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*Using 'Equine-Assisted Therapy' to Aid the Rehabilitation of Young
Offenders: An Evaluative Case Study of 'TheHorseCourse' Charity*

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Degree of
BSc Applied Social Sciences (Criminology)

By

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Abstract

Interest in the potential of equine-assisted therapy and learning, where horses are incorporated in therapeutic, rehabilitative and learning interventions to ameliorate mental, emotional, behavioural and social issues, has increased over the past half century. Most recently, equine-assisted therapy has been adopted to aid the rehabilitation of offenders within the context of prisons. However, there is a demonstrable lack of peer-reviewed research and published evaluative studies examining the effectiveness of these emerging programmes. The purpose of this research was to produce a case study of TheHorseCourse, an equine-assisted offending behaviour programme at HMP/YOI Portland, and contribute to the evidential base regarding the programme's effectiveness. Given the infancy of research within this field, this research also aimed to contribute to the emerging knowledge base regarding the benefit of equine therapy interventions. The perceived impact and personal experiences of seventeen young offenders who participated on the course were explored. Secondary analysis of existing qualitative, semi-structured interviews with offenders following the completion of the course was conducted, drawing upon an open coding process to identify emergent themes. Results illustrated that TheHorseCourse has the potential to transform dysfunctional attitudes, thoughts and behaviour, improve engagement with the prison regime and develop skills in psychological resilience, emotion management and anger management. Based on these findings it appears possible to argue with some confidence that TheHorseCourse is an effective programme, contributing to the resocialisation

and rehabilitation processes of offenders. There is a definite need for rigorous research that empirically validates the benefit of equine-assisted therapy if the programme is to be accepted and advanced. In the meantime, this research suggests that TheHorseCourse is a promising and innovative intervention, advancing further evidence of the potential value of this emerging therapeutic programme.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

‘Equine-assisted therapy’ (EAT) is an umbrella term for a series of emerging experiential interventions in which horses are incorporated, in a therapeutic capacity, to ameliorate mental, emotional, behavioural and social issues (Kruger et al., 2004). Practitioners and researchers assert that the benefit of employing a horse in therapy stems from numerous unique qualities, including horses’ ability to provide honest feedback on body language (Klontz et al., 2007). The value of EAT is increasingly recognised in addressing problems across a host of contexts, including addiction, depression, eating disorders and antisocial behaviours (Taylor, 2001).

A review of the literature identified that the title, ‘equine-assisted therapy’ is used interchangeably with other appellations, including equine-facilitated psychotherapy and equine-assisted learning (McConnell, 2010). This research will adopt the term ‘equine-assisted therapy’ to encompass all alternatively used terms. Whilst the concept is loosely defined, this research will draw upon the broad definition put forth by Kersten (1997, p.138);

“Horses are used as a tool for emotional growth and learning...an experiential approach...where the client learns about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses and then processing the feelings, behaviours and patterns.”

Most references to equine therapy focus on the physical benefits (Vidrine et al., 2002), whilst the potential psychosocial impacts that horses afford have been largely neglected. Comprehensive academic evaluations of EAT programmes are demonstrably absent from the emerging evidential base, despite being fundamental to the advancement and validation of the discipline.

Despite increasing interest in the potential of employing horses as a therapeutic medium, literature in this field remains scarce. To date, published literature consists predominantly of anecdotal reports and case studies documenting the benefits of EAT (Karol, 2007). There is a significant lack of well-designed outcome studies, rigorous evaluative research and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of EAT (Kaiser et al., 2004).

In recent decades, EAT has grown significantly in both the US and the UK across a number of contexts. Most recently, EAT is being adopted to aid the rehabilitation of 'at-risk' youths and offenders within the prison environment. An increasing number of prisons within the US, and more recently the UK, are turning to EAT to teach offenders positive habits of behaviour and develop skills identified as salient 'protective factors' within the risk and resilience literature (Burgon, 2011). 'Protective factors' can be understood as the skills and strategies that enable individuals to cope with stressful situations (Rutter, 1985).

Rehabilitation programmes within prisons that aim to prevent reoffending emerged following the recognition that the prison population is rising exponentially and the cost of operating prisons is rapidly increasing, both identified partly as a result of a 'recidivism crisis' (Cavadino and Dignan, 2007). Prison presents a fundamental crossroad, where opportunities for prisoners to make positive changes to their behaviour must be provided to reduce the 'revolving door' of offenders (Whitehead, 2011). The use of horses in the rehabilitation process has facilitated a unique opportunity to work more effectively with challenging individuals within the prison system (Cushing and Williams, 1995).

As far as this research can trace, TheHorseCourse, introduced in 2010 at HMP/YOI Portland, was the first and is one of the only equine therapy programmes of its kind to operate within British prisons, implemented in response to the successful results reaped from comparable programmes in US penitentiaries. The course targets a specific population; offenders who are unwilling to engage with the prison regime, particularly violent offenders and those vulnerable to bullying. TheHorseCourse aims to address behavioural problems and develop crucial pro-social skills through the metaphor of horsemanship whilst also providing prisoners with an opportunity to practice emotional control. The intensive course employs two horses who motivate participants to remain calm, set goals and become confident as learners. Following impressive results within an interim report (Meek, 2012), plans are being made to roll TheHorseCourse out across other contexts.

The need for rigorous evaluative research on the benefit of EAT is particularly crucial within the context of the 'rehabilitation revolution' agenda and the need for 'what works' based on objective evidence (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Both this and the previous government have emphasised their commitment to evidence-led policy and practice and highlighted its salience for programmes that are intended to be rolled out. With this in mind, to become a credible, evidence-led programme, the 'next step' for research on EAT programmes, of which TheHorseCourse is included, needs to be a comprehensive systematic research review.

Given the minimal evaluation of TheHorseCourse to date, the primary aim of the current research is to contribute to the evidential base by exploring the perceived impact and personal experiences of participant offenders. Considering the infancy of research surrounding EAT, this research also aims to contribute to the wider knowledge base on the utilisation of EAT as an effective intervention for juvenile offenders and to identify the remaining issues that demand further research. Whilst this research has limitations stemming from reliability and validity issues within the data alongside it contributing a further qualitative research study documenting the benefits of EAT, if this programme is intended to be rolled out it will provide a valuable contribution to the emerging research base regarding the effectiveness of TheHorseCourse.

With this in mind, there exists a critical question for TheHorseCourse which this research aims to address;

In terms of the stated aims and objectives of TheHorseCourse, is it an effective programme?

