



Horses *who* HEAL

DIANE & JIM GILLESPIE

*Horses have many gifts to give simply by being in our lives — but
horses also have documented healing powers in therapeutic applications.*

COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY VICKI YARKER-JONES



South Coast
Psychology

**Equine
Therapy**

Dedication

*For those of us that know the
healing power of horses and those who are yet
to become horseful.*

*Also the horses
who give us unconditional love, and
who change the world around them.*

First published in New Zealand in 2022 by
Purple Press
Copyright © 2022 South Coast Psychology
The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Printed in New Zealand by Southern Office Products
Photography: Natwick Photography - www.natwick.co/
Stock images: Unsplash.com
Design & Layout: Sassy Advertising - www.sassyadvertising.co.nz



South Coast
Psychology

**Equine
Therapy**



HORSES who HEAL



Foreword



Di and Jim; thank you for giving me the opportunity
to make what I do an Art.

VICKI YARKER-JONES

*“Whether it’s horses or whatever it is you do, it doesn’t become
an art until your soul goes into what you do.”*



South Coast
Psychology

**Equine
Therapy**

SCP Equine Therapy is a subsidiary of South Coast Psychology Ltd. SCP Equine Therapy grew out of a need for human beings to relearn their ability to be present ground and connect. Horses teach us this.

The equine therapy centre grew out of Jim and Diane Gillespie's love of and deep connection with horses. Jim grew up wanting to be a cowboy since he was a boy and sought out horses to connect to. He understands them and their power to empower humans. Horses have been a part of Diane's life since a baby. She understands their ability to heal trauma and support healthy boundaries, grounding and connection





“

Some of my best
friends never say
a word to me

”



PART ONE

THE HEALING POWER OF HORSES



Horses have many gifts to give simply by being in our lives — but horses also have documented healing powers in therapeutic applications.

As the majestic, noble creatures they are, horses have the ability to give us many gifts by simply being in our lives — from being our best friends to providing us with peace and comfort at the end of a long day, and the list doesn't stop with companionship and love.

Horses also have an incredible healing power, and they help countless people every day through equine therapy. Equine therapy is emotional healing encouraged by interaction with horses. This helps people with various needs, ranging from anxiety and depression therapy to therapy for people on the autistic spectrum.

BODY LANGUAGE AND RESPONSE

Of course, all horse lovers know what an incredible healing power horses have with humans; it doesn't take long to experience it. Those who spend a lot of time around horses will not be surprised to hear that not only is this type of healing spiritual, but scientific as well.

A study of human and horse heart rates showed that spending time with a horse can lead to heart rates syncing up, which can slow down the heart rate of someone who is feeling anxious and lead them to feel calm. Since heart rate is an involuntary stress response, the study was able to conclude that horse assisted therapy has positive results, particularly for at-risk youths.

Similarly, horses have been found to have the ability to read human body language. One study by the University of Essex found that they can tell the difference between submissive and dominant stances even with people they are not familiar with.

HYPER VIGILANCE AND HERD DYNAMICS

Horses are able to achieve this due to their social skills as herd animals. As reported by researchers, horses are hyper vigilant creatures: "It allows horses to detect the slightest sound, smell, or movement, any of which might indicate the presence of a life-threatening predator. Their ability to read with flawless accuracy not just the behaviour of others but their silent intentions is what gives the horse the psychological mirroring expertise of the most gifted human therapist."

Since this hyper vigilance is also commonly observed in those with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), it makes horses the perfect therapy animal for helping them.

As herd animals, horses acquire particular social qualities that further qualify them to be therapeutic to humans:

"To promote social harmony and keep the herd together, horses possess a number of evolutionary hardwired qualities. These include: being accepting, tolerant, kind, respectful, honest, fair, non-judgmental, compassionate, and forgiving. All of these innate equine qualities are also utilised when a horse interacts with a human."





Another study, The Efficacy of equine therapy: Mounting evidence, takes a look at how horses help clients get through therapy. The study found that in addition to the skills already mentioned, horses help with self acceptance, impulse modulation, and creative freedom.

