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Samantha Shalen Pugh  
Healing Each other: A  
Qualitative Study of  
Therapist Perspectives at an  
Equine-Assisted  
Psychotherapy Program in  
Boulder, Colorado

## ABSTRACT

This project utilized qualitative interviews to examine therapist perspectives at an Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) program in Boulder, Colorado. The program, called the HopeFoal Project, pairs rescue foals with high-risk teen girls; a reciprocal healing model is employed in which teen and foal are engaged in a parallel process of trust-building and healing from traumatic early experiences. The program is unique in its use of unpredictable or difficult horses in treatment, as well as in its use of a reciprocal healing model. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with three program therapists to gain a better understanding of the program. Findings revealed the importance of using an attachment theory model to understand the foals' and the teens' early experiences and their subsequent ways of relating in the world. Additional findings supported current EAP research regarding the horse's role as a nonjudgmental other, the horse as mirror to provide reflection on the client's life, the immediacy of feedback and present-moment qualities of the farm environment, and the capacity for empathy building in clients participating in equine therapy. Lastly, this study revealed clear differences in treatment approaches between EAP with difficult horses and more traditional EAP programs that use well-trained school horses.

HEALING EACH OTHER:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THERAPIST PERSPECTIVES AT AN  
EQUINE-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY PROGRAM IN BOULDER, COLORADO

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2010

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

I'd rather have a goddamn horse. A horse is at least *human*, for God's sake.  
J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

This research study is a qualitative project utilizing interviews to examine therapist perspectives of an equine therapy program that employs a reciprocal healing model. The study focuses specifically on an Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) program in Boulder, Colorado called HopeFoil Project. This program, under the larger EAP nonprofit organization Medicine Horse Program, pairs malnourished rescue foals with teenage girls from the community who have been identified as “high-risk” by outside professionals. A reciprocal healing model is utilized; both teen and foal work together to mend one another.

Foals are rescued from farms in the northern United States and all have at least one thing in common: they are the byproduct of the pharmaceutical industry’s attempt to secure PreMarIn (Pregnant Mare Urine), a hormone-replacement drug useful in treating menopausal women. The foals, born to mares who are kept pregnant year-round, often face slaughter (across the border in Canada) unless rescued by programs around the country such as Medicine Horse. Unwanted, maltreated, and distrustful of humans, the foals have much in common with their teenage counterparts.

The intent of this project was to use therapist interviews to explore the parallel process that teens and foals experience in the HopeFoil Project. Utilizing previously researched EAP outcomes as a basis for study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former HopeFoil therapists to learn more about the qualitative aspects of such a program. The HopeFoil Project is unique in its reciprocal healing model; most EAP programs rely on well-trained, predictable horses to act as co-therapists in the treatment, while HopeFoil uses unpredictable foals to facilitate change and growth in clients (Vidrine, Owen-Smith & Faulkner, 2002). This concept is largely unexplored in the literature and warrants further study. Additionally, despite preliminary findings that indicate positive outcomes for clients who participate in equine-assisted therapy, the dearth of research makes this field relatively uncharted but still a largely provocative area of study for social workers and other helping professionals looking for alternative therapies for their clients (Vidrine, et al., 2002; Schultz, Remick-Barlow & Robbins, 2007; Ewing, et al., 2007).

The HopeFoil Project, founded in 2003, has gained national attention for its unique approach. In 2008, ABC World News filmed a segment at Medicine Horse, interviewing several teenage girls who were participating in the HopeFoil program. Without intending to, those girls inadvertently identified several qualitative benefits to EAP that published research has uncovered, including the concept of the horse as a nonjudgmental other and a silent witness (Vidrine, et al., 2002; Yorke, Adams & Coady, 2008; Bizub, Joy & Davidson, 2003). One teen described her experience by saying, "It's easier to talk [to the foals]. It's easier to open up about things that have happened in your life. And they don't judge you" (ABC World News, 2008).

Horses bring out a range of emotions and behaviors in people, and traditional EAP uses this natural connection as a catalyst for growth (Klontz, et al., 2007). The HopeFoil Project takes this idea a step further, adding a component of reciprocity in which emotions are elicited as the clients attempt to nurture and heal the foals. Trust and attachment – two relational qualities that both teen and foal have been lacking in their lives – are developed and, through these connections, growth happens.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the literature focusing on the therapeutic use of horses, for the purposes of providing a comprehensive background for understanding the present study. The literature review will include an overview of the use of animals and, specifically, horses, in mental health treatment; a discussion of the clinical components of equine-assisted therapies; and, finally, a presentation of pertinent research studies focusing on the use of horses in mental health treatment.

#### *History of Animal Usefulness*

Humans have used animals for thousands of years, whether it be for food, transportation, or companionship. The therapeutic use of animals, however, at least in its modern and organized form, is far more recent; the first published report identifying the therapeutic value of pet ownership appeared in 1980 (Fine, 2000). Since then, there has been much research done on the calming and healing effect of animals on humans suffering from anxiety and physical illness (Fine, 2000). Studies on animal use with the elderly, as well as with cardiology patients, found significantly decreased heart rates as a result of human-animal interactions (Furst, 2006; Turner, 2007). Positive results using animal-assisted therapy (AAT) have been found in the treatment of physical and psychological symptoms across a range of populations (Fine, 2000; Klontz, et al., 2007). The animals traditionally used in AAT, however, are dogs, whose physical presence differs greatly from that of a 1200-pound horse. Horses have unique therapeutic aspects

beyond those obtained through the use of these smaller companion animals (Yorke, et al., 2008). Because horses can be *ridden*, fostering intimate connections that are more physical in nature, this body-to-body relationship differs from those with smaller animals (Yorke, et al., 2008). Most importantly, the horse's inherent hypervigilance and sensitivity, coupled with its reflective abilities, make it an ideal therapeutic partner (Klontz, et al., 2007; Schultz, et al., 2007; Vidrine, et al., 2002).

### *Horses and Therapy*

Traditionally, horses have been used for treating physical ailments through hippotherapy, a physical, occupational or speech therapy utilizing horses (Bizub, et al., 2003; Vidrine, et al., 2002). Another equine-assisted model is called therapeutic riding, in which the riding lesson focuses on the student's special needs; it has been shown to increase self-esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness, and quality of life (Bizub, et al., 2003; Vidrine, et al., 2002). As newer and more structured mental health treatment models, equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) or equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) deviate from therapeutic riding or hippotherapy in their utilization of the horse as co-therapist (Vidrine, et al., 2002).

There are many names for therapies utilizing horses, including (but not limited to) Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT); Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP); Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL); Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP); therapeutic riding; and hippotherapy. For the purposes of clarification and narrowing the scope of this project, reviewed literature will focus on EAP, EFP, and therapeutic riding studies. Additionally, this researcher will use the terms EAP or EFP interchangeably to refer to mental health treatment using horses. EFP and EFL are the two varieties of

equine programs practiced by the Equine-Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA), which is a subprogram of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). EAP is a term coined by the Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA).

Most EAP or EFP programs utilize a treatment team approach that is made up of the licensed therapist, the horse, the client, and sometimes a horse handler whose main job is to pay attention to the horse's signals (i.e. the horse feels anxious, calm, or scared) and to convey them to the therapist and client (EAGALA, 2009). These signals, most of which are reflective of the client's behavior, serve as the basis for the therapy and allow for metaphor, transference, and clinical intervention to emerge.

The equine is a critically important, sentient partner in the four-part team consisting of the equine, a mental health professional or educator, an equine specialist and a client (NARHA, 2009).

### *Clinical Elements*

#### *Reflection and Metaphor*

The primary purpose of EAP/EFP is to utilize these reflective qualities as a therapeutic tool to bring about positive change in the clients' lives. In this manner, the horse becomes a catalyst and metaphor to bring the client's clinical issues to the surface, eliciting a range of emotions from the client (Klontz, et al., 2007). Interventions are planned based on the horse's reflective behavior (Schultz, et al., 2007). The horse, therefore, acts as a 'mirror', reflecting the client's internal and external world (Ewing, et al., 2007). When the client is able to overcome challenges in the therapy, for example a fear of haltering or standing next to the horse, the therapist utilizes these examples as metaphors for challenges faced by the client in his life. The client begins to see that he

can utilize the same strength and resiliency to overcome life challenges (Yorke, et al., 2008). In their study with clients with psychiatric illness, Bizub, et al. (2003) reported, “Skills learned and challenges met in the activity build a foundation of mastery that could be of service in other endeavors” (p. 379). The importance of metaphor is aptly illustrated on the EAGALA website:

Horses are very much like humans in that they are social animals. They have defined roles within their herds. They would rather be with their peers. They have distinct personalities, attitudes, and moods. An approach that seems to work with one horse, does not necessarily work with another. At times, they seem stubborn and defiant. They like to have fun. In other words, horses provide vast opportunities for metaphorical learning. Using metaphors, in discussion or activity, is an effective technique when working with even the most challenging individuals or groups (EAGALA, 2009).

