

A Feasibility Study of an Equine Assisted Intervention for Children and Young People with Mental Health and Behavioural Challenges

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This paper presents the findings from a feasibility study of an equine assisted intervention (EAI) which brings together young people (8-18 years) and horses to learn social and emotional skills in the context of natural horsemanship.





Click here to play a 4 minute video of the intervention under study: TheHorseCourse (UK)

https://vimeo.com/222624036

Click here to visit TheHorseCourse.org



Feasibility Study Framework (Bowen et al., 2009)

- 1. acceptability
- 2. demand
- 3. implementation
- 4. practicality

- 5. adaptation
- 6. integration
- 7. expansion
- 8. efficacy testing



Ethical Issues...

- University ethics panel
- Anonymised data
- Risk assessments
- Supervision
- Equine stress monitoring (Young et al., 2012).



Methodology

The methods used to answer the questions posed by the elements of the feasibility study included:

- Analysis of referral data
- Qualitative interview with the charity CEO
- Analysis of referrer assessments before and two months post intervention (n=155)

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1. Acceptability

- Referrers 700 plus referrals to date from multiple agencies (social work, mental health and education).
- Participants 97% completed the course during the recruitment period for this study (two years).
- Referrals are currently increasing with referrers reporting that 10-15% of their case loads do not respond to talk based interventions.



2. Referral Criteria

- The individual is not improving with talk based interventions
- Has severe social exclusion
- Is referred by a professional (for example social worker, teacher, psychologist, nurse, GP, psychiatrist).



3. Demand

Demand is outstripping supply with overall more than 650 people having completed the course and over 150 per year now being referred from one area.

Four further centres are now providing this course in the UK and one in the USA.



4. Implementation

This intervention has evidenced that it can implement successfully.

- The clearly defined programme TheHorseCourse ReStart forms the majority of the activity undertaken by this charity.
- This program has eight years of delivery with multiple horses multiple locations and multiple facilitators.
- There is a clearly defined training program for facilitators.



5. Practicality

Requirements already in place in multiple centres:

- An indoor arena
- Large pool of trained horses
- Pool of trained facilitators
- A significant volume of referrals



6. Adaptation

- Moving from offenders only to broader referral criteria
- Family Working
- Disability adaptation
- Early intervention adaptation (group work, lighter touch)





7. Integration

This intervention has demonstrated clear integration with local statutory and other support services.

- Well defined planned sequencing of treatment within overall care package.
- Good communications with front line professionals and local strategic leads.
- Detailed referral and handover protocol.



8. Expansion

Evidence of replication:

- London
- Surrey Kent border
- Dorset
- Gloucestershire
- Wiltshire
- Oregon

Additional facilitators have been trained by the charity to aid replication, recruited primarily from those who already hold instructor status with Parelli Natural Horsemanship.



Anxiety/ Depression	ADHD	Bullying/ Angry/ Aggressive/ Violent	Lacks Confidence /Bullied/ Lonely	Witness to Domestic Violence/ Abuse	Not Attending School/ Excluded From School	Self- Harm/ Suicidal	Relationship Issues/ Attachment Disorder
18	15	53	27	11	10	13	8

Main Reason for Referral N=155

SCORING Independence (needs little/ no support) Referral / Outcomes / Feedback Star gaining confidence. 3 less support Name: trying, Referred by: needs 2 support Star filled in by: Date: wants to Assertiveness make a change Able to be boundaried Et assertive, without STUCK getting aggressive or O upset Engagement (Confidence Focus & as a Learner) needs less Perseverance support Enthusiastically takes on Works towards goals new challenges, pushes despite setbacks limits whilst also taking trying to gaining care of own confidence be assertive confidence, needs less without with less support aggression support gets distracted, trying recognises needs to learn problem support blocks gives up teacher easily ineffectual Taking non OR Communication & refuses / Responsibility aggressive starter drops out Language overly listening well blames taking some getting getting wants to thinking One way / & trying to STUCK others or confident esponsibilities confident communicate about it be clear none Two way, situation Taking full responsibility respectful, assertive doesn't heartless for own thoughts, communcations. think OR shut emotions and actions. impulsive/ Has language to talk down Allowing others to make about thinking and anxious poor planning / wants to their own choices. emotions unrealistic basis make contact wants to trying, noticing make a with needs of change support others gaining responding confidence, trying appropriately strategies, less support sometimes needs support Realistic Analysis & Planning gaining confidence, Stops to think before less support Relating to acting, makes a realistic assessment of Others / Empathy situations and plans Has the habit Sees the needs of accordingly of calmness and others, offers care Calmness knows how to and support, feels create it, even in closely connected difficult situations



Measure of internal consistency for the `star chart`

measurement scale used

(Cronbach's alpha will tell you if the test you have designed is

accurately measuring the variable/s of interest)

Cronbach's Alpha

N. of Items on Star

889

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Star Chart Skills Pre and Post (p value 0.001)	Number of Participants with a Positive Score Change	Number of Participants with a Negative Score Change	Number of Participants with No Score Change	Total number of scores in analysis for each Skill
Realistic Planning	105	15	33	153
Assertiveness	107	12	35	154
Communication	102	25	27	154
Calmness	111	15	28	154
Engagement (as a learner)	103	13	38	154
Focus and Perseverance	100	9	45	154
Empathy	99	19	36	154



(p value 0.001)

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	5	5
36	31	38
112	119	112
155	155	155
	112	112 119



Limitations

- No randomisation
- No control group
- Convenience sample
- Measurement tool in test phase



In conclusion...

- This intervention has a clearly defined methodology and facilitator training program and therefore lends itself to robust evaluation.
- More robust studies are needed on effectiveness using a randomised controlled trial or other experimental design using a validated tool and access to statutory data sets.



References

- Bowen D.J., Kreuter M., Spring B., Cofta-Woerpel L., Linnan L., Weiner D., Bakken S., Patrick Kaplan C., Squiers L., Fabrizio C. & Fernandez M. (2009) How we design feasibility studies. *American Journal of Preventitive Medicine*. May; 36(5): 452-457.
- Young T., Creighton E., Smith T. & Hosie C. (2012) A novel scale of behavioural indicators of stress for use with domestic horses. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 140, 33-43.



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