SPECIALISED EQUINE THERAPY

Though the incredible ability for horses to heal allow them to be potential therapy animals for a variety of therapies, there are a few areas where they have proven to be especially helpful. Two of these include helping people in addiction recovery, and people diagnosed with autism.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE EQUINE THERAPY

Due to their healing qualities, horses are often used in animal-assisted therapy — a form of complementary therapy. According to Wake Forest University, which specialises in counselling, complementary therapy is "enacted by mental health professionals who believe their clients would benefit from more non-traditional treatments in addition to standard medical practices".



The university also states that animal-assisted therapy is one of the most common and most effective types of complementary therapies available. It has been proven to help reduce anxiety, depression, pain, and fatigue in people who use this type of therapy. Horses, along with dogs and cats, are one of the most common types of animals used for animal-assisted therapy.

HORSES AND ADDICTION THERAPY

Equine therapy is also proven to be effective as part of many specialised therapies, including addiction therapy. People who spend time around horses are familiar with the work and reward of caring for these majestic creatures, but those who haven't previously had the opportunity have a lot to learn and gain. As it relates to overcoming addiction, equine therapy is "a holistic approach to substance abuse treatment," according to addiction recovery experts. They also list other benefits of equine therapy:

- Building a sense of self-worth
- Improving communication
- Building trust and self-efficiency with therapist or self
- Developing socialisation skills and decreasing isolating behaviours
- Learning to respect and establish limits or boundaries

Some clients may be intimidated by the size of horses, so not all of them will choose to ride them. Therapy services put safety first and allow clients to pet, brush, and feed the horses, at the same time giving them a chance to be outside in the fresh air.

Without a doubt, spending time with horses has an incredible healing power that can help just about anyone. Whether it takes form in spending a day roaming the hills and fields, or passing a few hours grooming and feeding in the stables, horse and human share an amazing bond.





“

The wind of heaven is that
which blows between
a horse's ears.

”

-BEDOUIN PROVERB



HORSES who HEAL



HORSES AND AUTISM

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological and psychological disorder that affects social, physical, and communicative abilities. As the name implies, ASD exists on a wide spectrum, and those who have it can be high functioning, low functioning, or anywhere in between.

Though treatments vary due to the needs of the client, counselling is often

recommended as a treatment for ASD, as it can help with social abilities. The earlier treatment is started, the more it can help with possible behavioral issues. Animal-assisted therapy can be beneficial for those with ASD, as bonding and interacting with animals can help with relationship-building skills and other social abilities. Horses are the perfect animal to help, as they are gentle and responsive creatures who can convey love to humans.



PART TWO
**THE WAY
OF HORSES**





5 LESSONS ONLY A HORSE TEACHES



People have sought out relationships with horses since we first laid eyes on each other. Riding horses can be exhilarating, but there's something even more profound. That's why many mental health professionals recommend the benefits of equine therapy. "There are striking similarities between horses and people," says Vicki Yarker-Jones, who grew up riding horses. She has also maintained a private professional supervision practice since 1999, and more recently counselling since 2016. She says "Like people, horses are social beings whose herd dynamics are remarkably similar to the family system".



At South Coast Psychology Equine Therapy Centre, where Vicki also works, you can experience change in a hands-on way. It challenges people to look at themselves and the world in a new way. People who have struggled to make progress or achieve their treatment goals have made significant breakthroughs with the aid of equine therapy. Research has confirmed many equine therapy benefits. It lowers your blood pressure and heart rate, alleviates stress and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression. Equine therapy also helps people struggling with addictions or mental illness. There are several life skills that a horse teaches better than a person. This is the primary benefit of using equine therapy with individuals facing mental illness or addiction.



01 LESSON 1 Identifying and Coping with Feelings

Equine therapy is a powerful way to get in touch with thoughts and feelings. During equine therapy, you do not use your mind to address problems. Instead, you must use your body and heart to feel and react in the moment. Horses have a unique ability to sense emotions and react accordingly. If you are angry or aggressive, the horse may become obstinate. If you are anxious, the horse may get skittish. But when approached by someone who is open and calm, the horse is more likely to respond in kind. Witnessing the horse's response promotes self-awareness and can help people see themselves in a more realistic way.