The clients’ own lives and feelings are reflected in the horses’ lives. Vidrine, et al. (2002) provides several examples of reflection in EAP, including processing death and loss with clients by discussing the death of a horse and the loss the herd is experiencing. Children in foster care can come to terms with their multiple placements and life transitions by discussing what it is like for a horse to be sold and sent away to a different farm (Vidrine, et al., 2002). In the Bizub, et al. (2003) study with clients suffering from psychiatric illness, “individuals began to see themselves in the horse” (p. 382).

Schultz, et al. (2007) highlight the similarities between horses and humans as a primary reason for reflection and insight gained through EAP. Horses are prey animals, naturally hypervigilant and sensitive to external predators. The client can relate to the horse’s fear and flight responses, as well as their anxiety in new situations (Vidrine, et al., 2002). The client ‘gets it’ once the horse reflects a concept back to him (Schultz, et al., 2007); in terms of anxiety, the horse acts as the client’s ‘hypervigilance mirror’,

reminding the client of his/her own internal anxieties (Klontz, et al., 2007). The horse reacts to the client's behaviors and does so quickly, frequently reacting to nonverbal cues due to the horse's extreme sensitivity (Schultz, et al., 2007; Vidrine, et al., 2002).

Another important aspect of the horse's reflective capacities is the inherent authenticity and honesty that comes from interaction with an animal. The horse provides unconditional responsiveness and accessibility (Yorke, et al., 2008). Horses are nonjudgmental, accepting, and able to provide and receive unconditional love when many humans are not (Yorke, et al., 2008; Bizub, et al., 2003; Frewin & Gardiner, 2005). Vidrine, et al. (2002) describe horses as "naked and unashamed" and without ego (p. 595). Transference with the horse (rather than the clinician) is, therefore, less threatening and leads to accurate and unbiased feedback that could not be accomplished in the traditional therapy setting (Klontz, et al., 2007). The client's interpretation of the horse's behavior determines the meaning of the metaphor and, therefore, brings transference to the surface. The transference is easier to address, in this case, because the focus is the horse rather than the therapist (Klontz, et al., 2007).

Vidrine, et al. (2002) report that the increase in authenticity is also largely a result of reliance on nonverbal communication rather than solely verbal communication. The horse becomes the client's silent witness, a role that a therapist – despite his/her desire to the contrary – cannot possibly fulfill (Vidrine, et al., 2002). The client perceives judgment, opinions, or the potential for spoken interaction with the therapist; these qualities are not present in the silently witnessing horse. Additionally, the unpredictability of the farm environment, which one day might present inclement weather and the next day might focus on searching for a horse's missing shoe, leads to an in-the-

moment problem-solving that is not present in typical therapy settings (Vidrine, et al., 2002).

### *Relationships*

In EAP, the horse's role is a valuable one. Different researchers describe the horse in various terms, including *co-therapist* (EAGALA, 2009); *therapeutic co-facilitator* (Ewing, et al., 2007); *education enhancer* (Ewing, et al., 2007); *therapeutic tool* (Bizub, et al., 2003; Schultz, et al., 2007); *catalyst and metaphor* (Klontz, et al., 2007); *vehicle towards therapeutic change* (Ewing, et al., 2007); *healer* (Bizub, et al., 2003); *beacon of hope* (Bizub, et al., 2003). Whatever the label, EAP horses are typically specially selected and trained (Vidrine, et al., 2002), and are usually calm horses who are somewhat easy to approach (Klontz, et al., 2007).

There is a lack of research exploring the use of horses for EAP who do not fit this description, although Yorke, et al. (2008), who looked at traumatized people whose relationships with their horses helped in their recovery, did include horses who were unpredictable and difficult, rather than calm. For the purposes of this study, which focuses on untrained and difficult horses, further research in this area would be extremely valuable. The foals at Medicine Horse, who are rescued from slaughter and face an uphill battle against histories of malnutrition, abuse, and other maltreatments, have much in common with their teenage counterparts, particularly in their distrust of adults. This unique model, based on a reciprocal healing approach, warrants further study as it differs greatly from typical EAP programs that use fully trained and calm horses (Klontz, et al., 2007; Vidrine, et al., 2002).

The therapist's role in EAP is also vital. Vidrine, et al. (2002) and Ewing, et al. (2007) agree that the therapist acts as a role model, setting limits and acting as the horse's advocate. In this manner, the therapist-horse relationship and the therapist's concern for the horse's safety can lead to increased empathy in clients (Vidrine, et al., 2002). The client sees the therapist through the horse's eyes, as caretaker or nurturer, and this view may allow the therapist to appear less threatening to the client (Vidrine, et al., 2002).

There are other noteworthy relationship parallels uncovered through the EAP process; specifically, several writers have noted similarities between the client-therapist relationship and the human-horse relationship. Yorke, et al. (2008) points to similarities in regards to the nature of each relationship and their healing qualities and impact. The therapeutic alliance includes attachment, engagement, task, mutuality and emotional connection; these qualities extend to human-animal bond (HAB) research and are present in the horse-human relationship as well (Yorke, et al., 2008). Ewing, et al. (2007) reminds us of the importance of building rapport in any therapeutic relationship; equine therapy is no exception. Schultz, et al. (2007) views the horse as the holding environment for the client, and highlights the importance of relationship-based treatment for kids, in particular, to build trust, confidence, and communication. More than anything, good therapy is a good helping relationship; in its focus on relationships between client, horse, and therapist, EAP is the ultimate relationship-based treatment (Yorke, et al., 2008). The present study, which investigates the relationship between client and horse and the impact of this relationship on the client's life, is a much-needed addition to the current body of research.

Despite the parallels between the typical therapeutic alliance and the horse-human bond, there are, indeed, substantial differences between typical psychotherapy and equine-assisted therapy. First and foremost, the physical environment has an enormous impact on the treatment. In therapies that involve horses, the client must come *to* the horse, becoming present in the horse's own environment. The farm setting is unique and non-threatening (Schultz, et al., 2007). The importance of experiencing the treatment in the horse's natural environment, rather than in a therapy office, is profound (Ewing, et al., 2007).

Several writers agree that the uniqueness of this experience, which is both physical and social in nature, contributes greatly to the positive outcomes of equine treatment (Bizub, et al., 2003; Ewing, et al., 2007; Fine, 2000; Trotter, et al., 2008). Equine-assisted therapy can be particularly useful for clients (especially children or adolescents) who are not cooperating with traditional forms of therapy (Ewing, et al., 2007). As Bizub, et al. (2003) discovered, this modality is also useful for clients who may not have the internal capacities required to engaged in more traditional, insight-oriented talk therapy. Adolescents may view adults with mistrust or apprehension, and the farm setting provides an opportunity to engage with clients on a different level than in a typical therapy office (Ewing, et al., 2007). Additionally, the uniqueness of interaction with an animal cannot be ignored. Ewing, et al. (2007) quotes Nebbe (2003), who explains, "Children see animals as peers, so teaching them to be empathetic with an animal is easier than with a human."

### *Physicality*



The challenge of controlling a thousand pound snorting creature ... both concentrates the mind and, when successfully met, strokes the dampened fires of pride...(Melson, 2001; p. 115)

One of the most obvious aspects of the horse, which certainly lends itself to clinical intervention and impact, is the physical largesse of the animal. Vidrine, et al. (2002) highlight the intimacy that can develop between rider and horse, despite the size of the animal. Schultz, et al. (2007) describe the horses as large and powerful, demanding respect and instilling fear in humans. Ewing, et al. (2007) agree, pointing to the physical stature of the horse as something the clients must control but also something that commands respect. Trotter, et al. (2008) sum up the abused client's process of regaining control over his or her life: "For abuse victims, having a 1400-pound horse respond to your command in a nonthreatening manner provides the ultimate sense of validation of power and control" (p. 255). Yorke, et al. (2008) view the horse's size as just one more challenge that the client can overcome, utilizing his/her own strength and resiliency.

Several researchers recognize the importance of physical contact in equine therapy. Vidrine, et al. (2002) describe this aspect as a "body-to-body experience of shared energy, impulsion, rhythm, and balance", in which the horse interacts with the client in a physical manner in which the therapist cannot participate (p. 588). Yorke, et al. (2008) describe the deep connections that develop through the physical contact of the riding experience. Bizub, et al. (2003), in their study on clients with psychiatric diagnoses participating in a therapeutic riding program, found the intimacy of this physical contact to be a notable qualitative aspect of the experience. The physical

relationship between horse and rider – a reciprocal one in which the rider groomed, tacked up, and led the horse around while the horse, in turn, carried the rider through the lessons – had a profound impact on clients’ ability to build empathy, respect, and connection to their horse (Bizub, et al., 2003).

The importance of touch and physical affection is not a new concept to the field of mental health (Yorke, et al., 2008). Professionals in the field have even developed therapeutic models that include touch as a healing agent and integral part of the therapy (Jernberg & Booth, 1999). What is notable for equine therapy, however, is the notion that physical affection can feel so much safer, for some clients, with horses rather than with people (Vidrine, et al., 2002). Traumatized clients, in particular, can utilize their therapy horse as an opportunity for a safe touch experience (Yorke, et al., 2008). Therapists who cannot be physically affectionate with their clients due to the ethical concerns are still able to provide physical affection through their horse partners instead (Yorke, et al., 2008).