Whilst a systematic research review is impossible due to the imposed time constraint, this study will provide a thorough research review and case study of TheHorseCourse. It will evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, identify how the programme works and make recommendations for how future evaluation of EAT programmes should be conducted. This chapter provides an overview of EAT and TheHorseCourse charity. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, expositing the evolution of EAT and exploring the programmes currently practiced. Chapter 3 advances a contextual overview of TheHorseCourse charity, providing a programme summary, outlining future plans and locating it within the rehabilitation revolution agenda. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of this study. Chapter 5 illustrates the results from the interview data. Chapter 6 summarises the research findings and provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

The History

Horses have long been present within human culture, performing a crucial role in the development of modern society, particularly as a means of efficient transport (Lawrence, 1992). The benefit of engaging in an authentic and rewarding horse-human relationship with an unconditional bond has a long legacy, with horses often referred to as 'healing agents' (Burgon, 2011, p.167). However, the integration of the horse into the therapeutic milieu is a relatively recent phenomenon, inspired by the benefits obtained from this bond and harnessing the qualities of the horse to promote psychosocial growth and learning (Lessick et al., 2004). Since the early 1950s there has been a burgeoning integration of equine activities within the therapeutic framework and a subsequent proliferation of equine therapy programmes, with organisations such as the Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association promoting the discipline (Burgon, 2011). There has been increasing academic interest in the potential of incorporating horses as a therapeutic medium, following claims that horses evoke psychosocial changes that can valuably contribute to the rehabilitation process. Despite initial scepticism, preliminary reports have shown demonstrable success across a host of contexts and highlighted the value of EAT in addressing a myriad of issues, including depression and anxiety (Bullock and Gable, 2006), recovery from trauma and abuse (Yorke et al., 2008), eating disorders (Christian, 2005)

and most recently, offenders who require assistance in breaking the cycle of criminality and imprisonment (Hayden, 2005; Mann, 1998).

Definitional Issues

The research literature delineates a plethora of varying philosophies, approaches and conceptual frameworks to the therapeutic use of horses, including equine-assisted therapy, therapeutic riding and hippotherapy (n.b. a form of physical therapy using the movements of a horse) (Macauley and Gutierrez, 2004). Some programmes involve horse-riding, some incorporate ground-based activities, whilst others include elements of both (Bates, 2002; Donaghy, 2006). A commonality of all these unique programmes surrounds the use of horses to aid the treatment process (Yorke et al., 2008).

This literature review revealed the use of contradictory and interchangeable terminology to describe equine-assisted therapy, including equine-facilitated psychotherapy and equine-assisted learning (McConnell, 2010). The lack of standardised terminology hinders the development of a universal understanding of equine therapy.

Animal-Assisted Therapy

EAT is an emerging form of animal-assisted therapy (AAT), which has a more established association with therapeutic benefits (Greenwald, 2001). The first documented use of AAT dates back to 1792, when the York retreat was founded to develop the self-control of mentally ill patients through interaction with animals (Mallon, 1992). Since then AAT has been utilised across a

range of settings, including schools, nursing homes and prisons, to promote wellbeing (Mallon, 1992). Research confirms that animals are “great ‘aids’ in the therapeutic process” (Chardonnes, 2009, p.324) due to their facilitation of benefits, including the provision of companionship (Beck and Katcher, 1996) and the development of self-esteem (Myers, 2007). Interest in the human-animal bond was developed extensively by Levinson (1962), who promoted the use of animals as ‘co-therapists’ due to their ability to minimise the therapeutic treatment duration and induce greater benefits than conventional talking methods.

Physical Therapy to Psychosocial Therapy

Traditionally, horses have been incorporated in the domain of physical therapy and thus most references place emphasis on the physiological benefits that horses afford, while the potential psychosocial benefits have been largely neglected (Rothe et al., 2005). However, in recent decades, interest in the potential of employing horses as a medium to address emotional, behavioural and social issues has grown (Kersten and Thomas, 2005). This branch of equine therapy is termed EAT and is an experiential and interactive methodology, offering participants an opportunity to learn about themselves and promoting exploration of emotions (Tetreault, 2006).

Psychosocial Benefits

Sir Winston Churchill claimed that “there is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man” (cited in Running Press, 1984). This underlines the basic principle of introducing horses to the therapeutic

milieu. Researchers have now explored the use of horses as a psychological tool, asserting that they valuably contribute myriad psychosocial benefits. According to the literature, the most significant benefit is increased confidence and self-esteem (All et al., 1999). Increased confidence is seen to stem from the non-judgmental nature of horses, the accomplishment of tasks and the acquirement of cooperation with a powerful animal, leading to improved self-esteem (Iannone, 2003; MacDonald, 2004). Burgon (2003) evaluated an EAT programme for women with mental health issues through the use of questionnaires, interviews and participant observation. The findings revealed that gaining a sense of mastery and coping with challenging horse-oriented tasks positively influenced self-esteem and confidence development. The augmentation of these skills provides a valuable addition to traditional therapeutic interventions as they offer 'protective factors' emphasised within the risk and resilience literature (Burgon, 2011; Rutter, 1985).

Horses are claimed to aid the development of a plethora of other skills including trust, motivation, patience, respect and empathy (Cumella and Simpson, 2007; Schultz et al., 2007). It is also claimed that EAT reduces anxiety (Lessick et al., 2004) and develops mental and emotional self-control, leading to more functional behaviour (All et al., 1999). EAT sessions are argued to decrease feelings of depression and isolation through the enhancement of psychological wellbeing (Frame, 2006; MacKinnon et al., 1995). It is hoped that skills developed during EAT can be transferred to participants' daily lives and assist them in finding their place in society, often cited as a key source of unease (Ewing et al., 2007, p.71).

Why Horses?

Practitioners and researchers assert that the benefit of employing a horse as a co-facilitator in therapy stems from various unique qualities. The most important asset for therapeutic interventions is the horse's natural mirroring capacity, whereby they provide accurate feedback to human body language and emotional energy through their behavioural reactions (Roberts et al., 2004; Tramutt, 2003). This serves to promote self-awareness, encourage genuine communication and enable patients to "gain insight into [their] own non-verbal communication and behaviour patterns" (Colclasure, 2004, p.2).

To achieve success in EAT activities, participants must model behaviours that the horse will respond positively to, such as calm and confident leadership (Rashid, 2004), which creates an opportunity for learning new behaviours and developing coping strategies (Tyler, 1994). McCormick and McCormick (1997, p.64) claimed that experience with equines leads participants to "become...more receptive to new ideas and behaviours" as defence mechanisms are broken down. Their research evidenced this, as defiant behaviour eroded with the understanding that openness promotes positive equine behaviour, whereas aggression does not. The horse teaches patients the boundary between aggression and assertion (Shultz, 2005).

The size of the horse is also beneficial, both soliciting respect (Frewin and Gardiner, 2005) and building confidence as fear is overcome (Lentini and Knox, 2009). Additionally, the non-judgmental nature of the horse, whereby they have no hidden agenda, is profoundly beneficial to the therapeutic

process and facilitates an environment conducive to exploration of emotions (Bachi et al., 2011; Tetreault, 2006). The presence of the horse provides a unique setting, which is instrumental in increasing the motivation of those who fail to respond to office-based therapy (Engel, 1984; Pauw, 2000).

General Applications and Programmes

The scope of EAT is gradually expanding from its traditional employment in the rehabilitation of less-able-bodied individuals with initial advancements in utilising the discipline in social-work contexts, such as in the psychological rehabilitation of 'at-risk' youth (Trotter, 2006). 'At-risk' defines individuals whose experience of risk factors such as poverty, sexual abuse or dysfunctional parenting has increased their likelihood of negative life events; crime or poor academic achievement, for example (Bannister, 1998). McCormick and McCormick (1997) recommended the adoption of EAT when traditional therapy fails, particularly with 'at-risk' youth and young offenders.