“
Horses lend us the
wings we lack
”

LESSON 2

Communication & Interpersonal Skills

Many people experiencing Mental Health issues may struggle at times emotionally. They may have difficulty relating or getting close to other people. Yet they manage to establish close bonds with horses. Through working with horses, people recognise their patterns of interacting with others. Horses do not speak, but they are excellent communicators. Learning to understand horse behavior can help people learn the way their behaviour impacts others. "As a sophisticated herd animal, horses immediately begin building relationships with people as members of their herd", Vicki says. "People then get to decide whether they will hold fast to their old ways of interacting, or take this unique opportunity to develop a new kind of relationship". While riding can be part of equine therapy, the most important work happens during the interactions between client and horse, she says. Exercises as simple as haltering and grooming teach people how to approach others with respect and awareness. In equine therapy, people talk about what they see and feel. The therapist guides the person to see the horse's responses with an objective lens. Thus, they begin to recognise the ways in which their perceptions are accurate or misguided. They also discover the ways they may be projecting their own issues onto others.

LESSON 3

Setting Boundaries

Working with a horse can expose a person's challenging thoughts and behavior patterns. In an equine therapy session, Vicki draws metaphors between the client's interaction with the horse, and the patterns in their own lives. She finds opportunity to address issues like detachment in their family. Lessons may be as simple as how much physical space the horse needs to feel

comfortable. With no words at all, horses make it clear when someone has crossed their boundaries. Trying to control or dominate will not work with a horse. Likewise, a detached or passive approach can make it difficult to lead a horse.

LESSON 4

Overcoming Fears

Horses are large animals. Their strength and size can bring up unmet needs, fears, past trauma and feelings of inadequacy or lack of control. "These special animals allow people to bring all kinds of issues into the horse's world and accept them as they are - imperfections and all". In a safe environment, clients learn to face their fears. They build confidence in their ability to overcome challenges. Many people feel intimidated and nervous at first. Later they discover how quickly they process those feelings and find comfort in their relationship with the horse. Empowered by the experience, people may develop the confidence to address other fears. They then transfer these lessons to day-to-day life. "Clients at South Coast Psychology Equine Therapy don't have to love horses or have experience working with animals in order to benefit from equine therapy," says Vicki. "They simply have to be willing to give treatment a chance and move in a different direction than they have in the past".

LESSON 5

Trust

Horses are soothing, gentle animals. They are straightforward in their interactions without lying or manipulating. They do not judge or blame. Their presence alone can be healing. Vicki says she still learns something new every day. "I get back tenfold what I put in, just by watching someone have a softening of the heart or a moment that creates a new kind of wonderful body memory".





PART THREE

SOUTH COAST PSYCHOLOGY



WHAT IS EQUINE THERAPY?

Equine Therapy (also referred to as Hippotherapy, Horse Therapy, Equine-Assisted Therapy, Equine-Assisted Leadership and Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy) is a form of experiential therapy that involves interactions between a therapy provider, a horse specialist, a client/clients, and horses. It can be delivered individually or in groups. Sometimes the therapy provider and equine specialist are the same person – depending on the training, model and experience of the Equine Therapist. South Coast Psychology Equine Assisted Therapists are trained in Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and are experienced horse specialists. We also have counsellors, social workers, psychotherapists and psychologists who work with trained equine specialists to deliver equine assisted leadership to their clients. Equine Therapy involves activities (such as grooming, feeding, haltering and leading a horse, as well as some projective and mounted experiences) that are designed by a mental health professional and a horse professional to address clients presenting and underlying problems. Both during the activity and

after the client has finished working with the horse, the Equine Therapist can observe and interact with the client in order to identify behaviour patterns and process thoughts and emotions. The goal of Equine Therapy is to help the client develop needed skills and attributes, such as emotion regulation, confidence, relationship skills, responsibility, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and self-control. Equine therapy also provides space in which the mental health therapist and the client can identify and address a range of emotional and behavioural challenges through the observations of the equine specialist and the interactions between the horse/s and the client/s.

