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Benefits of Equine-Assisted Learning and Therapy

Introduction

Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) and Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) are evidence-informed interventions that engage clients in experiential activities involving horses to promote physical, emotional, cognitive, and social wellbeing (Bachi, 2012). These interventions are particularly beneficial for neurodivergent individuals and those with trauma-related histories. The therapeutic nature of horse-human interaction is grounded in somatic regulation, trust-based relationships, and non-verbal communication, aligning with current practices in trauma-informed care (Schultz et al., 2007).

About Hooves of Hope

Hooves of Hope delivers equine-assisted interventions in South Australia, combining clinical expertise with a deep understanding of horse behaviour. Services are facilitated by registered counsellors, equine specialists, and trained educators. The programs can be tailored to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) goals and grounded in psychological, educational, and behavioural frameworks.





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Key Benefits of Equine-Assisted Learning and Therapy

1. Emotional Regulation

Interacting with horses promotes emotional self-awareness and regulation. The rhythmic movement of horseback riding supports calming of the nervous system, encouraging co-regulation (Pendry & Roeter, 2013). This is especially useful for individuals with anxiety, PTSD, or autism spectrum disorder.

2. Confidence and Mastery

Horses provide immediate feedback and opportunities for success. Completing structured tasks such as grooming or leading a horse can enhance self-efficacy and self-esteem (Ewing et al., 2007).

3. Social and Communication Skills

EAL supports both verbal and non-verbal communication by requiring participants to engage with horses through body language, tone, and consistent cues. These interactions foster empathy, boundary recognition, and social connection (Carlisle, 2017).

4. Sensory Integration and Physical Benefits

The multisensory experience of riding and interacting with horses helps improve sensory processing and motor coordination. This is particularly valuable for neurodivergent children who may experience sensory sensitivities (Bass, Duchowny, & Llabre, 2009).

5. Executive Function and Cognitive Flexibility

Engaging in task sequences and adapting to animal behaviour enhances executive functioning skills such as planning, impulse control, and problem solving (Tabares et al., 2020).

6. Trauma-Informed Engagement

Horses support relational trust and predictability, vital for clients recovering from trauma. As prey animals, horses are highly sensitive to emotional states, providing a somatic mirror for clients to reflect and self-regulate (Schultz et al., 2007).

7. NDIS-Aligned Outcomes

All activities are linked to measurable NDIS goals in areas such as capacity building, social and community participation, and emotional wellbeing. Sessions are tailored to individual support needs.



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So How Does Hooves of Hope Do This?

Hooves of Hope Program Structure and Integration

The Hooves of Hope program is structured to support the development of core emotional, cognitive, and relational skills. Through equine-assisted learning and therapy, each module is intentionally designed to integrate clinical knowledge with horse-led experiential learning. Our fully qualified team—including registered counsellors, educators, and equine specialists—work collaboratively with participants to achieve individualised goals aligned with NDIS funding outcomes.

Program components include:

Goal Setting

Participants are supported to identify and articulate personal goals using strengths-based approaches. These goals are revisited regularly to reflect progress and guide session structure.

Introduction to Emotional Regulation

Facilitators introduce co-regulation and self-awareness techniques using horses as emotional barometers, fostering body-based emotional literacy (Pendry & Roeter, 2013).

The Personality Profiles

Participants explore their own temperament and behavioural responses using accessible profiling tools to better understand how they engage with others and with horses.

Social Dynamics and the Herd

By observing herd behaviour, participants learn about group roles, conflict resolution, and cooperation—parallels are drawn with human relationships and peer interactions.

Lessons in Safety and Connection

Facilitators embed relational safety principles, helping participants to form trust-based connections while managing personal safety and consent.

How Horses Communicate

Participants learn to observe horse body language and energetic cues, enhancing their non-verbal communication and empathy skills.



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How Humans Communicate

Verbal, non-verbal, and behavioural communication methods are explored, with attention to how congruence and tone affect interactions with both humans and horses.

Boundaries and Consent

Clear, consistent boundaries are modelled in sessions, supporting participants to understand and practice giving and receiving consent—critical for trauma recovery (Schultz et al., 2007).

The Importance of Recognising Personal Boundaries

Participants are guided to reflect on physical and emotional boundaries using feedback from horse interactions, reinforcing the value of assertiveness and self-protection.

Identifying Horse Moods and Recognising Human Emotions

This dual learning process helps participants increase emotional intelligence, interpret cues, and respond appropriately to changing relational dynamics.

The 5 F's (Trauma Responses)

Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn, and Flop responses are explored through observation of horse behaviour and discussed in relation to human trauma patterns (Levine, 2010).

Perception and The Senses

Mindfulness and sensory awareness activities help participants develop body-based awareness and improve their understanding of how perception shapes emotional and behavioural responses.