Existing Research Findings

Initial results of EAT programmes with 'at-risk' youth in America show great promise. According to Tetreault (2006), experiential therapeutic activities are effective in altering the disruptive, maladaptive behavioural patterns of emotionally disturbed adolescents. Myers (2004) utilised EAT with alcohol-dependent adolescents, discovering that participants developed coping strategies and honed skills such as patience and empathy. Mann and Williams (2002, cited in Thomas, 2002) reported an improvement in the behaviour of 82% of adolescent participants with psychosocial disorders

following an average of five EAT sessions. All participants had failed to respond to traditional therapeutic modalities.

Pearson (1997) evaluated an EAT programme for emotionally disturbed male adolescents. Critical Incident Report data, identified as the most credible measure of antisocial behaviour, was collected before and after the EAT programme for each participant. The results indicated that EAT was effective in reducing aggressive tendencies. Bowers and MacDonald (2001) evaluated the effectiveness of an EAT programme for 'at-risk' adolescents, claiming that contact with horses "foster[ed] the development of life skills including open and direct communication, honesty, patience, respect and proper use of power and control" (p.69). MacDonald and Cappo (2003) evaluated an EAT programme for adolescents with anger management issues. A significant increase in self-reports of self-esteem and control of disruptive outbursts alongside decreased aggression were identified. This emerging evidential base suggests that EAT with 'at-risk' adolescents is effective.

Penological Applications and Programmes

The positive feedback of EAT has proved instrumental in its latest development within prisons to assist the rehabilitation of offenders and the development of life-enhancing skills. EAT provides an opportunity to reassess maladaptive behaviours through experiences with horses, focusing on issues of empathy and trust that traditional therapy struggles to address (Rothe et al., 2005). The critical construct of empathy is defined as "...an ability to put yourself in another person's shoes – and to act in a way that is

sensitive to other people's perspectives" (Lexman and Reeves, 2009, p.17). Within EAT, appreciation of horses' vulnerability, demonstrated by their 'fight or flight' instinct, aids the development of empathy towards the horse and is hoped to extend to relationships with humans (Goleman, 1996). The focus of EAT programmes within prisons varies, with some concentrating on teaching equine care, some on retraining ex-racehorses and others developing psychosocial skills through the metaphor of horsemanship. All programmes share a common aim of rehabilitating the incarcerated.

As far as this research can trace, the initial use of horses within the context of prisons was during the late 1970s in the US. Dr. Zaidlicz initiated a horse-training programme that taught prisoners equine husbandry and care within the penitentiary in Canon City, Colorado (Strimple, 2003). Another facilitator of EAT within prisons is the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, which, based in the US, sends retired racehorses to numerous correctional facilities (Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, no date). The aim of this initiative is to teach life skills to offenders whilst also providing a vocational training programme. Currently there are nine correctional facilities involved but two additional prison farms will open in 2013.

Existing Penal Research Findings

Alongside the growing number of prisons in America turning to equine therapy to rehabilitate offenders, there has been an increase in research exploring the value of EAT with offender populations. Chandler (2005) reported that an EAT programme for juvenile offenders resulted in new positive behaviours;

offenders overcame fears, became less self-focused and developed communication skills, leading to the conclusion that “there are some therapeutic tasks that are more easily and quickly accomplished...with the assistance of a therapy horse” (p.120). Mann (2001, cited in Thomas, 2002) reported improvements in the conduct and mood of male juvenile offenders and found that EAT sessions reduced reconviction of incarcerated adolescents. Myers (2002, cited in Thomas, 2002) reported encouraging statistics provided by the Geauga County Juvenile Court that indicated reduced recidivism rates. In 1998, 67% of juvenile offenders did not reoffend within three months of release, whereas in 2000, following the introduction of EAT, this increased to 79%. The development of psychosocial skills alongside the ability of horses to act as a motivational medium can be argued to encourage offenders to engage with the prison regime, contributing to their rehabilitation and the reduction of reoffending rates (Edney, 1995).

Cushing and Williams’ (1995) exploration of the Wild Mustang Program, an EAT programme within a correctional facility in New Mexico presented a seminal study, advocating the potential of EAT to rehabilitate offenders. The programme taught offenders to train wild horses, promoting self-confidence, patience and self-efficacy. This study involved analysis of inmate-participants’ records, informal interviews with staff, semi-structured interviews with inmate-participants and the administration of questionnaires to staff. The findings revealed that this programme was effective, identifying that participation reduced the incidence and severity of disciplinary reports. Based on these

findings, there is increasing positivity surrounding the utilisation of horses within prisons to rehabilitate offenders.

Policy Transfer

Reflecting the influence America has on British policy and practice, the idea of EAT, especially in the context of prisons, has begun to 'migrate' from America. TheHorseCourse, implemented in 2010, employs two horses to aid prisoners develop pro-social skills and overcome emotional challenges. Initial research into the efficacy of this programme revealed positive results, advancing further evidence for the effectiveness of EAT (Meek, 2012). More recently a Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Program has been developed in Australia with retired racehorses sent to correctional centres for retraining and care (Flores, 2012). It is hoped that this programme will provide prisoners with opportunities for personal development and modification of behaviour, reducing the likelihood of reoffending (NSW Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Program, no date).

Shifts in Penal Policy

The introduction of rehabilitative programmes within prisons mirrors a macro-level shift in penal policy. Themes of retribution and deterrence have been dominant over the past century, punctuated by notions of 'nothing works' (Walker, 1989). However, research into 'get tough' policies revealed their ineffectiveness in reducing crime (McShane and Williams, 1989). The ever-expanding prison population, the increasing cost of operating prisons and the recognition that over half of all crime is committed by individuals who have

previously been in prison (Home Office, 2006) triggered a search in the 1980s for rehabilitation programmes which address the 'recidivism crisis' (Palmer, 1991). Prison represents a *critical juncture*, where opportunities must be provided to reduce reoffending by motivating offenders to make positive changes to their mentality and behaviour. As a result, programmes such as EAT that aim to prevent further offending emerged within penal establishments. Preliminary research suggests that the employment of horses in the rehabilitation process within prisons facilitates a unique opportunity to aid offenders who are 'hard to reach' and move successively between phases of offending and imprisonment (Strimple, 2003).

Chapter 3:

‘TheHorseCourse’ at HMP/YOI Portland: A Contextual Overview of the Programme

Summary of Programme Delivery

Of particular interest to this research is TheHorseCourse, an equine-assisted offending behaviour programme that operates within prisons in the UK. This information is drawn from both liaison with the founder of the programme, Harriet Laurie, and the official website (<http://www.thehorsecourse.org/>). This programme prioritises the particularly disengaged, disruptive and violent offenders as part of their sentence plans. ‘Disengaged’ describes those who are unable or unwilling to engage in the academic, vocational and rehabilitative opportunities within the prison. The project, introduced at HMP/YOI Portland in 2010, is now administered by a registered charity, TheHorseCourse¹ and following its initial success, has been replicated in HMP Oakwood, HMP Verne and HMP Eastwood Park in 2012. Implemented and facilitated by Harriet Laurie, TheHorseCourse relies upon Parelli Natural Horsemanship² as its theoretical framework to achieve the principle aims of changing dysfunctional thoughts, behaviours and attitudes of offenders and encouraging engagement with the prison regime. TheHorseCourse is not a riding lesson but a programme that aims to develop salient pro-social skills amongst offenders who are ‘difficult to reach’.

¹ Registered Charity No. 1141654

² Parelli Natural Horsemanship (PNH) represents a natural approach to horse training based on relationship, communication and trustworthiness between horse and human.

