



# EQUITEAM NEWS

www.equiteam.org

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## Happy New Year!

This is our very first newsletter and it is sure to become a valuable collector's item one day – so make sure you keep it in a safe place!

EquiTeam is now embarking on the next step in its development. We are proud of how much we have grown and want to share with our friends, neighbors, colleagues and supporters, our journey so far.

Four years ago, we were enthusiastically trying to convince you all that our relatively new experiential therapy was deserving of your support. Indeed, some very brave and generous souls did give us the benefit of the doubt and contributed ideas, help, moral support, encouragement, and even financial assistance, to get our programs up and running.

As you will remember, the economy was already taking a turn for the worse and it was definitely not the best time to launch a new venture. Even though WE knew that EAP (Equine Assisted Psychotherapy) was a successful treatment we had no measurable "home-grown" proof.

Now, however, deep into our fourth year, we can report some significant achievements. Our outcomes are measured and charted using two nationally recognized systems giving us clear indication of each client's progress and growth. These have been especially strong among our MH/MR (Mental Health/ Mental Retardation) clients which includes those diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum, specifically Asperger's Disorder.

Following a very generous donation from Allegra Knight, the EquiTeam Support Fund was established in 2009 in memory of Allegra's mother, Nisha Kirk. Allegra shared with us that she felt chills when she learnt of EquiTeam as her Mother had a passion for horses and cared deeply for those less fortunate. She felt that EquiTeam was a perfect fit for her mother's legacy. We were honored and very humbled.

With four years of data in our pockets we are excited to be taking our next step. We can now prove that EAP is a valuable tool in the treatment of mental health disorders and we are committed to providing for those children that we know will benefit from our programs. In order to expand we will be writing for grants and adding to our Support Fund in any way we can.

We are very grateful to our supporters for everything that they have contributed in so many ways. Thank you,

Ellie Williams, MS, NCC, LPC

Marian Hamilton, Equine Specialist

## Outcomes

To date EquiTeam Support Services is maintaining an 85% SUCCESS RATE of client's completing treatment with improved mental health and behavioral stability.



## Why Horses?

Often termed as a flight or fight animal, horses are inquisitive yet cautious, their sensitivity and awareness is second to none. The Native Americans are just a few who understood and used these natural characteristics and since time began the horse has been an important part of our history.

When using horses in therapy one of the biggest challenges is to allow them to be themselves, not to interfere and to let situations naturally unfold. During a therapy session the horse or horses often act as a mirror to whatever the situation is and without fail the horses will do something that the therapist can use to encourage the client to learn about and see themselves in a new way. Therapy is self discovery and reflection, a client who discovers his own answers will remember them.

*Save the Date!*

**May 14th, 2011**

*Gala Dinner*

*to Benefit*

**UNFUNDED MENTAL HEALTH CLIENTS**

*Hosted by*

**Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kinsley**

# A Letter We Would Like to Share

Dear Ellie and Mrs. H-

I want to thank you very much for all of your hard work with R., and all of your kindness to both of us. I want to share with you what I have seen as improvements with R. during his time counseling with you. First of all, I think that R. has had much success in improving his social skills and making better social choices. This has allowed him to improve his relationships with both children and adults. Social skills were addressed in just about every program R. has ever been in, but I think that he learned more with you because he was able to depersonalize the horse's responses, and not take them personally... R. seems to be more comfortable sharing his emotions, and also taking responsibility for how he shares them. R.'s self awareness has expanded to include an awareness of how others perceive him, which is helping him curb some automatic responses which were turning others off... Your balance of both structure AND warmth and kindness have provided a safe place for R. to begin to address his many losses, and also some of his anger related to the abuse he suffered. I'm very grateful for this.

Dr. S.

*Dr. S. is a Hershey area physician who brought her adopted son to EquiTeam*



## Facing Her Fear

Have you ever been so afraid that you were frozen in fear? Or felt that your heart would pound right out of your chest? Or that speaking to someone would make you shake from head to toe? The interactive nature of equine therapy was able to help a 15 year old girl with severe social anxiety work through such extreme personal distress. When this young lady started with EquiTeam, she stood hunched over, eyes focused on the ground, with her fingers picking at her clothing. Each time she spoke, her voice was quiet and shaky. The horse immediately picked up on her anxiety, walked over to her side and promptly placed his chin on her shoulder giving her a soft nudge.

During one activity in particular, our client was asked to direct the treatment team to put a blanket on the horse with using only her words. When given the directions, she began to cry. When asked of her reaction she quietly shared that she could NEVER tell someone else what to do, let alone an adult. While she was talking the horse walked over and calmly placed himself right in front of her. When asked of the horse's actions, she said "maybe he's telling me that it's OK, give it a go."

Over the course of treatment she was able to identify the necessity of breaking things down into steps and addressing them one at a time, reducing the extreme levels of anxiety. Such experiences allowed her self-confidence to blossom. From a recent update this young lady has continued to flourish, becoming involved in her church as well as volunteering at a local animal shelter.

*The horses taught me "that all creatures can be made into a loving and caring 'person' with proper care."  
- 15 Year Old Client*

## Substantiating Our Claims

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy has proven an excellent therapeutic tool for children on the Autism Spectrum, especially with Asperger's Disorder – and now we have numbers to substantiate these claims. A young man (14 year old) was referred to EquiTeam to assist with development of social and coping skills due to his Asperger's Diagnosis with secondary issues including depression and anxiety. In utilizing the Youth Outcome Questionnaire, a self report inventory, this young man scored off the charts when entering treatment, with high scores in the Intrapersonal Distress and Behavioral Dysfunction categories. At the start of treatment he scored 106 and at discharge scored 48 (the normative scores for 'healthy' adolescents not needing treatment is 34.21). His scores have maintained when retested at 3 and 6 months post treatment and in recently receiving his 1 year post test the score has reduced even further to 36. Therefore, it is safe to say that this young man did not only benefit from receiving equine assisted psychotherapy, he has maintained and further improved his behaviors and coping skills since the close of treatment.



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