It is not simply the physical contact between horse and client that is profound. Vidrine, et al. (2002) points to the horse’s size as inherently metaphorical, quoting her personal correspondence with Aaron Katcher, who wrote, “The ratio between body weight of a horse and a person is not unlike the ratio between body weight of a mother and infant” (p. 591). The parallels between mother and infant and horse and human do not end here. In fact, the same biofeedback mechanism that is found in mother-infant relationships could also be applied to horse-human dyads. Vidrine, et al. (2002) describes the impact of a tense or calm client on the notoriously sensitive horse, who picks up on the client’s stress and anxiety. Yorke, et al. (2008) refers to this dance

between horse and client as a physical sign language, creating a mutual understanding between horse and rider. It also presents another example of horses' incredible reflective qualities, which allow clients to better understand themselves (and, in this case, their own anxiety) through the horse's experience of them. The present study, which focuses specifically on ultra-sensitive and frightened horses, will provide even more insight into the usefulness of these reflective capabilities in clinical treatment.

### *Research*

Unfortunately, only a few empirical studies have looked at equine therapy programs in detail. The current research is limited in its scope, and mostly lacks external validity. Those who have researched EAP programs agree that the lack of sufficient research is a huge barrier to future programming and funding. Many researchers call for further research, in particular empirically based studies that are well designed and controlled (Bizub, et al., 2003; Ewing, et al., 2007; Klontz, et al., 2007; Schultz, et al., 2007; Vidrine, et al., 2002). Most agree that, despite the lack of solid research, the field of anecdotal evidence suggests promise and the use of horses for therapeutic intervention is certainly a credible research area (Ewing, et al., 2007; Yorke, et al., 2008).

Several studies have reported positive outcomes for clients who participate in equine-assisted therapy. The dearth of research, however, makes this field relatively unexplored but still a largely provocative area of study for social workers and other helping professionals looking for alternative therapies for their clients. Despite the lack of research, we do know that horses can have significant effects on humans when utilized in a therapeutic capacity. Equine-assisted programs have been proven effective with a multitude of populations, including clients struggling with substance abuse, trauma,

emotional disorders, and family violence (Ewing, et al., 2007; Klontz, et al., 2007; Schultz, et al., 2007; Yorke, et al., 2008). In addition, EAP has been proven to lead to reductions in psychological distress and an increase in psychological well-being (Klontz, et al., 2007).

In a qualitative study at Horse Time, Owen-Smith (2000), as cited by Vidrine, et al. (2002), found qualitative differences in participants' human-animal interactions, as compared to their interactions with other humans. Prominent themes discussed by participants included taking risks and trusting the horse when participants originally felt fearful; the horse as a provider of approval, acceptance and affection; being valued by a nonjudgmental other; and the horse as a fantasy creature that could help the client "lift up and move forward". Additionally, Owen-Smith (2000) found that, for kids who have been violated by adults in their lives, it was easier and safer to relate to horses than it was to relate to adults. Unfortunately, Owen-Smith's research is not available to this researcher, and Vidrine, et al. (2002) fail to mention methodology and design details for this particular study.

Klontz, et al. (2007) utilized a pre-post-post design for their quantitative analysis of 31 adult participants in an equine-assisted experiential therapy program. After attending eight consecutive groups in an eight-month period, participants reported an overall decrease in intensity of psychological distress, an increase in psychological well-being, feeling more oriented to the present, less burdened, less fearful, and an increased sense of independence (Klontz, et al., 2007). This study's primary limitation is based on the self-selection of participants; those who declined to participate were not interviewed, and the study relies entirely on the clients' self-report.

Schultz, et al. (2007) conducted a pilot study over an 18-month period, testing EAP efficacy in a cross-sectional group of 63 children with various behavioral and mental health problems. The study utilized a pre-post test design to compare GAF scores before and after program participation. One hundred percent of the participants showed an improvement in GAF scores; there was a statistical significance between the percentage of increase in scores and number of EAP sessions attended. Researchers noted an especially significant change in younger children, who more quickly responded to EAP (Schultz, et al., 2007). It is unclear why this is the case, although one could surmise that the benefits of early intervention, combined with the novelty of the farm experience being particularly potent for young children, may have an effect. The researchers note that children at different developmental stages do exhibit varying reactions to stress as well as to treatment, calling for early intervention (Schultz, et al., 2007). Long-term effects are still unknown, and it is not clear whether gender, age or environment had any effect on the results of the study. Additionally, the sample was biased due to self-selection; some participants dropped out of the study, so their data was not captured. The researchers do admit to the unlikelihood that all children would benefit from EAP, and acknowledge that using GAF scores as the sole outcome measure could restrict our understanding of EAP and its benefits. For example, since GAF scores are subjective based on clinician report, it is possible that the one hundred percent increase in GAF scores was due to clinician bias in reporting.

Yorke, et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative exploratory study using six participants whose pre-existing relationships with horses had helped in their recovery from trauma. The type of trauma varied, but all were of a physical nature, such as car

accidents, horse-related accidents, or abuse. Participants were interviewed individually and observed with their horses in a natural environment, in order for researchers to fully understand the participants' experiences. Findings suggested parallels between horse-human and client-therapist relationships in the nature of the bonds as well as in the healing qualities of these relationships. In particular, Yorke, et al. (2008) noted the importance of physical affection, honesty, innocence, nonjudgmental nature, acceptance, nurturing, and mastery that participants gained from interaction with their horses. This study was certainly limited by its small sample size, as well as by the self-selection of participants. Only participants who had acknowledged the positive impact of their horses on their trauma recovery were eligible to participate in this study, limiting the results substantially.

In their mixed methods study, Ewing, et al. (2007) looked at 28 children identified as "at-risk" due to behavioral problems. The children participated in a nine week equine-facilitated learning (EFL) program, and completed questionnaires in a pre-post format to measure self-esteem, empathy, locus of control, depression and loneliness. This quantitative analysis found no statistically significant positive changes in any of these areas. In their qualitative analysis, however, the researchers used four case studies (out of the total 28 cases) to illustrate the positive effects of the program. Emerging themes included viewing the horse as a mirror, reflecting the client's life; an increase in confidence and self-modulation of behavior; the therapist as role model for positive behavior; and building trust (in the instructor as well as the horse) (Ewing, et al., 2007). Despite previous studies that found an increase in self-esteem post-intervention, an

increase in interpersonal empathy, and a decrease in depression, this quantitative study did not find any statistically significant changes.

Bizub, et al. (2003) conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with five participants of a ten-week therapeutic riding program. The participants, each of whom had a psychiatric disability, reported an increased sense of group cohesion; an overcoming of challenges and of fear; a positive horse/rider relationship; the importance of physical contact; and views of the horse as nonjudgmental and providing unconditional love (Bizub, et al., 2003).

Only one study was found discussing the use of anything other than fully trained horses as “co-therapists”. Yorke, et al. (2008), in their qualitative exploratory study of six people recovering from trauma, found that each person had had their recovery positively impacted by their horses, several of whom were “difficult” and “unpredictable”. All other research has characterized the typical therapeutic horse as calm and easy-to-approach (Klontz, et al., 2007; Vidrine, et al., 2002). The present study fills a void in the research by looking at the utility of EAP with untrained and difficult horses.

### *Summary*

The existence and efficacy of this type of programming is certainly relevant to the field of social work, particularly for use with populations who might benefit from an alternative therapy taking place outside of the typical clinical environment (Ewing, et al., 2007). The present study seeks to shed more light on a unique therapeutic experience that has been largely left out of the literature. Despite a relatively small amount of research (as compared to other, more widely explored therapeutic modalities), equine

therapy is showing largely positive results with a range of populations. The reciprocal healing model utilized in the HopeFoal Project is a unique approach that has yet to be examined. Further research with different populations and control groups is needed to truly understand this powerful model. The field of professional social work, one committed to progressive and innovative approaches to helping people, cannot overlook the potential contributions of this type of therapy.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Formulation*

The original intent of this study was to utilize interviews with former HopeFoal clients in order to retrospectively examine and understand the impact of program participation. The researcher planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with former HopeFoal participants, all of whom would be over 18 years old. The intent of the project was two-fold: to provide a forum in which clients could look back on their experience and have their voices be heard, and to better understand the reciprocal healing aspect of the HopeFoal Project from the clients' perspectives. Because the field of mental health has historically, and too frequently, been viewed through an us-versus-them dichotomy in which practitioners make decisions about treatment without consulting consumers, it seemed important to allow clients to speak for themselves in the originally proposed study (Velpry, 2008). The power of this type of research – that allows people to describe their own experiences in their own words – cannot be ignored, as Deborah Padgett (2008) describes:

You wish to capture the “lived experience” from the perspectives of those who live it and create meaning from it. When researchers seek *verstehen* (deep understanding), they pursue studies that are *emic* (i.e., focused on the insider point of view, rather than *etic* [the outsider's perspective]). (p.16)

The HopeFoal Project primarily targets teenaged girls, many of whom are disenfranchised due to race, socio-economic status, family environment, and trauma;

their perspective is critical to understanding how the program helps to promote growth and healing. In addition to the need for an insider's perspective on HopeFoil Project, the lack of research about the field of equine therapy – and about reciprocal healing programs such as HopeFoil – dictates a profound need for further study. As Padgett (2008) explains, “Such topics need not be left pristinely untouched. What is important is that too little is known about them and an in-depth understanding is sought” (p. 15).