The course is delivered intensively over seven sessions of approximately two hours over one week, with an instructor aiding two participants working on the ground with two horses. The course takes place outdoors, alongside the sports pitch within the prison grounds.



Using 'scary' obstacles to practice empathy and trust, requiring strong focus and calmness (see Appendix 1)

The horses are trained to provide accurate, unbiased physical feedback on body language, promoting self-awareness and requiring the prisoners to be calm and focused whilst communicating effectively. The behaviour of these sensitive horses enables the instructor to teach coping skills to the prisoners, contributing to their rehabilitation and encouraging desistance from crime.

The horsemanship approach promoted in TheHorseCourse enables the participants to gain mastery of the Parelli technique, but more importantly within the penal context, self-mastery of their emotional state. The course is



Weaving through cones requires assertiveness and a strong focus

designed to develop crucial life skills, including empathy, focus, patience, communication and work ethic through the metaphor of horsemanship whilst providing the prisoners with an opportunity to practice calmness and focus even

when out of their comfort zone. The course uses horse-related tasks to promote the development of strategies to establish calmness and confidence alongside new habits of positive behaviour and emotional control. All the tasks place emphasis upon creating relationships with horses based on trust and respect, using body language and strong intention. The demands of the horsemanship establish an immediate learning environment which draws the participant into the 'here and now', argued to elicit long-term attitudinal and behavioural change. All the tasks practised within the course demand calm and assertive leadership as well as the ability to assume 'neutral' (i.e. drop tension and energy levels to 'zero' quickly and soften body language).

Over seven sessions, pro-social skills and coping strategies are practised with the expectation that these habits can be generalised into daily life 'back on the wing'. Having developed their confidence as learners, it is anticipated that the prisoners will become more willing to engage in opportunities within the prison regime. A critical benefit of this course is its provision of a means of learning by 'doing' rather than by being told, with the horsemanship tasks taught



The participant gains the horse's trust by rapidly shifting between 'asking' the horse to kick the ball and 'neutral'

through simulation, not verbal explanations. This serves to avoid the well-practiced defences constructed by prisoners for basic survival and self-preservation within prison, such as silence and lies, that often hinder successful treatment (Gussak, 2007).

During the concluding session, all participants are video-recorded whilst executing several tasks, which are submitted to Parelli USA for assessment.

On completion of the course, participants receive a certificate presented by



A prisoner teaching a Governor a horsemanship task, requiring calm and assertive energy

the prison Governor. Given the absence of important celebratory ceremonies within the prison environment (Maruna, 2011), the participants demonstrate their newfound skills to a small audience and often teach a member of prison staff a horsemanship task.

TheHorseCourse 'Star'

TheHorseCourse 'Star' (see below) has been recently developed as a tool for monitoring development of skills which underpin the course relating to psychological resilience; assertiveness, engagement, communication, planning, calmness, empathy, responsibility, focus and perseverance. Each skill has associated horsemanship tasks. These 'protective factors' are focused upon given their links with criminogenic risk factors associated with self-confidence, goal setting and emotional control. Following completion of the course, the star is used to assess participants' progress in the development of these factors. Despite the star providing a subjective tool, it has proved valuable as a document to refer to as the course progresses. The star correlates with the needs emphasised in the Offender Assessment System.



TheHorseCourse

Referral / Outcomes / Feedback Star

Name:

Referred by:

Star filled in by:

Date:

SCORING

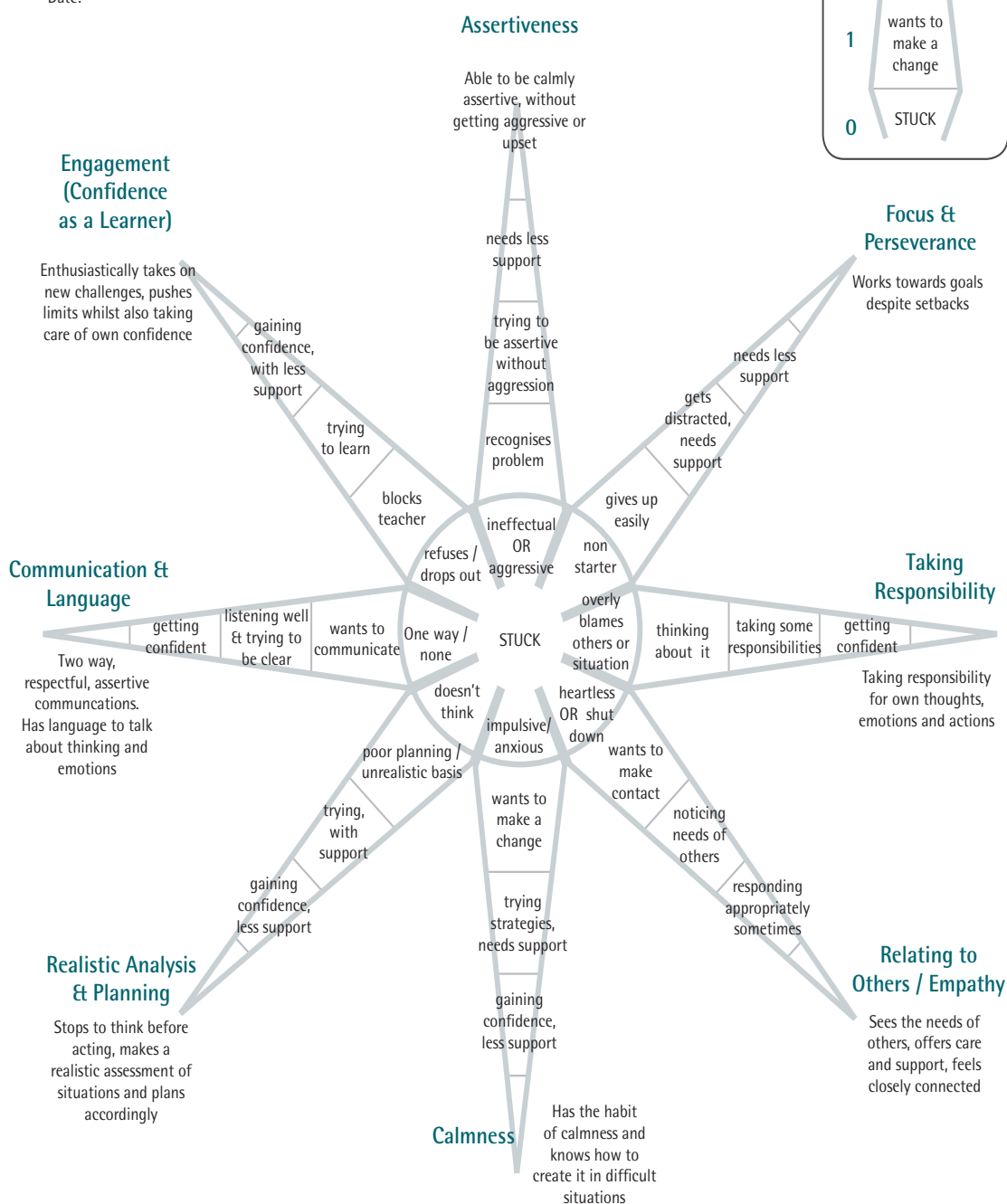
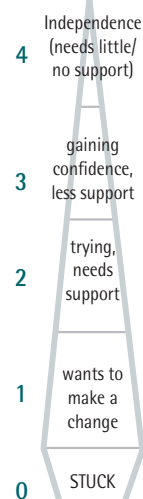


Figure 3.1: TheHorseCourse 'Star'

Looking Forward

Following the positive results of TheHorseCourse in aiding the rehabilitation of youth offenders presented within an interim report (Meek, 2012), plans are being made to roll the programme out across other contexts and client groups. It is anticipated that TheHorseCourse will be replicated in further prisons within the UK according to 'supply and demand'; practitioners and horses trained to the appropriate horsemanship standard are a scarce commodity within the UK. Currently TheHorseCourse charity is interested in discussing pilot courses in partnership with organisations involved with target groups such as traumatised soldiers and dysfunctional families. Premises are currently being sought for a pilot course with teenagers from a Pupil Referral Unit.