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Our Mission & Vision

At Hooves of Hope, our mission is to empower individuals through meaningful connection with horses. We provide inclusive, evidence-informed equine-assisted learning and therapy experiences that promote emotional resilience, personal growth, and community wellbeing. Hooves of Hope operates as an approved Research and Development (R&D) project, registered with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), committed to producing credible, evidence-based outcomes. Our team is currently developing a nationally recognised professional development program for support workers, equestrian coaches, and therapists seeking to integrate equine-assisted approaches into their practice. This program is designed to help professionals get the best outcomes for their clients through safe, ethical, and trauma-informed equine sessions. Grounded in compassion, professionalism, and integrity, we believe in the healing power of the human-horse bond to inspire confidence, restore trust, and create lasting change.

Our Vision

To create a world where every individual, regardless of ability or background, can experience healing, connection, and personal transformation through the power of horses. We envision communities strengthened by compassion, inclusion, and the innate wisdom of the herd.

Our Values

Compassion

We honour each person's story and provide a safe, nurturing space for healing and growth.

Integrity

We uphold ethical practice, professional standards, and transparency in all we do.

Inclusion

We celebrate diversity and create opportunities for all individuals to participate and thrive.

Connection

We believe in the transformative relationship between humans and horses as a foundation for learning and wellbeing.

Collaboration

We work as a multidisciplinary team and with our community to provide wraparound support and meaningful outcomes.

Empowerment

We support participants to build skills, confidence, and autonomy in line with their own goals.



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The Team

Renae Gunn – Program Director, Counsellor & Equestrian Coach

Renae is a registered Counsellor with the Australian Counselling Association (ACA #33091) and a member of the Australian Psychological Society (APS #330126). She holds qualifications in counselling, criminology, neuroscience, and animal-assisted therapy. Renae's expertise lies in integrating traditional evidence-based interventions with equine-assisted therapy to support clients with Autism, PTSD, ADHD, and other complex needs.

As an accomplished equestrian coach, Renae has competed up to Royal level (Show), trained to Grand Prix in Dressage and operated one of the States leading Harness Racing Stables for a 10-year period (accolated include the richest 2yo in SA Pacing History and multi-champion awards across 2 states). She combines her equestrian experience with trauma-informed coaching to support individuals of all skill levels in their equestrian journey. Her approach focuses on developing riding techniques, enhancing rider confidence, and fostering a deeper understanding of horse-human interactions, particularly for neurodivergent individuals and those with additional support needs.

Renae's visionary leadership and passion for equine-assisted therapy have positioned Hooves of Hope as a leading provider of innovative and life-changing programs. Her dedication to empowering individuals, maintaining the highest standards of equine care, and fostering community partnerships ensures that Hooves of Hope continues to thrive, evolve, and create lasting positive change.

Qualification List:

BcPsySc (Current) - University of Adelaide

(Major: Criminology)

Dip.Counselling

Dip. Animal Assisted Therapy

Horses Helping Humans Licensed Theory Practitioner

Certifications Include:

AMHOCN (Adult, Child & Adolescent)

Montreal Cognitive Assessment

Abuse Counselling

Relationship Counselling and Conflict Resolution

Clinical Applications of Neuroscience

Trauma-Informed

HERD and Polyvagal Theory

Responding to Risk of Harm, Abuse and Neglect

First Aid & CPR

NDIS Orientation & Induction Modules

Horse Riding Coach

Cert III In Racing

Cert III In Individual Support Disability

Federal Police Clearance

Working with Children Clearance

NDIS Worker Screening





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Sindy Brown – Equine-Assisted Learning Facilitator & Therapy Assistant

Sindy holds a Certificate IV in Youth Work and a Certificate IV in Racing. She is a certified Horse Riding Coach with Pony Club Association of South Australia (PCASA) and possesses current Working with Children Check, Police Clearance, NDIS Worker Screening, and First Aid & CPR certifications.

At Hooves of Hope, Sindy plays a vital role as an Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) Facilitator and Therapy Assistant. She designs and delivers individual and group-based equine-assisted learning sessions, helping participants develop confidence, emotional regulation, communication, and social skills. Sindy assists counsellors and therapists in equine-assisted therapy sessions, ensuring a safe and effective environment that meets each client's therapeutic goals.

Her expertise in equine-assisted learning, client engagement, and therapy support enhances the personal growth, skill development, and emotional well-being of participants. Sindy works closely with NDIS participants, neurodivergent individuals, and those facing social, emotional, or behavioural challenges to provide tailored learning experiences aligned with their needs.

Sindy's commitment to horse handling and welfare ensures appropriate horse selection and handling during sessions, prioritising animal well-being and client safety while fostering meaningful horse-human interactions.

