups ask us to deliver complementary services as they have seen the success and compatibility of our service. We are also closely linked with various County Councils, Schools, Colleges and Universities and NHS CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) supporting children in need.

### **MY CHILD SUFFERS FROM ANXIETY – HOW WILL THIS HELP?**

For a child or young person who typically controls very little of their own environment, working with horses is very empowering. The relationship is one of trust with a powerful being, a trust that does not rely exclusively on language as a medium for interaction. Working with the horses we look to help develop vocabulary about feelings and emotions, reflect care for self and others, and increases confidence and connection. Research suggests the changes in anxiety are a result of the confidence gathered during EFL and increased feelings of control and physical comfort.

### **CAN I APPROACH MY LOCAL NHS TRUST TO ACCESS THIS SERVICE?**

Our desire is to be able to provide EFL through social prescribing to communities across the UK through our NHS. At present we have funding available to support a program of work with the Buckinghamshire Healthcare

Trust and we are working with NHS Charities Together to enable further support to those in need.

### **WHAT MAKES YOU CREDIBLE?**

We ensure that every project we deliver contains social value and impact measurements. This means we have a framework for recording both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, impact and value, enabling us to capture relevant data for our own assessment, development and reporting requirements as well as those of our diverse range of stakeholders. We have already invested in social value training and created an independent social value report (available on our website) containing our Key Value Indicators.

### **IS THERE ANY VALUE FROM A SINGLE SESSION?**

This depends on the individual. However, a single session may be all that is needed to gain insight into how we are turning up, to recognise the patterns of thought and behaviour connected to a situation and the choices we can make going forward. Sometimes the first session reveals that a deeper level of understanding is required and our programs are developed in conjunction with delivery bodies to ensure we support existing channels or deliver a solid level of service.

### **DOES IT WORK AS WELL FOR CHILDREN AS FOR ADULTS?**

Often horses respond more readily to children as they are often less constrained and closed than adults. Children are only partially conditioned to hide their inner workings and wear the mask that others expect.

### **DOES THE CHILD NEED TO BE A “WILLING PARTICIPANT” OR DOES IT STILL WORK WITH RELUCTANT PARTICIPANTS?**

Nothing we do is rushed, staged, forced, or coerced. Very little, or even no talking is required to take part and become centred in an interaction. Working with the horses the child can explore changes in thoughts and behaviours and explore different ways of being and find comfort from a powerful, trusting animal. Trust is central to our delivery and that comes from a trust that the facilitators and horse will turn up for the child regardless of how the child turns up.

### **CAN THE CHARITY DIRECTLY SUPPORT ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL?**

At present the charity does not provide support directly to individuals, we work in partnerships through NHS, Educational Settings or Veteran Support

Bodies. However, when there is solid demand, we do offer group sessions to enable individuals to experience working with horses first hand and minimise cost. Our work is delivered by a community of practitioners and in instances we may make available contacts for individuals to investigate private sessions.

### **WHAT HAPPENS IN A GROUP SESSION?**

The sessions enable individuals to explore areas of concern, and through real time observation, interaction and experimentation gain understanding of how they turn up and that there is a choice in how one 'turn's up'. The exercises help individuals undertake self-enquiry and make significant, often life changing revelations about their internal states. Participants are also encouraged to give and receive positive constructive feedback about their observations of the interactions. We work with groups of individuals, existing teams or in family sessions. Our sessions are in groups of up to 6 people or 12 people per half day session.

### **WHAT IF I'M SCARED OF HORSES?**

Often in life there are things that concern us, or we are feeling anxious about. As with all things in life there is a choice, and you have a choice as to how close you engage with the horses. The facilitators and team are here for you and if at any point you feel uncomfortable you can choose to leave the arena and the facilitators will support you. Observing feelings, thoughts and behaviours in relation to fear can provide its own insights.

### **WHAT IF I'VE NEVER BEEN NEAR A HORSE BEFORE?**

Many people who attend our sessions have not been near horses and you don't need any special skills or understanding, as no riding or horsemanship skills are required. There is no right or wrong, no competition or winning required. The focus is learning and experiencing in real time how changes in being have an impact on the world around us.

### **ARE THE HORSES ESPECIALLY TRAINED?**

No. Horses don't need to be trained to react instinctively. However, they need to be able to easily access their natural states and be emotionally stable in the presence of humans. Our horses are selected based on their inquisitive, friendly natures and their desire to interact with people as one of the herd. Their unique personalities, preferences, appearances and place in the herd all play a role in creating a rich environment for learning.