Alongside these proposals and plans, in early 2013 the founder of TheHorseCourse, Harriet Laurie, was awarded the Churchill Fellowship³. Fellows receive a travel grant, providing Laurie with the opportunity to travel to the USA and Canada to investigate equine-assisted interventions and bring back knowledge to inform best practice in the UK.

TheHorseCourse in the Context of Penal Policy

In recent years the penal system has suffered a 'crisis of legitimacy', triggered by its perceived failure to control crime and reduce recidivism (Cavadino and Dignan, 2007). 47.5% of those released from prison in 2010 reoffended within two years (Ministry of Justice, 2012a). Such statistics have drawn

³ Winston Churchill Memorial Trust - <http://www.wcmt.org.uk>

attention to a 'recidivism crisis' and have prompted the coalition government's radical reform, outlined in the Ministry of Justice's 2010 *Breaking the Cycle* Green Paper and the *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012*. Most significantly for the current research, Prime Minister, David Cameron, has pledged his commitment to the agenda of a 'rehabilitation revolution', which aims to tackle reoffending and reduce the cost of imprisonment (Ministry of Justice, 2012b). It is claimed that prisoners will receive support in changing their lives and breaking the cycle of reoffending by 2015, with a greater emphasis on rehabilitation programmes within prisons.

A system of 'payment by results' will be implemented, whereby only interventions that can provide rigorous evidence of their effectiveness in reducing reoffending and providing offenders with an opportunity to transform their lives will receive funding (Ministry of Justice, 2012b). The rationale behind this system is that given the expense of imprisonment, only evidence-led programmes that have proven effectiveness based on robust research will be implemented; the government wants 'what works'. If TheHorseCourse is to become part of the 'rehabilitation revolution' and meet the notion of an evidence-led intervention, there is need for rigorous, credible research that proves the benefits of EAT with offender populations. The research needed to fulfil this criterion will be explored further in the conclusion. It is anticipated that a forthcoming evaluation of TheHorseCourse will go some way to empirically confirming its value in enabling offenders to appreciate the negative effects of their dysfunctional behaviour and subsequently teaching positive habits of behaviour, aiding the reduction of reoffending.

Chapter 4:

Methodology

EAT is a relatively recent therapeutic modality, particularly in the UK where it has only begun to 'migrate' from America over the past two decades. Mirroring the development of EAT in the US, there is an increasing number of equine therapy programmes emerging in the UK, adopting varying approaches and being implemented across a variety of contexts. The focus of this research is the employment of EAT within penal institutions, specifically TheHorseCourse, to aid the rehabilitation of offenders.

To date there exists only an interim report advancing preliminary quantitative research findings on the effectiveness of TheHorseCourse, which reported positive outcomes including improved behaviour and engagement (Meek, 2012). A full academic evaluation involving a qualitative and quantitative approach with a larger sample and aiming to produce more credible research evidence is currently in progress by Professor Rosie Meek⁴ and Dr Ann Hemingway⁵.

The primary aim of the current qualitative research was to contribute to the existing and forthcoming evaluative work on TheHorseCourse by exploring the perceived impact and personal experiences of a small number of participants. As such, generalisations cannot be made from the research findings.

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Current evaluative research of EAT programmes consists primarily of descriptive reports and relies predominantly on qualitative interviews and observations (e.g. Burgon, 2003; Chandler, 2005). Cushing and Williams (1995) conducted a more credible evaluation of a prison-based EAT programme, involving interviews with participant offenders and prison staff, questionnaires and analysis of existing data on participant offenders' behaviour within prison.

For this research, the plan was to employ a mixed methods approach to increase the validity of the data and enable the analysis to be verified through methodological triangulation (Altrichter et al., 1996). It was intended that semi-structured interviews would be conducted with participant offenders and wing staff to explore the subjective benefits and whether staff perceive TheHorseCourse to improve engagement. Additionally, a quantitative questionnaire measuring constructs such as self-confidence was to be administered prior to attendance, immediately after and a three-month follow-up to construct a profile of the offender and gain an objective understanding of the impact of TheHorseCourse. It was also planned that secondary analysis of data on participants' positive and negative entries⁶, before and after TheHorseCourse would be conducted. However, the prison-based nature of this research led to a number of issues surrounding access. The access issue will be returned to in the conclusion when discussing future research needs. Additionally, the limited sample available would have compromised

⁶ Notes added to offenders' files by staff to record good and bad behaviour.

the validity of the quantitative analysis. Consequently, the proposed methodology was modified.

To assess the impact of TheHorseCourse, secondary analysis of seventeen semi-structured interviews with participant offenders at HMP/YOI Portland following their completion of TheHorseCourse was conducted. This data was collected by the charity, which granted permission to share this data for the purposes of this dissertation. The researcher was sent a sample of interviews from the initial four courses of TheHorseCourse.

Secondary analysis can be understood as analysis of data by researchers not involved in data collection (Bryman, 2008, p.296). The rationale for choosing secondary analysis surrounds its provision of access to information which otherwise would be restricted due to time and resource constraints (Boslaugh, 2007). Additionally, interviewing involves an exhaustive process (Thorne, 1994) and thus the researcher who conducts secondary analysis has an increased amount of time for analysing the data. This methodology allowed the researcher to make their own contribution surrounding TheHorseCourse, providing an opportunity for re-analysis to reveal new interpretations and conclusions.

There are limitations to this methodology. Most significantly, the data is not collected in specific reference to the research question (Hinde, 1991). Additionally, there is often limited information surrounding the data collection process including how it was carried out and any sources of bias that

invalidate the data (Nachmias and Nachmias, 2007). There is also a lack of control over the quality of the data and interview technique, including influence of researcher bias, location of the interview and probing skills (Bryman, 2008).

However, this data was specific to the current research issue and beyond the constraints of this research, thus proving a valuable methodology. The access issue, paradigmatic of prison research, also made it an appropriate choice. The original purpose for the data was the same as the current research; to evaluate the effectiveness of TheHorseCourse. Having been in communication with the practitioner who conducted the interviews, the researcher had a solid understanding of how the data was collected.