Qualification List:

- Cert IV in Youth Work
- Horse Riding Coach (Certified PCASA)
- Working with Children Check
- Police Clearance
- NDIS Worker Screening
- First Aid & CPR
- Certificate IV in Racing





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Testimonials & Client Feedback

★★★★★ 9 months ago

Highly recommend Hooves of Hope in just 3 short weeks my Daughter has made huge progress with both her riding and behaviour doing equine therapy and counselling with Hooves of Hope. All the staff are friendly and knowledgeable and I myself have felt supported and not only is my daughter getting help I am too. The environment is welcoming, clean and tidy and safety is taken seriously. Bonus all the horses are beautiful 🥰

★★★★★ 9 months ago

Hooves of Hope is the best place to go if anybody is looking to go for therapy with horses. It increased my confidence, lowered my anxiety, got plenty of exercise and made special friendships with horses AND humans. I ALWAYS felt better after my session there. The people there are so amazingly caring and always want the best for you and their horses. HOOVES OF HOPE TOTALLY ROCK!

★★★★★ 11 months ago

Hooves of Hope is beyond amazing. The horses are wonderful! I have learnt more than I could've imagined & am gaining more confidence each time I'm there. The workers go above & beyond, in all aspects. They are supportive, caring, compassionate, & super informative! Couldn't be more grateful 🥰🐾



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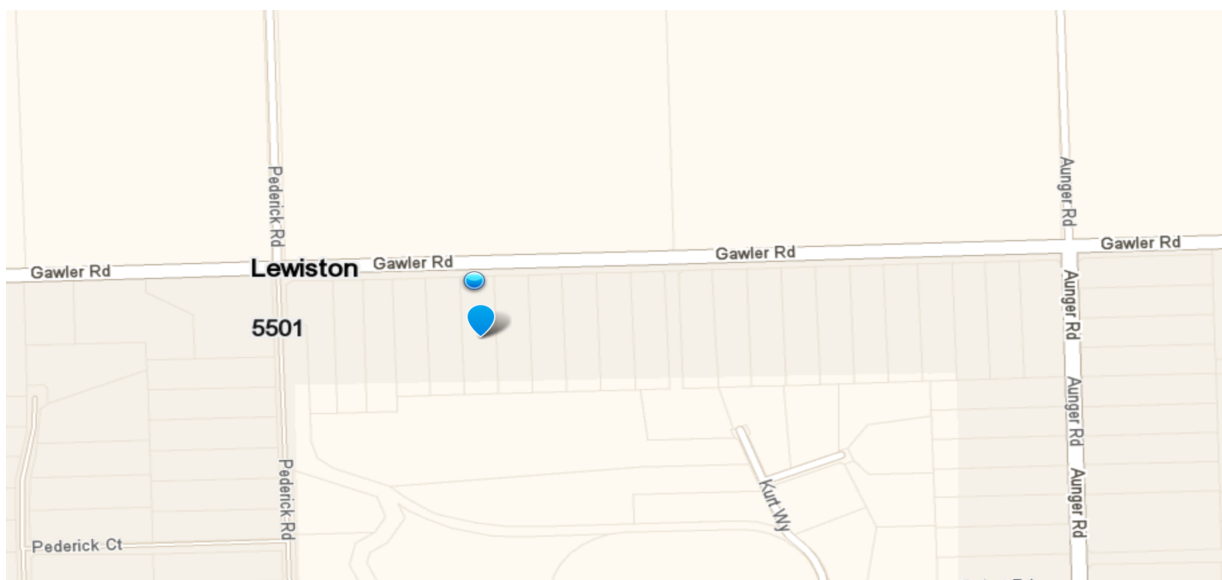
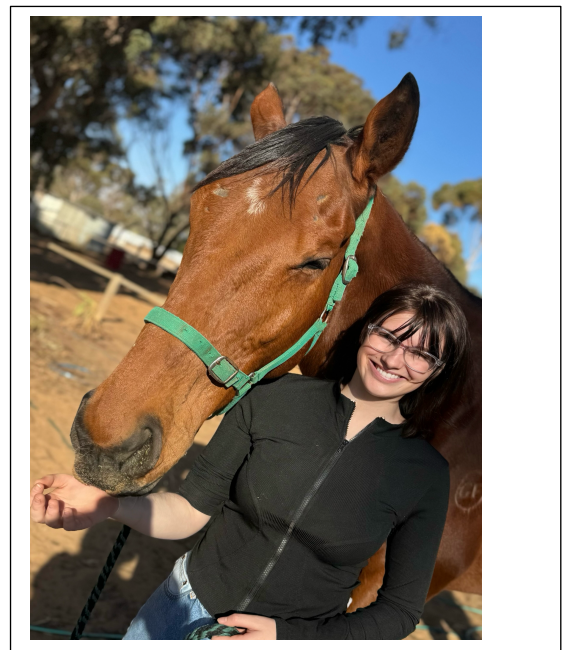
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