

Horse Therapy for Troubled Teens

by Pam Kachelmeyer, Coach Horse Counseling and Learning Center

Many teenage girls face emotional, behavioral, or social difficulties. Many of these girls are looking for a friend to help alleviate the anxiety, depression, and family problems that affect their daily lives. A therapy horse could be just the answer. CoachHorse Counseling Services, just a few miles from the hustle and bustle of local cities incorporates horses into sessions helping troubled, abused, defiant or rebellious girls cultivate alternative, appropriate, and effective ways of dealing with life's challenges.

Jennifer, a struggling teen states, "I'm 17 years old, since grade school bully problems arose; I had self-esteem and self-confidence problems. Over the years I have done things to try and stop my depression. I cut for many years. I overate, and I even thought about suicide one year. I was a wreck, coming home from school in tears and then having to deal with a great family problem; my parent's separation which led to divorce. For many years, I've lived life thinking I was only on this planet to be tortured, but one great furry friend

Incorporating horses into sessions can be inviting, less intimidating, more fun and creative in treating at-risk teenagers. The therapeutic process includes developing a relationship with a horse, allowing the girl to feel empowered by her own strengths while earning the trust of a horse. To earn this trust, teens must learn to authentically and effectively relate with the horse while responding to his body language. Learning to watch the non-verbal communication of the horse translates to similar language among their peers, parents, and families. Teens gain awareness of their emotions and behaviors and establish personal boundaries as well as receive unconditional attention. These skills provide tools for building and sustaining accountability, self-control and healthy relationships.

Each girl's experience begins in a peaceful, safe and serene setting, with a program of cognitive behavior therapy, art therapy, and experiential learning. No horse experience is required; 90% of interacting with the horses is done on



helped me see the light."

Jennifer found a horse friend named Dan and after a few sessions said, "He has not only given me confidence, but also some of the best memories in life. I knew he was the horse when we were doing trust exercises. I was to lead him over swimming noodles which were levitated among various objects. My counselor was unsure of whether or not Dan would attempt walking over the noodle levitated by two cardboard boxes. After numerous attempts and patient persistence Dan actually attempted! I felt like I was in the movie, when the unbelievable happened and a magical light feeling began to glow inside me, a flame lit. That flame was the bond between Dan and I, he had trusted me! Not one of the popular kids at school, or one of the kids who had bullied me believed in me. What happened was the most magical thing ever."

the ground, little riding. Horse therapy is not for everyone; however a specific group of clients benefit and the program shortens the length of therapy for many young people.

Pam Kachelmeyer is a professional counselor and received her Counseling Psychology degree with a concentration in Equine Assisted Mental Health and Learning from Prescott College. She interned at Chaps Academy in Appleton, WI and is certified through the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association. She practices in Kiel, WI and focuses on Equine Assisted Mental Health with children, adolescents and young women. To learn more about CoachHorse Counseling Services and its summer workshops and mini-retreats visit www.coachhorse.com or call 920 980 5326.