The data had several limitations stemming from the process in which the data was collected. Whilst the practitioner may have had a more established rapport with participants (Silverman, 2005), her connection with the course may have resulted in biased responses, potentially based on what the respondents knew the practitioner wanted to hear. There are always power differentials present in prison interview situations. This presents issues surrounding reliability and validity of the data. Additionally, the interview style resembled more of an informal conversation than a systematic social scientific interview, incorporating the use of leading questions, potentially invalidating the data further. Whilst the interviews analysed within this research appeared to lack focus, TheHorseCourse 'Star' (see page 21) has since been implemented as a tool to structure more recent interviews, with the skills

within the star discussed in relation to evidence from the programme and potential life outcomes. The star was devised following reflection on the quality of the initial interviews in an attempt to further improve the course and its evaluation. A final issue was the location of the interviews. Located outside with other participants working with the horses in the background presented distractions, causing potential issues with interviewees' concentration and the thought given to the formulation of responses.

Despite the data limitations, analysis of the semi-structured interviews was beneficial for this research. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate due to their ability to gather data that captures the perspective of participants alongside its ability to reach respondents with potentially low literacy levels (Oppenheim, 1992). Semi-structured interviewing is often exhibited as the 'gold standard' of qualitative research (Barbour, 2003) due to its ability to produce 'thick' descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and provide participants with an opportunity to discuss personally salient issues. However, qualitative interviewing is reliant on participants' ability to 'verbalise, interact, conceptualise and remember' (Mason, 2002, p.64). Underdeveloped communication skills may have hindered participants' ability to fully express their thoughts, experiences and perceptions.

Data Analysis

Responses from the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Thematic analysis was then conducted. The analysis process was lengthy, characteristic of this methodology, incorporating many phases of reading

transcripts to identify themes and establishing meaningful patterns to capture the nuances of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Having identified themes, they were defined and organised into a logical order. Due to its interpretative nature, ideally the analysis would have been verified. However this was unfeasible given the small-scale nature of this research. Nevertheless, themes were explored and illustrated by interview quotes that were extracted from the transcripts consisting of between 1428 and 3122 words.

Ethics

This research gained ethical approval from the University of Southampton's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 2). No ethical issues were raised given that the research was based on secondary analysis of existing data. Informed consent was granted by the participants at the time the interviews were conducted.

Any identifying material was removed from the transcripts by the researcher given that the materials that arrived were not anonymised. This could raise ethical issues in other circumstances but in this context there were no issues. The original materials were returned to TheHorseCourse charity and HMP/YOI Portland and remain in their secure possession.

Chapter 5:

Data Findings and Results

This research aimed to gain an understanding of whether TheHorseCourse is effective in changing dysfunctional thoughts, behaviours and attitudes of young offenders through the development of fundamental life skills and coping strategies, aiding their rehabilitation. An exploration of the experiences and perceptions of participants was carried out through analysis of post-participation interviews to identify themes.

An initial theme cited by several participants was their initial fear and scepticism about working with horses, with many discussing how they felt unconfident and nervous during the first session of TheHorseCourse.

“Coming into this course I was pretty much scared of horses.” (Appendix 3)

In support of previous research (Burton, 2011; Iannone, 2003), many of the participants described how by overcoming their initial fear, gaining cooperation with a large animal and achieving success in demanding activities, they experienced improved self-confidence and self-esteem. Through this affective change and expansion of participants' 'comfort zones', involvement in TheHorseCourse served to evoke a change from 'shuffling around' to striding out and achieving. Rutter (1985) emphasised the importance of self-confidence and esteem for psychological resilience.

“I was kinda nervous around the horse...but then as time went on I realised if I could stay calm and focused, that actually I can put my mind to anything and achieve stuff.” (Appendix 4)

“Makes you more confident, like when you’re afraid. If you get to know ‘em [the horses] it’s alright. Kinda relaxed a bit.” (Appendix 5)

Many participants stated that an additional result of overcoming fears and anxieties was the development of a sense of mastery and self-efficacy (Burgon, 2003). Mastery of demanding tasks is emphasised as providing a ‘protective factor’ for ‘at-risk’ youth (Masten et al., 1990). According to Seligman (1975), individuals with a lack of control over their lives, such as incarcerated offenders, have low self-efficacy. TheHorseCourse appeared to develop a sense of self-belief amongst participants, evidenced by changes in attitude.

“It makes me feel more positive and more like I can achieve something.”
(Appendix 6)

A key aim of TheHorseCourse is for participants to learn self-efficacy ‘in the moment’ through experiencing a method of practical learning, rather than learning through written or verbal means. The majority of participants emphasised how TheHorseCourse provided an effective learning environment that encouraged engagement and responsibility. It was apparent that the horses motivated the offenders, whilst also eliciting other benefits.

“Here’s more practical, like you can be working with the horse and you can see the results when you try and do it. On other courses they’re just telling you about what you should do...but here you can actually put it into practice.”

(Appendix 7)

“I’ve been on anger management courses, alcohol courses, things like that – this is much different. You’re learning it physical rather than mental, if you know what I mean. It’s helped me more, without a doubt. I don’t like talking...normally with other courses you’re in a group of people and you have to talk about your issues...Here you get it out in a different way.” (Appendix 8)

Many participants discussed how, prior to taking part on TheHorseCourse, they struggled to manage their anger and frustration, which often resulted in conflict and adjudications. Participants remarked that learning to ‘manage’ and work with horses had encouraged them to develop control over aggression and an ability to cope with stressful situations, leading to reduced tension.

“I learnt a lot of people in jail haven’t got a lot of patience. Fights happen just like that [clicks]. The horses teach you just to like not escalate stuff so much so quickly.” (Appendix 9)

“It [TheHorseCourse] helps you understand yourself better. And I haven’t been getting so aggressive on the wing. In life I get pissed off with people. I’ve learnt to relax on this course.” (Appendix 10)

One participant stated that TheHorseCourse taught him to modify his impulsive behaviour and to engage in more rational thought, describing how tension often evolves out of misunderstanding and lack of communication.

“I’ve learnt with the horse it’s a misunderstanding most of the time...she won’t do it because she’s not understanding you properly. It’s the same on the wing...I don’t ‘go’ as easy as I used to.” (Appendix 11)

Another frequently occurring theme was the development of calmness. All participants referred to how developing relationships with horses that demand calm and confident control (Rashid, 2004) had elicited the discipline that enabled them to remain calm even in stressful situations.

“I’ve learnt ways of handling and getting the horse to do what I want without force. It’s much better on the animal and on me...it’s less frustrating, more relaxed, more calm.” (Appendix 12)

“I’ve been more relaxed around the horses this past two weeks than I have the past year in this establishment. My sleeping’s even improved. I’m worn out and more calmer. Usually I’m quite stressed in the evenings.” (Appendix 13)

“The horses help...my emotions just feel calm.” (Appendix 14)

One participant emphasised the ability of horses to equip even the most aggressive person with a capacity to relax and control their behavioural response to others' actions, inhibiting violent outbursts.

"This could make a proper angry person calm down a lot." (Appendix 15)

Another common theme was an increased ability to manage emotions. Several participants drew attention to their enhanced emotional self-control; a result of successful accomplishment of horse-oriented tasks depending upon their ability to quickly drop or raise emotional energy. Some of the young men discussed how they increasingly take responsibility for their emotional state resulting in greater behavioural discipline.

"I learnt I need to control myself more. I get stressed quite easily. But I'm getting there. I'm starting to feel like I actually should try and control it whereas before I didn't care." (Appendix 16)

"You've got to take responsibility for yourself. Manage your emotions. Coz that's when it causes problems." (Appendix 17)

Many participants described how working with horses had encouraged them to develop coping strategies to overcome emotional challenges and respond calmly to potentially conflictual situations that may have previously resulted in negative responses.