The researcher obtained Human Subjects Review approval for this project, and moved into the recruitment stage. With help from Medicine Horse Program staff, who gathered all known contact information for people who met study criteria (i.e., over 18 years old, English-speaking, former program participants), the researcher sent out a mass mailing to 35 addresses, including an introductory letter, recruitment flyer, and informed consent letter. To provide incentive and to compensate participants for their time and energy, the researcher offered a small honorarium in the form of a Starbucks gift card. In addition to sending the mailing, recruitment flyers were posted around the barn and the researcher planned to utilize the Medicine Horse website as an additional recruitment venue.

Unfortunately, recruitment efforts did not result in a single participant contacting the researcher. Approximately half of the envelopes were returned to sender due to incorrect mailing addresses. The transient nature of this particular population, combined with their having aged out of the program and, therefore, not remaining in contact with program staff, meant that efforts to contact former clients were futile. The recruitment flyers also yielded no response, probably largely due to the fact that current program participants were the only people viewing the flyers (since they were located in the barn)

but they were too young to participate. Former clients rarely spend time around the barn and, therefore, did not see the flyers. The researcher had hoped that potential participants who might have spent time around the barn would notice the flyers and be interested in speaking about their experiences in the program.

### *Present Study Formulation*

The revised (and present) purpose of this study became the utilization of semi-structured, qualitative therapist interviews to examine the HopeFoal Project. The revised study was approved through an annotated Human Subjects Review Board process. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former HopeFoal therapists, using open-ended questions in order to better understand the uniqueness of this program through the therapists' perspectives. The therapists – despite their not having the same lived experience or perspective as the clients themselves – do have an exclusive understanding of the HopeFoal program, and can share their personal experiences of facilitating such a special type of therapy. The intent of this study was to understand two specific and unique aspects of the HopeFoal Project: first, the reciprocal healing model that allows client and foal to heal during a parallel process, and second, the use of difficult or unpredictable horses in EAP. These two aspects are inherently interconnected, as the reciprocal healing model is possible precisely *because* the unpredictable, fearful, and distrusting foals are so similar in nature to the struggling teens that attempt to mend them.

Using flexible, qualitative methods, the researcher hoped to generate rich descriptive data about this program's unique model. This study's exploratory design was a particularly appropriate fit because such little research has been conducted in the area of

equine therapy. In fact, no research was found looking specifically at programs utilizing a reciprocal healing model or unpredictable horses. As Yorke, et al. (2008) explain, exploratory studies such as this one give us the opportunity to delve deeply into a narrow topic by interviewing the most salient participants possible.

In exploratory studies, the quality of the study is not determined by the size or randomness of the sample, as the research goal is not to generalize but rather to go into depth with a small number of people. Thus qualitative research seeks to compose a group of people who have something in common, and to include individuals who are 'information-rich'. (Yorke, et al., 2008, p. 19)

#### *Ethics and Safeguards*

Participants are current or former therapists and, therefore, risks of participation were unlikely. There was a possibility, however, that participants could feel distressing or uncomfortable emotions while discussing their clinical work. Participants were warned of this possibility during the informed consent procedures. The informed consent letter was emailed to all potential participants, and participants were given another copy of the letter at the time of their interview. Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent letter again verbally and allowed for further questions from the participants. Both participant and researcher signed the letter prior to interviews being completed, and the participant was given her own copy to retain for future reference.

Participants understood that all identifying information would be kept confidential, but that complete anonymity would be impossible since the interviews took place in person. In the final report and future presentations, data is presented as a whole, and any direct quotes from the interviews are disguised. The research advisor for this project had access to the data, once all identifying information was removed. Medicine

Horse will see the study's findings once the data is disguised, and special care was taken to ensure that participants were fully disguised from recognition by staff, particularly due to their status as current or former staff members. In keeping with federal regulations, data is in a secure location for three years, and will be destroyed after it is no longer needed.

Participation was completely voluntary and participants were aware that they could refuse to answer any question. Additionally, participants were notified that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time prior to a specified date by informing the researcher of their desire to do so. They were notified that, if they chose to withdraw, all materials connected to them would be destroyed. No participant chose to withdraw from the final report.

### *Sample*

Participants were required to have facilitated the HopeFoil Project at Medicine Horse Program. Due to this limiting factor, the sample was not randomly chosen and, rather, participants were intentionally recruited based on their experiences as HopeFoil Project therapists. A purposive sampling technique with snowballing elements was employed. The Medicine Horse staff gave the researcher a list of eight potential participants who met study criteria; recruitment efforts yielded five people who agreed to be interviewed for the project. Ultimately, only three interviews were completed; the other two potential participants did not respond to the researcher's repeated attempts to set up an appointment. The final sample included three participants, each of whom identified as female and Caucasian. The participants' ages were 29, 30, and 34. All three participants received graduate degrees in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology, with an

emphasis on Wilderness Therapy, from Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.

Participants' experience with EAP ranged from one year to four years.

#### *Data Collection*

Participants were interviewed in-person and interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were audio recorded. Interviews were semi-structured in nature, in order to allow participants to describe their perspectives as freely as possible. Participants answered questions relating to their experiences as therapists at Medicine Horse, and their perspective of the HopeFoal Project's unique program model. Therapists were encouraged to provide specific examples of client experiences in order to deepen the researcher's understanding of the program. Interview guides were utilized to maintain consistency across interviews (see appendix). Demographic data was collected, including age, race/ethnicity, gender, and educational background, so as to better describe the sample in the final report.

Two interviews took place at Medicine Horse Program; the third interviewee chose to meet the researcher at a coffee shop but due to space and noise concerns the interview was relocated to a small therapy room in a nearby graduate school. The participants chose whether interviews took place at Medicine Horse, in order to preserve the integrity of the study and to reduce potential bias or perceived coercion. If a participant chose to conduct the interview away from Medicine Horse, possible locations included local coffee shops or bookstores; the location needed to feel as private as possible and allow for audio-recording without putting the researcher at risk in an isolated location. The researcher drove to the most convenient location for the participant, so as to cut down on the participant's transportation time.

### *Data Analysis*

Interviews were audio-recorded and the researcher transcribed each interview in order to ensure accuracy in data collection. Transcription, coding, and pattern finding methods were used to compare responses and to provide the researcher with a better understanding of participants' perspectives. A thematic content analysis was conducted in order to identify common themes and subthemes among interviews. Once themes were identified, responses were organized based on their thematic content, making sure to capture the most salient and descriptive data. As Padgett (2008) explains,

Although the boundaries between thematic coding and content analysis are not always clear, content analysis deals with the manifest rather than the latent. If forced to choose, most qualitative researchers would opt for an interpretive method that takes full advantage of the depth of qualitative data. (Padgett, 2008, p. 142)

The flexible nature of the study, including the use of open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, allowed for the respondents to describe their perspective in full while also allowing for the researcher to pursue follow-up questions that would best capture the richness of the data.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations of this study. Medicine Horse is a small program that has only existed for seven years; in those seven years, management staff has changed at least three times, and the barn location has changed once. These changes have affected program vision; HopeFoil Project has been expanded during that time and changed its scope. Originally developed to work solely with adolescent girls, this program now includes groups for younger children and for boys. While the researcher geared interview questions to focus more specifically on the teenaged population served by HopeFoil,

therapist perspectives are certainly affected by the work they witness between foals and younger children, which is different than the relationships developing between foals and teens.

Because Medicine Horse is such a young program, it relies heavily on the use of intern therapists who do not have extensive experience using EAP. Additionally, the small size of Medicine Horse meant that the sample would be restricted to eight therapists chosen by the current program staff. These potential participants had all worked closely with program administrators, who supported this project and encouraged therapist participation. Despite the researcher's attempts to ensure confidentiality, therapists who chose to complete interviews at Medicine Horse were not able to avoid current staff's learning of their participation. The offices are small, and former therapists who arrived at the barn were immediately understood to be involved in the project.

Program administrators supplied the researcher with the list of potential participants; this list did not include HopeFoal founders or therapists who are no longer associated with the program since administrative changes occurred. Current administrators and program staff trained all program therapists that were referred to the researcher; this may account for similar responses found during data collection. Selection bias is a possibility, as therapists eager to share their stories might have had more positive or negative experiences than those who chose not to participate. In addition, therapists recommended by program staff may be more likely to speak positively about the program. It is also possible that responses were unconsciously censored if participants were aware that the administration would view the final report.



