

SEPLA-CON18



Equine Therapy - 'Horse Talk'

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As a class teacher of a K-6 Multi Categorical Class at Barrack Heights Public School, I have had to utilise many different strategies and skills in order to deal with many challenging behaviours as well as build rapport with my students and engage them in their learning. To assist me in doing this, as well as improving self-confidence in my students, I decided to introduce Equine Therapy. This immediately raised several questions, including:

- Was it possible to bring a horse into a school for Equine Therapy?
- What benefits could Equine Therapy provide to the students?
- Could Equine Therapy be used as a way of increasing self-confidence in students?
- Would it be safe to use in a setting where a majority of the students have extremely challenging behaviours including violence?
- Would it be something that all students, regardless of disability would be able to participate in?

After considering the above questions, I began to research into the extrinsic benefits of Equine Therapy, particularly when used with children with disabilities. I found the proven benefits include:

- Improved independence
- Improved social behaviour
- Learning non-verbal communication
- Decreasing blood pressure
- Increases in self-esteem

Upon introducing equine therapy, the effect was incredible, quickly breaking down barriers and immediately engaging students. Therapy days initially began with basic horse handling skills, and as students increased their knowledge and confidence, the types and difficulty of activities increased. Students went from being scared to go anywhere near the horse, to now handling and leading the horse, and completing other related activities. As students were thoroughly engaged throughout the day, their challenging behaviours and level of disability turned out not to be a major issue. Their joy in working with the horse, coupled with their respect for the horse and its size appeared to negate any negative behaviour.