“The other courses tell you to think about things. I find it better to just not think about anything. Try calming down and be neutral.” (Appendix 18)

“When I’m at my cell, I’m always tense. But I feel more relaxed now. I’ve got better at letting it all go. Just breathe in and let it out. Think things through before you do it.... You have to ignore it and move away.” (Appendix 19)

“To relax it’s all about concentration basically. Get into the moment.”
(Appendix 20)

Many participants discussed how they were able to put their behavioural and attitudinal changes into practice ‘back on the wing’, resulting in less confrontation.

“Everyday I’m behaving, being calm. Not got into any confrontation or anything. This [TheHorseCourse] has made me more relaxed.” (Appendix 21)

The theme of self-awareness was frequently cited, with participants stating that interaction with horses taught them to read body language and provided them with an insight into non-verbal communication. Rector (1994) highlighted that the development of self-awareness is a fundamental contribution to the therapeutic process as emotionally disturbed people rarely know exactly how they feel.

“There were some times when I thought I was relaxed but really I weren’t. The horse picked up on it. I didn’t even realise it until the horse made me realise. If I can control it people might look at me differently. Won’t be intimidated. Come and speak to you or something. You’d just be more respected.” (Appendix 22)

“I noticed on the wing if it’s serving time...if you’re lining up and you’re there like [puffs out chest], people are gonna think that...he must want a fight coz his energy is up and he’s looking...ready. But if you just go and you’re calm, bring yourself down...you’ll find you’re gonna have no confrontation.” (Appendix 23)

Several participants used this increased self-awareness to reflect on the offence that culminated in their imprisonment. These young men discussed how if they had possessed the skills honed from TheHorseCourse, they may have acted differently.

“If I’d calmed down and just thought about it more clearly I would’ve got on the bus and gone home. I just acted on impulse.” (Appendix 24)

“I should’ve stopped and thought about everything. Thought about the consequences. I just rushed into it, acted on impulse. I wasn’t thinking clearly.” (Appendix 25)

A frequently occurring theme was empathy. Empathy is a key construct addressed within TheHorseCourse given evidence that offenders display a

compromised ability to experience an empathetic state (Heilbrun, 1982) alongside research that regards empathy as offering a 'protective factor' against aggression (Hastings et al., 2000). Most participants discussed how TheHorseCourse encouraged them to be more empathetic. Some stated that they had an improved awareness of how their behaviour impacts others, resulting from the mirroring capacity of horses.

"I've learnt I need to keep my energy calm. Keep it to the bare minimum. Coz to make the horse do what you wanna do, you've got to let it feel safe."
(Appendix 26)

"You need to communicate with 'em [the horses] to make 'em do things you wanna do. And you can't pressure 'em into stuff. They get anxious and won't do it. You have to breathe out and make 'em feel nice." (Appendix 27)

"I learnt that body language and actions effect people." (Appendix 28)

Many participants stated that one of the main things that TheHorseCourse taught them was how to be patient and tolerant, serving to transform individualistic, aggressive attitudes and encourage them to give people a chance.

"Horses read your emotions. So you can't be angry around the horses and expect it to do stuff that you want...got to be patient." (Appendix 29)

“I used to get angry...more faster until I learnt this and now I’ve proper learnt to just...if I’m around people, just give them a chance...learnt more patience I guess.” (Appendix 30)

An additional aim of TheHorseCourse is to improve offender participants’ concentration and determination in order to encourage engagement with the prison regime. The majority of participants stated that the need to be committed and focused on achieving tasks with the horses alongside their newly developed self-confidence had increased their ability to focus and stick at tasks rather than give up at the first sign of difficulty.

“I think I’ve given up too easy on things. I think I could have done a lot of things better. I just need to focus and have an ambition and set my mind forward to it.” (Appendix 31)

“I’ve learnt you’ve gotta have strong focus if you want them [horses] to do what you want...you’ve gotta show leadership. I guess that would help me to fix up while I’m in prison. Try and get some courses done.” (Appendix 32)

“I’m the kinda person, I start something and I’m really focused but I lose interest...and my focus drifts off. But this has taught me to stay on it sorta thing.” (Appendix 33)

“I feel I could probably manage my focus better. When there’s people messing about, I might be able to think ‘they’re messing about’ and do some work. Just ignore it.” (Appendix 34)

Another frequently cited theme by the participants was an increased confidence in their ability to learn alongside a greater willingness to engage with the learning process. Many of the young men discussed how their success on TheHorseCourse showed them that they were able to achieve and learn.

“I’ve learnt a lot about myself. That I can actually do things. I’ve always said I can’t but I can.” (Appendix 35)

“I’m more focused on learning than I was before. I realised I can enjoy it.” (Appendix 36)

One participant stated how TheHorseCourse had prepared him for future learning on the educational courses available within the prison by developing the necessary skills, such as confidence and patience.

“If you’ve done this, you’re gonna do better in your Maths and English. You’ll get less frustrated.” (Appendix 37)

Many participants drew attention to their increased motivation to make positive changes to their behaviour and to transform their lives. The majority

of the young men emphasised how they felt more determined and hopeful. Many discussed a newfound sense of purpose, outlining plans for release and a more positive future in a goal-directed manner.

“I’m working on a few courses...and I’m just gonna push forward and hopefully come out with a decent CV. I’m just going to go out and try and get a job.” (Appendix 38)

“I’ve learnt motivation. I’ve never tried anything. Nothing since I was about 13. I just lost all motivation, self-confidence. Now I wanna start boxing when I get out. I’ve always wanted to do it ever since I was young but never actually had the courage to do it. But now I feel more like I can actually do things, achieve things. Now when I get out, I’ll do something good.” (Appendix 39)

The opportunity to interact with horses was seen to provide an escape from the intense prison environment and the stress of being ‘locked up’, ameliorating the wellbeing of participants. In support of previous research (Lessick et al., 2004), one participant emphasised that TheHorseCourse had provided him with an opportunity to get off the wing, offered stress relief and reduced feelings of depression and anxiety.

“I’m a quiet person...I think it was a lot of stress being locked up. This [TheHorseCourse] has helped me to escape...from troubling thoughts. Just putting everything aside and not having anything in your mind. Can just let go. Taking control and physically addressing anything that makes me feel

anxious. And then recognising it and dealing with it. That's why I liked doing the horses so much, it's helped me to get rid of that [tension]...It's been a big relief for me, escaping." (Appendix 40)

Lastly, all participants stated that they had benefited from TheHorseCourse and would recommend it to others, despite finding it initially challenging. The course received positive feedback from all participants, with some stating their enthusiasm for the course from the beginning whilst others remarked that it was not until the end of the course that they realised how much they had gained from it.

"I'd recommend it...I'd say there's not gonna be another chance to be around horses. I'd say you learn a lot off of it." (Appendix 41)

"If I could do it again I would, it's a great course. There's probably more you could learn." (Appendix 42)

"I didn't feel the course was worthwhile at first...wasn't really fussed. I didn't really care...but now I started getting used to it...starting to get to know horses and that...it's alright." (Appendix 43)

Discussion

The qualitative data from interviews with offender participants provides an insight into the perceived benefit of participation on the development of fundamental pro-social skills and coping strategies alongside an increased

ability to manage emotions. These findings suggest TheHorseCourse is effective in fulfilling its aims; addressing offending behaviour, increasing offenders' confidence as learners and improving engagement with the prison regime, aiding their rehabilitation. An interesting point to emerge from the interviews was that the participant offenders unintentionally told us about life 'inside' from their perspective. Extended interviews would provide researchers with more of an insight than was possible within the current research.