Additionally, every single therapist interviewed attended Naropa University's Transpersonal Counseling Psychology program, with a specialization in Wilderness Therapy. The founder of Medicine Horse attended this program and subsequent therapists have come from the school. They share similar educational backgrounds and a similar therapeutic philosophy. Furthermore, all therapists were Gestalt-trained therapists. This shared background adds an additional and unique slant to the Medicine Horse philosophy that differs from other mainstream EAP programs, most of which follow a growth and learning model that focuses on experiential learning as compared to Medicine Horse's emphasis on therapeutic relationship.

#### *Expected Findings*

The researcher expected that interviews with former HopeFoal therapists would reveal strong relationships between horse and rider and that clients would have had positive outcomes as a result of their program participation. The researcher assumed that these outcomes would mirror prior research studies that have shown increases in self-esteem, sense of responsibility, and empathy, and decreases in depression, anxiety, or behavioral problems. In addition, the researcher has a personal background of horseback riding and a strong connection to horses; she expected that this study's findings would support her perspective on the powerful relationship between horse and rider, and the capacity for this relationship to facilitate change in people's lives.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This qualitative study revealed important results about the HopeFoil Project and the growth and healing aspects of this program. Specifically, all respondents indicated the importance of using an attachment theory model to understand the parallel process experienced by teen and foal. Understanding the foals' early experiences and attachment styles – which could be viewed as insecure, much like their teenage partners – can help us to better understand the relationship that develops between foal and client. Additionally, much of the data supported current research findings about EAP, including the view of the horse as a nonjudgmental and less intimidating other; the importance of being in the moment and the immediacy of the horse-human interaction; the horse as mirror, offering reflection and projection of the clients' issues; and the increase in empathy and trust-building that develops through the client's connection with the horse. Lastly, this research points to clear differences between the use of a well-trained EAP horse as compared to the use of unpredictable rescue animals in treatment. These differences affect the interventions utilized by the therapist as well as the results obtained.

#### *Attachment*

Every single respondent discussed attachment theory when describing the uniqueness of the program and the parallel process between foal and teen. One participant explained, "Because our foals have similar attachment trauma to a lot of our clients that work in the HopeFoil Project, and because they're in the process of learning

how to trust as well, [HopeFoal Project] *does* feel different to me [than our other EAP programs].” The therapists agreed that the foals’ prenatal and postpartum experiences are typically rife with trauma and stress. Respondents described early experiences in the womb – of mares being locked in box stalls while the foals are in utero, with movement restricted (in order to catch the catheterized mare’s urine) and mares kept dehydrated (so as to make the urine more concentrated) – as an eerie foreshadowing of what was to come. Once born, the foal is taken away from the mare immediately so that the mare can be re-impregnated in order to produce more hormone. Meanwhile, the foal is weaned improperly and denied physical contact with its mother as well as necessary nutrients from its mother’s milk. One respondent described the experience by stating, “These foals were literally ripped away from their mother; they have *no* attachment to their mother.”

Another therapist described the foal’s subsequent experience thusly:

They don’t have really any interaction with people... Generally, the experience [of coming to Medicine Horse] is pretty traumatic: they herd them into the trailer, shove them in there, shove them against the wall, get them their shots in the trailer and then haul them off. They get here, and they often have worms, lice. They’re not very healthy – they often have joint issues, they haven’t been weaned. So, the weaning process is fast and pretty harsh, and there’s not a ton we can do about that because we don’t have their moms... They don’t want to have anything to do with you. They don’t want to eat. They’re scared, they’re angry, they’re anxious.

Before the foals and the teens arrive at Medicine Horse, they are living parallel lives. One therapist describes the teens’ journey by saying, “We see a lot of teens who have been in foster care or who have been adopted. [We see] a lot of teens with trauma histories and abuse histories. So, lots of boundary violations, a lot of issues with trust and, occasionally, reactive attachment. So, it really parallels the foals’ experiences as

well.” HopeFoal strives to continue the parallel journey by uniting teens and foals so that they can heal each other.

One therapist described these commonalities further, explaining that, as babies, foals have basic needs that must be met that are similar to human babies’ basic needs. This respondent viewed the most essential needs as food, touch and movement, and also pointed out the importance of reciprocity and attunement between baby and mother – two of the fundamental principles of attachment theory – whether the creatures are horse or human. In the case of these rescue foals, and of many at-risk teenagers winding up at Medicine Horse, these needs were somehow unmet during the early years of development.

When we are babies, we have three primary needs, those needs being food, touch and movement. And so, if those needs aren’t met, that’s where insecure attachments are formed. You know, baby cries and mom or caregiver doesn’t respond and so that forms an insecure attachment. As we get older, those attachment ways of relating in the world get brought into our adult relationships, or into our teen relationships... In the HopeFoal Project those girls come in with so many different issues that stem from not having that secure attachment as a child... There are these pieces where you can see where the relationships have been harmed or wounded as a child and how that’s affecting them currently. And so, with the horses what’s really amazing is they’ve had something really similar. So [the foals] have what I think of as an insecure attachment when they come here.

In terms of the foal’s early experiences, these basic needs are relatively unfulfilled. The respondent explains the foals’ traumatic life events by stating:

Go back to the food, touch and movement. Their mothers stand in those stalls while they’re catheterized and having the urine removed and so they don’t have the normal movement of a pregnant mare out in the pasture. And so the development of the fetus internally is affected... [Once born,] they’re taken away from their moms almost immediately. They’re not learning correct boundaries, they’re not being groomed and licked and touched in the way that babies are. And then they’re not fed that really nutrient-rich milk. So they don’t get those primary things, and so then the babies as a result, they come here and they’re

scared out of their minds... They come here and the difference between a normal, bonded baby and these Premarin babies is that they do not know how to connect. They do not know how to have relationships – *healthy* relationships.

The idea of the rescued foal as an insecurely attached baby is an appealing and provocative one. As mental health practitioners, we have a firm understanding of the impact of early childhood experiences on an adult human's life. The effects of animal abuse and trauma is well known, and it is easy to comprehend that foals whose lives begin in this way will be profoundly affected later in life. They certainly need comfort, nurturing, and security from humans in order to form solid relationships and become gentle animals. These ideas are not foreign and, yet, the approach of pairing these malnourished animals with similarly injured, unpredictable, and fearful teenagers certainly seems, at first glance, farfetched.

However, all three of the respondents reported that this matching could not be more perfect. A common theme identified by all of the respondents is the importance of the teen to be at a developmental level in which she can understand that the foal is suffering, too. All of the respondents noted that the client's capacity to *understand* that the parallel process is taking place has a large impact on the therapy. This concept explains why younger children – who, as one therapist explained, “are in this developmental stage where ‘I am the universe’” – are not as capable as the older girls are of recognizing the experience of the foal. This therapist reports, “There's definitely a developmental piece about the capacity to see that not only am I starting to build trust, but [the foal] is starting to build trust with me.” Another respondent echoed this sentiment, reporting that the teen girls benefit from seeing another being struggle. She explained, “Taking an adolescent outside of that developmental, ‘Everything in the world

is horrible and it's all happening to me' is really powerful.” The same respondent went on to describe outcomes that were reported to her by several teenagers with whom she had worked:

They specifically said that they realized that it's not all about them – that they're not the only ones in the world who are suffering. So, it's that basic. And also to be able to concentrate on somebody else's suffering for a minute, rather than being so consumed with their own.

These respondents were not alone in describing the importance of this reciprocal trust building and empathy. The entire HopeFoil Project, in fact, is presented through this lens from the moment of a client's intake appointment. Clients understand, from the beginning, that the program relies on a reciprocal model. One respondent explained, “We like to set it up that it is a parallel process – that you are taking care of this baby, but this baby is also taking care of you. It's not just about you coming in here and loving on this baby.” Despite these warnings, however, the program does pull heavily on the nurturing and care-taking abilities of teen girls. All respondents acknowledged a strong desire in the girls to protect and nurture the foals. One therapist explained, “When you learn about the [rescued foals'] stories, there is this immediate desire to take care; there is this immediate attraction to nurture, to form that attachment, and to help them feel OK.” In this way, the client takes on the role of attachment figure for the foal, attempting to compensate for the lack of early relational experiences that has left the foal distrusting and isolated. In return, the innate aspects of the horse – its sensitivity, its ability to reflect emotion, its relational characteristics, and its status as a prey animal – combine to provide the client with a therapeutic opportunity for growth.

#### *Consistency with Current Research*

Data collected through this project mirrored current research findings about equine therapy and the specific qualities of the horse that clients find beneficial and life changing. In particular, the respondents all discussed: the presence of the horse as a nonjudgmental and accepting partner; the immediacy of feedback due to the sensitivity of the horse as a prey and herd animal; and the reflection and mirroring qualities of the horse that shed light on the client's clinical issues.