BENEFITS OF EQUINE THERAPY

Studies have indicated that equine therapy has been successful in helping patients show marked improvements in the following areas: Assertiveness, Emotional awareness, Empathy, Distress tolerance, Flexibility, Impulse control, Problem-solving skills, Self-actualization, Independence, Self-regard, Social responsibility, and Interpersonal relationships.



HORSES who HEAL

Many of the benefits of Equine Therapy are likely due to the nature of the animals with which the client, mental health practitioner, and Equine Therapist are interacting. Horses are typically non-judgmental, have no preconceived expectations or motives, and are highly effective at mirroring attitudes and behaviours of the humans with whom they are working.

While working with horses under the guidance and supervision of an equine therapist and a mental health practitioner, equine therapy clients have a unique and effective opportunity to note their tendency to engage in self-defeating and otherwise negative thoughts and actions. These realizations provide excellent bases for discussion and processing both during and after the equine therapy experience

OUR SERVICES **HORSERIDING**

South Coast Psychology's Equine specialist and equine manager, Jim Gillespie, has been training horses, riding and coaching others to ride for over 40 years. He is able to provide basic horse care, horse relationship and horse riding lessons for adults and children. Mini ponies Leo and Sweet Pea and horses Hannah, Panda, Willow, and Tilly are safe riding horses for these experiences.

EQUINE EXPERIENCE

Equine experiences can be relaxing and enjoyable with or without specialist therapeutic input. South Coast Psychology equine specialists, Jim Gillespie offers Equine experiences with our herd of 10 horses Hannah, Smokey, Tilly, Panda, Willow, Possum, Palle, Latte, Leo and Sweet Pea. Other therapists also bring clients to equine therapy to support the work they are doing in their room based practices.

EQUINE PSYCHOTHERAPY

South Coast Psychology has registered

mental health practitioners trained in equine psychotherapy. Psychologist, Diane Gillespie, and Intern Psychologist, Cassandra Rolston, are trained in Equine Psychotherapy utilising the Gestalt psychotherapy model and methods of the Equine Psychotherapy Institute. They use this model in working with a number of mild to severe mental health diagnoses.

EQUINE ASSISTED LEADERSHIP

South Coast Psychology has numerous equine and animal assisted therapy providers who use horses and other animals in their work with people either as counsellors, therapists, personal development coaches or mentors. We use the equine psychotherapy and EAGALA equine therapy models in working with people and blend these with trauma informed and kaupapa Maori practices models and traditions to provide a unique healing and learning experience.

EQUINE THERAPY GROUPS

Group therapy provides insight, awareness and development of groups. These could be family whanau groups or any other kinds of interpersonal grouping. Our therapy providers work with you to establish the best possible experiences for your specific groups and the outcomes you are looking for.

CORPORATE TEAM BUILDING

Working with horses, through observations, interactions, activities, and tasks and then processing this with our psychologists help teams come to mindful awareness which allows cohesive team building. We will work with you to meet the needs of your team.

EQUINE ASSISTED CLINICAL & TEAM SUPERVISION

Our trained clinical and team supervisor, Psychologist Diane Gillespie, uses horses to provide an equine assisted clinical and team supervision space.



PART FOUR
**MEET OUR
HORSES**





HANNAH

Clydesdale Cross

Hannah is the matriarch of the herd, and has the respect of all the members.

She is super grounded and will stomp a foot to get the younger herd members to see that she means "stop it".

She loves attention, and is very direct with what she wants.

She has a beautiful, calm, and gentle nature, and loves her rump and chest scratched, and she will sometimes give you a hug.



CASTLE

Suffolk Punch Clydesdale Cross

Castle, while a gentle giant with people, likes to play boss with the other horses (second of course to Hannah).

Castle enjoys his ridden work and picks new things up easily.

Castle is always one of the first to meet you in the paddock and is always where the food is. He is a Suffolk punch Clydesdale cross and very big. His breed is built to pull ploughs and carts.