However, the findings must be viewed cautiously given that they are based on subjective self-reports of participants' perceptions and experiences. The interviews were conducted 'in-house' by the practitioner of TheHorseCourse, who throughout the course would have made participants aware of the aims of the programme. This may have resulted in the participants' responses being biased, potentially based on what they knew the practitioner wanted to hear. This may present reliability issues and validity issues in terms of whether these findings could be replicated. These issues may have been exacerbated by the way the data collection process was approached, resembling an informal conversation with the inclusion of leading questions. However, it could be that the participants were more willing to talk about their emotions precisely because they had worked with and therefore trusted the practitioner.

Furthermore, this research did not have access to important information about the participant offenders, including their age, offence, stage of their sentence

or the sentence being served. A critical variable that was also unable to be considered due to lack of access to the information was the number and outcomes of other training programmes and therapy the participant offenders had either completed or were involved in at the same time. Despite the influence of simultaneous programmes potentially producing an overlap of results, it would be unethical to terminate them for the purposes of this research (Cushing and Williams, 1995). As such, this research data is 'decontextualised'. Future research must encompass a more contextual and holistic understanding of the prison lives of the participating young men. This will be referred to further in the conclusion.

Chapter 6:

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary and Conclusion

The results from this study compliment existing findings on the psychosocial benefits of EAT, suggesting that interaction with horses serves to assist participants in developing skills and strategies identified as offering 'protective factors' (Masten et al., 1990). The data findings confirmed the claims of a number of researchers, who identified the development of empathy, motivation, self-efficacy, patience, emotional control, confidence and self-esteem as a result of working with horses (Bowers and MacDonald, 2001; Burgon, 2011; Chandler, 2005; Lessick et al., 2004; Schultz et al., 2007).

This research identified key themes and issues from interviews with offender participants that revealed subjective accounts of the perceived benefits of TheHorseCourse. Many participants described their improved confidence and self-esteem as a result of accomplishment of challenging horse-oriented tasks. Confidence is identified as a fundamental factor in the psychological resilience literature (Burgon, 2011). The participants discussed how they had developed a sense of empathy, a critical construct addressed on TheHorseCourse given the inability of traditional therapy to fully facilitate this development (Rothe et al., 2005). Empathy is also identified as offering a salient 'protective factor' against aggression (Hastings et al., 2000). Increased motivation of participants to make positive changes to their behaviour was a key theme identified within the interviews. Many participants

discussed plans for a positive future given their newfound confidence, ambition and hope. The development of greater control over aggressive tendencies, an increased ability to manage emotional energy and an enhanced capacity to remain calm were identified as important benefits by participants, seen to stem from interaction with horses. The participants emphasised the benefit of developing coping strategies to overcome emotional challenges and to respond calmly to conflictual interpersonal situations that may have previously resulted in aggression. Participants discussed that through the metaphor of horsemanship, they had learnt skills and strategies that they were able to transfer and use in daily life to 'manage' their own life problems. Additional themes included enhanced self-awareness as a result of horses' mirroring capacity, increased patience and reduced anxiety. It appeared that participants responded well to the practical method of learning, as it presented 'something different' and avoided prisoners' well-practiced defences and verbal blocks.

Whilst the data limitations discussed in both the methodology and results chapters demand a cautious view of these findings, this research advances evidence that TheHorseCourse is an effective programme in terms of achieving its aims; addressing offending behaviour, improving engagement with the prison regime and increasing offenders' motivation and confidence as learners. The method appears to be a beneficial addition to offender resocialisation and rehabilitation processes given the development of skills in psychological resilience, emotion management and anger management.

Future Research Needs

Given the scarce research to date, further academic studies are required to advance the research base of the effectiveness of TheHorseCourse and other EAT programmes. There is a critical need for more methodologically rigorous and experimental research that empirically validates EAT's effectiveness in addressing emotional, mental and behavioural issues for this practice to become credible and meet the notion of an evidence-led intervention.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is identified as having one of the strongest evidential bases for effectiveness amongst all psychotherapeutic approaches (Butler et al., 2006). Considering this and the crucial need to deliver evidence-led interventions, future evaluation of EAT programmes should aim to replicate the well-established methodologies used within CBT research. An influx of well-designed and methodologically rigorous randomised controlled trials (RCT) is needed to achieve more precise and valid evaluations of EAT interventions (Whitfield and Williams, 2003).

To conduct an RCT on the effectiveness of EAT, some subjects would be randomly allocated to an experimental group that receives an EAT programme whilst a control group would receive a conventional intervention, such as office-based therapy. The inclusion of a control group would serve to ascertain whether positive results are due entirely to EAT or whether extraneous factors are involved. Such rigorous research would definitively reveal whether EAT 'works'. With a representative sample, objective outcome measures including scores on empathy and psychological resilience should

be assessed at baseline level, immediately after treatment and a 9-month follow-up to identify the impact of EAT. To evaluate the effectiveness of prison-based EAT programmes, additional measures assessing anger management should be incorporated.

In turn, results of RCTs should be synthesised in a systematic research review, a methodological technique seen as the 'gold standard' of evidence-led policy-making (Torgerson, 2003). A systematic review should be the 'next step' for research on EAT to unify and extend this emerging modality. Such work must prioritise the clarification of terminology surrounding equine therapy if this practice is to be accepted and advanced, both in theoretical strength and successful application.

Future evaluative research on the effectiveness of EAT within prisons specifically must encompass a more contextual and holistic understanding of the prison lives of participants. Access to detailed offender background data is vitally important to be able to undertake contextualised research. Information such as offence type, stage of the sentence, the sentence being served, number of previous convictions, age at which first convicted and most critically, participant involvement in other programmes must be considered when evaluating prison-based EAT programmes. Future evaluative research must also aim to explore the effectiveness of equine therapy with prisoner populations other than young offenders to establish its replicability. Additionally, there is a need for research to specifically explore three key

issues that cross all forms of therapy programmes; mood changes, behavioural changes and problem solving skills.

Furthermore, ongoing evaluation must encompass a comprehensive longitudinal follow-up, including a reconviction analysis, to establish the efficacy of EAT in reducing reoffending. Given that the critical aim of interventions designed to rehabilitate offenders is to effect a reduction in recidivism rates (Palmer, 1991), longitudinal research is needed to confirm the longer-term impact of EAT in assisting offenders to overcome emotional challenges and conflictual situations following the *critical moment* of reintegration into the community.

There is clearly a need for research that empirically validates the benefit of EAT, particularly for prison-based interventions such as TheHorseCourse if they are to become part of the 'rehabilitation revolution' and meet the notion of evidence-led interventions. A forthcoming evaluation of TheHorseCourse is anticipated to take a critical step towards the development of a credible evidential base. In the meantime, this research presents valuable preliminary findings that suggest TheHorseCourse is effective in fulfilling its aims and is a promising intervention to aid the rehabilitation of prisoners within Portland's Young Offender Institution, advancing further evidence of the potential value of this emerging therapy.

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