

Horse power helps young people back on their feet

Equine therapy project hopes to expand its offering to enable more youngsters to re-engage with our society

AN equine therapy centre which believes it can help those "in danger of coming off the tracks" hopes to increase the number of young people who benefit.

Viewpoint, in Surrey, has helped 22 12- to 18-year-olds in its first year, but wants to be able to offer its therapy to more people.

At an event to mark the centre's first anniversary, Surrey high sheriff Jim Glover praised all it has achieved so far.

"You've got a lovely expression, which is: 'When the talking isn't working,'" he said.

"It's often like that; some young people can't learn in the traditional way, and we've got to make sure everyone like that has this sort of opportunity to pull themselves back together again."

Centre founder Katie Dockery explained that young people, referred by professionals such as schools and social workers, spend a week at a time at the centre, during which time they handle her ponies Billy and Bo.

By working with the equines on the ground, the youngsters learn how to deal with other challenging life situations.

"It's quite hard to explain to people what we do," Kate said.

"It works because the horses mirror what they do; if a person asks in a way that doesn't make sense to the horse, they won't do anything. They give instant feedback so it's not me saying

By ELEANOR JONES

they've done well, we just coach them to help change something about themselves.

"When they find success with the ponies, they can carry that on elsewhere. Giving up just isn't an option."

Katie added that, for example, if participants are struggling with anger or frustration, they learn that only by calming down, do the horses react appropriately.

"People who come and watch on the Friday are always gobsmacked by how far they've come," she said. "We go through a rollercoaster but always end up

higher than where we started. It's so rewarding to be able to do this."

Katie's "right-hand man" Emily Wrench said the courses make a "huge difference".

"Especially for those who haven't been near horses before," she told *HE/H*.

"It's hard to say why or how in a nutshell, but it takes them out of themselves. It's motivating and empowering, having a relationship with the horses, things they may not have felt before — and they can go back with something to be proud of."

The mother of one participant said after the course: "It's put a smile back on her face, and I've felt I've got my daughter back."



The young people work with the horses on the ground