### *The Nonjudgmental Other*

All of the respondents echoed current research findings in addressing the extraordinary traits of horses that make equine therapy so intriguing. Notably, all respondents discussed the horse's ability to be nonjudgmental as a major difference between equine therapy and more traditional talk therapy. One respondent described this quality by saying,

Honestly, what I hear the most is that the teens get to have an experience of a living being that's in connection with them who isn't judging them. And a lot of our clients express something to the effect of "I can just be me; I don't have to pretend to be somebody else." [It's] an experience of acceptance in being able to just be who they are.

In a perfect world, all therapists provide their clients with this level of unconditional acceptance; ideally, all therapists are able to refrain from judgment when interacting with their clients. Whether therapists are or are not judgmental, however, has no bearing on the client's *perception* of whether he/she is being judged. One participant explained, "It's the connection to another being that is nonjudgmental – or *perceived* nonjudgmental. You know, even that perception of, 'I think this horse is going to accept me.'"

Another respondent illustrated this point by jokingly describing a therapist's reaction to a clinical encounter as compared to the horse's reaction:

Horses can be with the client who has really, really, really, big emotions happening for them in that moment. And they're not like, "Oh, God, am I gonna be OK? Oh, no! How is my countertransference working with this right now?" They're just like, "Oh, this person is being authentic in their emotions; I see them moving it. Alright." It's often safer for clients to be authentic and be genuine with the horses.

This perception of acceptance and nonjudgment is crucial to creating an environment for the teens in which they feel safe and understood. One therapist explained the inherent benefits to utilizing any animal that can act as a silent witness in the treatment.

The horses can't talk. The horses are very trustworthy primarily *because* they can't talk. So there's a safety. Whereas contact with people might be a really, really scary thing to do, contact with horses can often be a much safer intermediary.

This idea of safety was echoed by another participant, who explained how horses – whose large stature and unpredictability frequently elicit fear in people – could still make clients feel emotionally safe.

It can be less intimidating. It can be *more* intimidating for some people, but it can be less intimidating: instead of me saying, "OK, hold my hands and look me in the eyes and take a couple breaths," [I say,] "Put your hand on that horse. Take a couple of breaths."

### *Immediacy of Feedback*

Additionally, all three respondents discussed the immediacy of feedback that is possible with equine therapy. One respondent explained,

There's something to me about the immediacy, I guess sort of the 'present-moment-ness' that I think, as therapists, hopefully most of us strives towards, to be really present with our clients, and horses are *always* present. So, they have an incredible capacity to be *with* that client.



Another participant explained, “The client can’t really check out with the horse... like they can with a therapist.” Yet another therapist discussed this concept further:

The horses live in the moment; they’re present beings. They’re always responding in the moment, and they create a really great model for being embodied, for being in the moment, for going into what’s underneath the surface, for being still, for being versus doing... They’re so in the moment and do what they want, when they want...[even] if they don’t want to connect with you.

Another respondent described the importance of the farm environment in affecting the therapy and contributing to this ‘present-moment-ness’. She explains, “We’re dealing with every element that is out there. Like, when a storm kicks in, someone who has the propensity to control their environment – you can’t control the fact that a storm is rolling in over the mountains.”

#### *Mirroring, Reflection, and Projection*

Translating an issue that arises in therapy – for example, an incoming thunderstorm – into an opportunity for problem-solving and metaphor in the client’s life is one of the most valuable aspects of the therapeutic process. With horses, especially abused and fearful foals, this chance for reflection and projection onto the client’s life is magnified due to the horse’s innate characteristics. All three respondents discussed the outsider’s view of equine therapy as an “other-worldly” form of “magic”. In truth, however, according to these respondents, what happens between horse and client is entirely understandable, given the horse’s presence as a nonjudgmental, silent, sensitive being. In addition, the herd animal characteristics are undeniably therapeutic. One respondent explained:

Because they’re herd animals, they’re incredibly sensitive to the other – to the shifts in energy, to the shifts in behavior, to the shifts in alertness or relaxation in the other horses in their herd. And, with the long history with horses with people

they've become really sensitive to people as well and to what's happening for them. So, from a very Gestalt perspective, they're gonna respond to whatever's in the field.

What's in the field, in the case of HopeFoil Project, is a group of teenagers who are vacillating between seeking and fearing connection with another being. Two respondents discussed the horse's "highly relational" nature as having an important impact on the treatment. These qualities combine with the client's basic desire to be accepted and understood, and to have her experience normalized. The foals' histories, therefore, are used by the therapist to help the client make sense of their world through use of the foal as the mirror or, as one therapist noted, as "the magnifying glass of what's already happening for that client". Another respondent explained the teens' reaction to the foals, saying, "It often comes out verbally for them as, 'Oh, this horse gets it because this horse doesn't have a dad, either,' or, 'This horse understands me because this horse doesn't trust people either'."

The ways in which a client views the horses can say an enormous amount about the client. As one participant noted, "I remember one kid who came through who thought that every single horse on the ranch was angry – every single one was furious. And that's a lot of information for the therapist but it's also a lot of information for the client. 'So, every single horse here is angry, huh? Hmm.'" All respondents were adamant that interaction with the foals can shed important light on the client's relationships outside of Medicine Horse. One therapist who explained that, "The way we do one thing is the way we do all things," described how this theory translates into the client's everyday:

So, how I relate to humans in my life is gonna be reflected directly onto the horses and projected onto the horses when I come here and work with my horses and other horses. The same triggers are gonna appear, I'm gonna have the same issues come up. And so, the relationship that happens between the girls and the foals is ... exactly how they interact with people. So, it's by bringing awareness to those relationships and then saying "Does this work for you? If it works for you, keep doing it. If it doesn't work for you, how can you change things?"

This idea of translating therapeutic interactions into real-world experiences in the client's life is not a new concept in therapy. But, with programs that use horses in treatment there is a concrete jumping-off point from which to begin the dialogue. The horses – and relationships with the horses – are an easy conversation-starter that can pave the way to clients being able to address their other relationships. One participant explains what she says to teens in order to bridge this gap:

"So, OK, you can make contact with this horse or be in connection with this horse or relationship – that's great, that's awesome – how can we move that into your relationships with people? What can you learn about this relationship, where it might be a little easier or a little less scary – or might still be terrifying, because horses are big and there's a lot of fear that comes up with horses – and how do we start to bridge that to the other relationships as well?"

In this way, the abstract concept of relationship can become more concrete for clients. There are other examples, however, that provide a more literal view of the horse as a reflection or mirroring agent. All three respondents discussed specific examples of the foals mirroring the teen's experiences. One therapist described a HopeFoal group that happened to include several clients who had been adopted or placed in foster care. As the clients gathered around the foals, unknowingly surrounded by peers with similar life experiences, the therapist reports that she told them, "I know something that all three of you [the foal and the two girls] have in common. I know that you were all three adopted and rescued from scary situations." An immediate connection was formed, not only

between the girls but also between each girl and the rescued foal. Another respondent shares this viewpoint of immediate connection, reporting, “When we tell them about the history of our foals they go, ‘Oh, that’s like me’, and then those connections can start happening.”

The foals have something else in common with the teens – both groups turn to their peers for socialization, support, and role modeling that they are not getting from their own parents. All three participants described a “gang mentality” that develops among the group of foals. One explained,

[The foals] weren’t groomed in the ways that their mother would have groomed them. They weren’t taught any sort of social skills, people skills or herd skills. They’ve been looking to one another.

Another respondent reported,

What they tend to do is really, really attach to one another. It almost feels after a few months like this sort of gang mentality. And, when they first get here, a person can walk in the barn and the horses will just go to the backs of their stalls and just stand there. ... They do a ton of allo-grooming – that’s the sort of mutual grooming that’s comfort for them, so they provide comfort to each other. I guess my experience is that they probably have a secure attachment with the other babies, but they have no way of knowing how to relate or attach to people.

The third respondent concurred:

They don’t have that role model for setting boundaries and building that relationship and teaching them how to be in a herd and all of that... The only bonding that they get is with one another... they form these little gangs because they don’t have role models or parents. It’s amazing – it’s so similar [to teens]. They form these little gangs. They form an attachment with one another, [and] an extreme fear for humans who have been the ones to push them into a trailer and inject them with all their shots.

One of the participants highlighted the parallels between the foals' and teens' lives due to their early childhood experiences. According to this respondent, it's easy to see how the foal can provide a natural reflection for the client:

This has been [the foals'] basically zero to three life in human years. The first four months of their lives is traumatic. So translating that to a kid who's in foster care – I mean, kids in foster care it's pretty likely that they're gonna have difficult attachment and sometimes abusive attachment.

All three respondents discussed the 'matching process' – the ways in which teens pick their foal at the start of each session – as an important indicator of the reflective process in EAP. Two of the respondents each discussed a teen girl who had entered the program with a trauma history and difficulties with boundaries. (It is unclear whether they each described the same client, or two different clients with a similar story.) One participant described events leading up to the matching process:

We did an exercise on boundaries and just identifying, you know, standing across from each other, you know, where your boundary is. And this young girl let her partner almost climb on top of her and was like, "I can't feel anything. I can't feel anything." And I'm like, "So, you don't feel any desire to stop her, no desire to have her back off?" "No, no, I don't mind her being this close. I don't mind her being this close."

