**LEARN ABOUT EAAT**

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**What Are Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies?**

Throughout the world, hundreds of thousands of individuals with and without special needs experience the rewarding benefits of equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT). A physical, cognitive or emotional special need does not limit a person from interacting with horses. In fact, such interactions can prove highly rewarding. For instance, experiencing the rhythmic motion of a horse can be very beneficial. Riding a horse moves the rider's body in a manner similar to a human gait, so riders with physical needs often show improvement in flexibility, balance and muscle strength.

Whether it's a five-year-old with Down syndrome, a 45-year-old recovering from a spinal cord injury, a senior citizen recovering from a stroke or a teenager struggling with depression, research shows that individuals of all ages who participate in EAAT can experience physical and emotional rewards. For individuals with emotional challenges, the unique relationship formed with the horse can lead to increased confidence, patience and self-esteem. For teams in the corporate workplace and any individual seeking better leadership, team building or communication skills, working with horses provides a powerful new paradigm.

**The Role of the Equine as Partner in EAAT**

New scientific research continues to reveal critical information about equine sentience- their abilities of perception, cognition, memory, and emotions such as pain and fear. Equines are able to perceive, respond to and learn from the impressions they receive from minimal sensory stimuli. The stimulus may originate from changes in human biochemistry, body language, or vocal intonations. It can also come from changes in the equine’s environment, relationships with other equines, or the equine’s general health In this way, equines make decisions based upon the stimuli they experience from others or from their environment (Hangg, 2005; Nicol, 2002; Proops, McComb, &  Reby, 2009; Saslow, 2002). These abilities are based in natural, biological, physiological, and psychological traits of equines. Each equine is unique in personality, and has individual likes, dislikes and habits. The information gained from equine communication can be highly useful in all EAAT settings. Listening to equine communication can have an effect on the care of the equines, their rate of burnout, and the success of the human-equine interaction. In EAAT sessions or lessons, viewing the equine as a partner invites opportunities for relationship building and skill building with all participants served.