LATTE

Arabian

While still relatively young, Latte is social and sensitive who is very clear with what he does and doesn't like.

Having a more sensitive temperament, he can swing easily from being playful and flighty, to very quiet and gentle. He is very in tune with others around him, both human and equine.

Latte is still learning to be ridden, and is quietly building his confidence.



LEO

Miniature - Appaloosa Cross

Leo is a big personality in a little body.

He is always hunting out food and treats, often using his small size to sneak in where the bigger horses can't get.

He loves playing with the toys in the arena, and is very inquisitive and social with all around him.

He also enjoys some one-on-one pampering.





PALLE

Clydesdale Cross Filly

Palle is still very young and inquisitive, making her very social with both horses and people.

She is generally quiet and accepting; however, can still have 'baby moments' where she finds her tasks a little difficult or scary.

Possum is Palle's mum. Sometimes she likes the security of mum, but also likes to play with Leo and Latte.



PANDA

Thoroughbred

Panda is an elegant lady, who very much minds her own business. If you are greeted in the paddock by Panda you are truly fortunate.

Panda is in tune with the herd, the quiet observer, happy in her own company, as part of the herd, but not frightened to hold her ground when she needs to.

When Panda is well she loves playing with Leo and Latte.



POSSUM

Bay Welsh Mountain Arabian Cross Pony Mare

Possum is generally quite social with the other horses, but a little more reserved with people and will wait to be approached.

She is lovely and quiet, easy to groom and handle with a friendly nature. She has been mistreated in the past and gets triggered into anxiety responses quickly. If you are calm and reassuring, she will appreciate the support.



SWEET PEA

Miniature

Sweet pea typically likes to spend her time alone on the outskirts of the herd.

She is quiet, sweet and gentle.

While she spends most of her time quietly grazing, she loves her belly being scratched. She is a rescue pony who has foundered, and needs to have medicine each day to keep her well.



TILLY

Paint Horse

Tilly is an all-round quiet and gentle horse, both to handle and ride.

She is usually quite content to graze on her own or snooze with the herd.



SMOKEY

American Quarterhorse

Smokey is an American Quarterhorse. She seems to be snappy most of the time on the ground, prefers just being on her own with one other horse and is a one man horse - Jim's horse.

She is very well trained and loves being ridden, and loves treks and mustering cattle. She reminds Britta, our horse therapist, of a 'helicopter mum', micro managing the herd when she is in the herd.





TOBY

Standard Bred

Toby is our latest addition to the herd. He is a standard bred, and more used to being in a sulky, than being ridden. He is 6 years old and retired from racing now, having done well on the track. He is now a lovely riding horse, just recently broken to saddle. He is inquisitive and loves human contact, but is certainly bossy towards the other horses.

WHAKATOKI



In Te Ao Maori, central to well-being is the concept of Mauri (life force) as every living being has a Mauri.

In working in the equine therapy space the horse and the human will develop a spiritual connection based on the Mauri of both.

Te Ao Maori belief is that we are fundamentally connected to every living being.

***'Ko au te Whenua
Ko te Whenua ko au'
'I am the land,
and the land is me'***

We would like to thank and acknowledge **Sonia Pera**, Cultural Advisor South Coast Psychology for this beautiful Whakatokei.



South Coast
Psychology
**Equine
Therapy**

95 Turner Street, Edendale
Southland, New Zealand
Email: vicki@scp-equinetherapy.co.nz
Web: www.scp-equinetherapy.co.nz



Horses who HEAL

Equine Therapy (also referred to as Hippotherapy, Horse Therapy, Equine-Assisted Therapy, Equine-Assisted Leadership and Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy) is a form of experiential therapy that involves interactions between a therapy provider, a horse specialist, a client/clients, and horses. It can be delivered individually or in groups. Sometimes the therapy provider and equine specialist are the same person – depending on the training, model and experience of the Equine Therapist. South Coast Psychology Equine Assisted Therapists are trained in Equine-assisted Psychotherapy and are experienced horse specialists.