We are keen to express that all animals have unique personalities and if you do not know the horses background do not assume that they will welcome human interaction.

### **WHAT WILL THE COACHES TELL ME AND WHAT IF I DISAGREE?**

The facilitators will observe and describe the observation but will not interpret the interaction or tell you what you are feeling, believing, or thinking. Their role is to provide a safe space for you to explore and uncover what may lay behind how you are turning up. It will be the horses interaction which will provide you with feedback as they experience you from a place which is totally free from judgement and expectation.

### **WHERE'S THE PROOF THAT IT WORKS?**

There is a huge body of evidence for this work and its long-term effectiveness for treating a wide range of mental health conditions and for realising self-development goals. It has also been proven that purely being in the presence of horses lowers the stress response and increases endorphins.

### **CAN IT WORK ALONGSIDE OTHER TREATMENT AND MEDICATION?**

Yes. EFL when paired with other conventional therapies can act as a catalyst to help embody learning. In our delivery partnerships we co-create sessions to ensure that there is an integrated link between approaches and requirements.

### **Do you do therapy?**

We are not therapists. Equine Assisted Therapy is different because it addresses specific mental and physical health issues and should always be run by qualified therapists. Equine Assisted therapy can be used as a powerful tool for treatment of attention deficit disorder, substance abuse issues, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and low self-esteem. Interacting with horses — dynamic and inspiring living beings — adds metaphoric and reflective strength to conventional therapy and creates a non-threatening environment for revealing and accepting the authentic self.

### **HOW DOES IT COMPARE TO OTHER FORMS OF THERAPY?**

Equine facilitated learning is experiential, it places emphasis on the 'doing' rather than the 'talking' enabling clients to identify and address hidden or subconscious issues that are blocking their understanding.

It falls into the same categorisation as other experiential modalities such as art, music and wilderness experimental coaching but the significant difference is that it involves interacting with highly sentient beings that have the ability to provide instantaneous feedback and an unbiased reflection of our inner worlds and state of mind.

Unlike traditional talk therapy experiential coaching requires the full (and non-verbal) engagement of body and mind, a whole physical, interactive presence, where the individual is called to attend as a whole being ( not just the mind).

### **HOW DOES THIS MODEL OF EQUINE FACILITATED LEARNING COMPARE TO OTHER MODELS?**

HorseHeard and its corporate partner LeadChange have been delivering Equine Facilitated Learning for over 20 years and the legendary Andrew MacFarlane oversees our Community of Practitioners. In the field of EFL there are a myriad of standards, with the practice itself remaining unregulated. This is why we operate a community of practice. We bring the best in the field together and ensure continued CPD and delivery to a required standard. The HorseHeard way aligns most closely to the approach of the HERD Institute.

1. Sessions are always conducted by qualified equine specialist.
2. Our focus is on the present moment and what is taking place in that space not only in what is being thought but also in feelings, through our bodies, and our intuitive responses.
3. Our approach is phenomenological and gestalt in approach. Essentially asking, 'What is the lived experience of this person, and what does it mean to them?'
4. No riding takes place, and the horses are free to react instinctively to the client and the client is free to interact with the horse at any distance, in any position, with however much or little movement. The horses become metaphors for the clients inner story and the client becomes one of the herd.
5. The delivery is person-centred meaning that we provide a non-judgemental space for clients to discover their own best solution. Responses are not questioned, and issues are not coached, and the individual expresses what they are comfortable with. Often the greatest solutions are personally owned and not necessarily shared.

6. Our work is also based in somatics. Change in patterns come through at different speeds, with thought and feeling being fast. However, changing the body is the slowest but the most powerful, and the one we take the least notice of.
7. We also require our practitioners to meet the participants as a fellow traveller on a shared journey, bringing themselves authentically into the encounter, taking the risk to be vulnerable with the other. Also to recognise what is happening for the practitioner in the moment both internally and relationally and the quality of the connection with the client, the horse and the environment.
8. HorseHeard has high standards of practice and ethics with an ethics committee and protocol that is upheld to ensure best practice and the highest level of care for the participant. This includes facilitator supervision, ongoing training, informed consent, confidentiality, and a horse wellbeing manifesto.

#### **CAN I VOLUNTEER FOR YOU?**

We are often looking for experts in their field to support our administration or delivery.

#### **I AM AN EFL PRACTITIONER HOW DO I BECOME PART OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?**

Contact us. We are running a community recruitment session early in 2022 and would be pleased to hear from you.