The therapist went on to describe this client's 'matching' with a foal whose issues were a direct reflection of the teen's:

She chose the fourth foal, who was handled too much and did the exact same thing to her as this girl had done to her – he was stepping on her, was pushing her around, chewing on her clothes and she thought it was funny. And you know, all that. And it was like, "I'm warning you, this foal will bite you. What are you gonna do? Are you gonna jeopardize your boundaries and your space and get hurt?"

The other respondent described a client by saying, "She felt like she didn't know where her boundaries were and she didn't know how to ask animals and people to respect

them. And she also had a trauma history of her boundaries not being respected.” The participant discussed the treatment process for this client, explaining:

And through working with the baby and really working with space and working with stepping back and body sensations and all these pieces, and practicing NO and practicing NO, and NO and NO, again and again, she began to feel the positive effects of setting boundaries. It’s like, Oh, when I have him out at this space (holds arm out) I can still feel really connected to him and feel very much in relationship and pet him out here but I don’t get hurt.

The therapist went on to describe the integration of this treatment into the client’s relationships away from Medicine Horse:

So, and then to be able to integrate that into, like, so when are you going to do this with people in your life? And how are you going to? And, so, she really worked with that horse around, “How can I maintain my space and how can I ask for my space to be respected and how can I learn how to respect others’ spaces too?”

Perhaps the most powerful example of the horse’s ability to reflect the client’s emotions came from a participant who described an especially intense therapeutic encounter with an older, well-trained school horse who had not been a rescue foal:

She one day was working with a horse who was a school horse pretty much his entire life. He was in his twenties at the time. People who have ridden before got very bored riding him. He kind of glazed over most of the time. He was a very chill horse. And she was working with him in a one-on-one session with me one day and she was talking about collapsing under the pressure of being a teenager in her life and everything that was going on. And she was laying on him, bareback, just with her head on his neck and her arms by his front legs, on his back with her feet and arms dangling, and she was talking about collapsing under the pressure, and he literally – his feet came out right out from under him and he went down on the ground.

This example – of the horse literally acting as the mirror of what the client is talking about or experiencing – highlights the horse’s ability to carry not only the physical burden of the client, but also the emotionality of the client’s world. It is also an important example of the differences between the typical, well-trained EAP horse and a HopeFoal. The respondent described this particular horse by saying, “We had never had

any problem with him; he'd always just been sure and solid.” The same could not be said for the rescue foals, who are neither sure nor solid and, therefore, require a completely different approach.

### *Temperament and Unpredictability*

This study uncovered several important differences between the horses used in HopeFoal Project and the typical horse used for traditional equine therapy programs. Specifically, respondents reported that the rescue foals' unpredictability, anxiety, hypersensitivity, and distrust of humans are all at odds with the typical EAP horse, an older, well-trained, gentle 'school horse'. One participant described the general EAP horses as “the horses who would never step out of line – the horses that were literally raised as school horses and nothing would faze them.” In contrast, the foals were described as “very unpredictable”, scared of people and standing at the back wall of their stalls so as to avoid contact with humans. One respondent explained, “It's like, are they looking at me like that because they want me to touch them, or are they looking at me like that cause they want to bite me?” The same could be said about a scared teenager.

Another participant described the differences between a regular foal and a rescued foal:

So, they come here and what I notice, the difference between a normal, bonded baby and these Premarin babies is that they do not know how to connect. They do not know how to have relationships, healthy relationships. Their boundaries are either huge and they're incredibly fearful and they're pinning their ears, or they're kind of overly needy. It's these two extremes that they have.

As a result of these differences, the process and approach to treatment changes dramatically. Clients notice the differences immediately, and change their behaviors

accordingly when around different horses. For example, one therapist describes the clients' interactions with the animals:

It's even just as simple as they walk up and try to pet the horse on the head and the horse pulls back and [the clients] are not used to that experience. The adult horses will let them do that or let them get close, and they notice that the abruptness of their movements will startle the horses.

The use of the foals during therapy, then, inherently shifts to accommodate their sensitivity, anxiety, and special needs. One respondent explained:

Using the foals and the yearlings really, really slows the process down. From my experience, because the foals are still in their instinct and in their sort of natural capacity, they're much more sensitive to our shifts in energy and whether we're being in contact and in connection with ourselves. The older horses are trained very well, and so you can have a kid who is totally running around, out of contact with themselves, really high energy, and that horse is gonna stand because that's what it's been trained to do. The foals will run away or *they'll* get really high energy. So their instinctual responses are much nearer to the surface.

The relational component of the therapy changes, too, as teens realize that the trust building process for the foals is a slow one and that every interaction helps the foal to determine whether the human is safe and trustworthy. One respondent highlighted this concept when she reported, "Those babies, they make you work at it. They make you work hard for that connection." All participants reported a change in clients' behavior when around the foals as compared to behavior around the rest of the program's horses.

One therapist explained:

There's a really sweet sort of feeling in [the foals'] barn that a lot of the clients pick up on really quickly. They can be really loud and energetic outside and they walk in that barn and everything sort of drops. They get quiet, and they slow down a little bit.

### *Summary*

This study revealed important information about the unique framework of the HopeFoal Project. Every respondent discussed the program within the context of an



attachment theory framework, drawing parallels between the insecurely attached foals and the teens with whom they work. The early experiences of foals and teens have a profound effect on their ability to relate in the world, and also affect the reciprocal healing process that they undergo together. Findings paralleled current EAP research, including the view of the horse as a nonjudgmental other; the immediacy of the horse-human interaction and feedback in equine therapy; and the horse as mirror, offering reflection of the clients' lives and relationships. Finally, this research indicates important distinctions between the utilization of a well-trained EAP horse as compared to that of unpredictable animals in therapy.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

As noted in the previous chapter, this study revealed important information about the HopeFoal Project, its parallel healing process and the use of unpredictable animals in the treatment of high-risk teen girls. The early experiences of both teen and rescue foal have a deep impact on their abilities to connect with others later in life; an attachment theory perspective is helpful when understanding the bonding process that forms as teen and foal attempt to repair early wounds and connect with one another. While this focus on attachment theory was not a prevalent aspect of the reviewed EAP literature, the current study did, on the whole, reveal findings that were supported by the literature. This chapter includes a comparison of this study's findings to the relevant literature that has been reviewed. Important similarities and differences are discussed; implications and suggestions for, as well as limitations of, future research are explored.

#### *Similarities with Current Research*

The present study's findings are especially important in the context of the reviewed literature. There were several similarities between data collected during this project and relevant research on equine therapy. Notably, participants in this study echoed the research of Ewing, et al. (2007), Vidrine, et al. (2002), Bizub, et al. (2003), and Schultz, et al. (2007), all of whom addressed the importance of the horse's mirroring and reflective capacities used in EAP. Findings also supported the viewpoints of Klontz, et al. (2007), Schultz, et al. (2007) and Vidrine, et al. (2002) regarding the horse's innate

hypervigilance and sensitivity; these qualities lead to an immediacy of feedback in interaction with the client that is both valuable and rare. This feedback – which occurs in the present moment and forces a new level of honesty on the client’s part – is not always possible in a traditional talk therapy setting. In addition, the study revealed data supporting the work of Yorke, et al. (2008), Bizub, et al. (2003), and Frewin and Gardiner (2005), regarding the importance of the horse’s position as a nonjudgmental other that is unconditionally accepting. Interestingly, Vidrine, et al.’s (2002) discussion of the horse as a ‘silent witness’, who is not perceived as judgmental in the same way that a therapist might be, was reiterated nearly word for word by a participant who spoke about the perception of judgment that may create a therapeutic impasse.

Respondents echoed the sentiments of Vidrine, et al. (2002) and Yorke, et al. (2008), who report that despite the horse’s large size clients can sometimes feel safer with them than with people. Teenagers participating in the HopeFoil Project are reportedly struggling with issues of trust and boundaries around adults; Owen-Smith’s (2000) research indicates that, for traumatized children, it is often easier and safer to relate to and trust horses than adults, especially if they have been violated by adults in the past. The respondents in this project agreed with this concept of the horse as a safer and less intimidating confidante than adults.

Additionally, this study found similarities among current research and respondents’ perspectives on the importance of the horse as a social, relational, and herd animal. The study’s respondents emphasized the importance of the use of metaphor when utilizing EAP with clients; much of the current research concurs with this approach and underscores the value of metaphor on client treatment (EAGALA, 2009). The

client's interpretation of the horse's behavior – for example, in the respondent's description of a client who had decided that all of the horses on the farm were angry – determines this metaphor; in this example, the study's findings support the Klontz, et al. (2007) research, which showed that the horse's inherently human-like characteristics provide an opportunity for the therapist to expound upon metaphor and for clinical issues to emerge. This example – in which all of the horses on the farm appear angry to the client – is a perfect metaphor for the client's life; the therapist can use this opportunity to discuss the anger that the client experiences in the world around him or her. As Klontz, et al. (2007) describe, the metaphor can elicit a range of emotions from the client, and it can act as a catalyst for therapeutic change.

Lastly among similarities, this study's findings about the unpredictability and novelty of the farm environment playing an important role in the therapy were similar to research findings made by Vidrine, et al. (2002), Schultz, et al. (2007), Ewing, et al. (2007), and Bizub, et al. (2003), all of whom identified this aspect of the treatment as noteworthy. Vidrine, et al. (2002) explains that this unpredictability can lead to an in-the-moment problem solving that is helpful to the treatment, as in their example of a horse having lost his shoe prior to the session. The study respondent's example of a storm rolling in over the mountains in the middle of the session is akin to the horseshoe example; in both instances, the client and therapist must problem-solve in order to keep everyone safe – much like one must act quickly to stay safe in the world away from the farm. Indeed, it seems that the outdoor environment and experiential component of the equine therapy experience has a profound impact on the clinical encounter.

#### *Notable Differences*

Despite the multitude of similarities among this study's findings and the current research in the field of equine therapy, there remain several noteworthy differences uncovered by this project. This is not surprising, given the uniqueness of the HopeFoil model and the difference in approach taken by HopeFoil therapists. The underlying structure of the program in itself differs greatly from traditional EAP programming; typical EAP programs use the horse as co-therapist (Vidrine, et al., 2002), yet HopeFoil does not necessarily view the foals as co-therapist. Rather, the foal seems to be acting almost as the client's peer, sharing similar challenges and building relationships with clients in a different manner than a typical EAP horse would do. Vidrine's research also indicates an increase in clients' capacities for empathy as they witness their EAP therapist taking care of the horse and role modeling nurturing activities for the clients. In HopeFoil, however, it seems that clients build personal empathy not through these role modeling activities but, rather, by care taking for the foals themselves. This increase in empathy is more based on the clients' newfound ability to recognize another's suffering – and try to ease it – as opposed to watching the therapist's relationship with the foal.

This researcher found no literature besides the Yorke, et al. (2008) study that used unpredictable or difficult horses in EAP. The Yorke, et al. study, however, a qualitative design focusing on adults whose positive relationships with their horses had helped them to overcome trauma, was primarily looking at regular horseback riding, rather than focusing specifically on equine therapy activities. Additionally, no research was found that looks at programs with a reciprocal healing model like that of the HopeFoil Project. The only discussion about the reciprocity of the horse-client connection appears in the Bizub, et al. (2003) article, in which she describes the reciprocal process of the rider's

tacking up, grooming, and leading the horse who, in turn, carries the rider through the session.

The most noteworthy – and unexpected – finding that was uncovered through this study centers around the HopeFoil therapists' use of attachment theory to understand the foals' and teens' parallel experiences. Little EAP research exists that makes these connections, but researchers such as Yorke, et al. (2008) do identify the links between the therapeutic relationship and the horse-human relationship. Specifically, they discuss the presence of attachment, mutuality, and emotional connection within the therapeutic rapport, and they acknowledge that these relational qualities all extend to human-animal bond research and, subsequently, to the horse-human connection. The Yorke, et al. (2008) description of EAP as the ultimate relationship-based treatment is certainly in line with the HopeFoil therapists' view of the power of their program.

In this way, the current study supports previous research in the area of the horse-human relationship; this approach, however, differs from the EAGALA model, one which emphasizes growth and learning rather than relationship-building in equine therapy (EAGALA, 2009). One study participant described this difference (between the Medicine Horse and EAGALA philosophies) by explaining that HopeFoil Project (built by Gestalt-trained therapists) utilizes an attachment theory model with a focus on easing others' suffering and healing together relationally, while the EAGALA model discounts the horse's position as a relational being and occasionally even discounts the relationship, itself, as a fundamental aspect of treatment.

Instead of operating under this approach, the HopeFoil Project is designed to take into account the parallel experiences of teen and foal – both of whom struggle in their

relationships and could be viewed as insecurely attached beings – and use their tentatively forming relationship to build empathy and compassion in the teens. Findings indicate that the teens need to be at a developmental level in which they can see that the foal, too, is suffering, and that the foal is beginning to build trust. If the teen is not there yet, however, the therapist can use the parallel process and the foal’s trauma story to build up these abilities, helping the teen to develop mentalization capacities. Fonagy, Gergely and Target (2007) explain that the infant-caregiver relationship, and a healthy attachment, is crucial to the development of ‘mentalization’ capacities. The infant learns important information about the world from the caregiver, and this information processing leads to a construction of a sense of self as well as thoughts and feelings that are directly impacted by the parent-child relationship (Fonagy, et al., 2007).

Fonagy, et al. (2007) describe their concept of mentalization as, “preconscious imaginative mental activity, namely, perceiving and interpreting human behavior in terms of intentional mental states (e.g., needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, and reasons)” (p. 288). In the case of HopeFoal Project, to see another being suffering may help the teen move outside of the realm of a singular sense of self, and aid in the development of the capacity to recognize the ‘other’. As the teen attempts to reconcile the rescued foal’s traumatic history with how she imagines that foal must be feeling (i.e. scared, anxious, abandoned, alone), her capacity for empathy and interpersonal understanding grows. The teen puts herself into the foals’ position and begins to understand the foals’ suffering and, in turn, her own. In this manner, the HopeFoal Project’s reciprocal model is vital to the client’s growth, therapeutic process and ability to form relationships.

#### *Research Implications and Limitations*

The present study indicates a benefit to using horses that have a difficult or a traumatic background in EAP; the use of such animals allows the therapist to build on the mirroring and reflective capacities of horses by magnifying the things that they may have in common with their human partners. Indeed, this study points to a need for future research with this population of rescue foals. This research could impact our field's overall view of animal-assisted therapies, which traditionally use well-trained animals (Fine, 2000). The reciprocal healing model utilized by the HopeFoil Project warrants further research. The foals and teens go through a parallel process of trauma, loss, attachment disruption, fear, distrust, nurturing, and healing; these parallel experiences significantly drive the therapeutic encounter at HopeFoil Project and merit further study.

This researcher agrees with Frewin and Gardiner's (2005) opinion that there is a strong need for further research in EAP. In particular, their suggestion of a project that studies a control group of regular horseback riding as compared to an EAP group is appealing. This proposed research might help to determine whether the positive outcomes in these studies are simply the result of the novelty of being around horses and a farm environment, or whether it is truly EAP that makes a difference. In the case of HopeFoil Project, the control group could be an EAP group with healthy foals and another group could utilize rescue foals to determine whether the nurturing and care taking of the babies is more or less important than the foals' insecure attachment and trauma history acting as a mirror for the teens' experience. Making this distinction would be helpful in gaining a clearer understanding of the therapeutic change and rapport that is developed through participation in HopeFoil.



Additionally, the shortage of research in this field combined with the exploratory nature of the current study requires that further empirical data be gathered to clarify findings. A streamlined evaluation process that includes a pre-post-post test model for client participants may give immediate feedback on the program and a longer term, retrospective view of its impact. In fact, a pre-post-post test for the foals that measures their progress, as well, may give us a better understanding of the impact of the reciprocal aspect of the program. Importantly, the researcher was unable to locate current literature regarding the use of rescue animals in treatment. Outside research supporting the use of this specific population of foals for mental health treatment would certainly benefit the field and help to support the current study's findings.

The limitations of the current study, mentioned in previous chapters, highlight important obstacles that might affect future research conducted at Medicine Horse Program. The limited range of staff experience and background, coupled with the small sample, indicate a potential for selection bias and lack of confidentiality in the research process. As Gestalt-trained, Naropa University therapists, the team at Medicine Horse shares a common perspective that might impact the study and reduce external validity of future empirical projects. In addition, the transient nature of the program's clients could potentially limit the probability of securing a sound data sample for a longitudinal study. While the original plan for a retrospective exploration of the program's impact on clients' lives was a sound and important topic, the lack of current contact information for clients made it impossible to recruit participants and, in the end, affected the likelihood of hearing from the clients themselves. A more focused campaign of outreach with former clients would allow effective research to be conducted in the future. As one of the few

programs utilizing this important model, research from Medicine Horse Program is vital to furthering the field's understanding of reciprocal healing programs.

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## Appendix A

### Human Subjects Review Approval Letter



Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
Tel: (413) 784-9100  
Web: (413) 784-1234

February 11, 2010

Samantha S. Pugh

Dear Samantha,

Your revisions have been reviewed and they are complete. Thank you for your revisions letter. It made tracking the changes much easier. We are glad to give final approval to this very interesting study.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

I hope your recruitment efforts are successful and wish you the best of luck with your project. I love the picture of the horse. That is a very appealing recruitment flier!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann Hartman".

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Heather Pizzarello, Research Advisor

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent Letter**

Dear Research Participant,

My name is Samantha Pugh and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am doing a research study to learn more about the HopeFoil Project and the therapeutic effects of horses on people. I am particularly interested in learning about clients' relationships with their foals and your views on whether this relationship affects other parts of their lives. You have been asked to participate in this study because, as a current or former therapist in the HopeFoil Project, you have a unique understanding of this program and how it might differ from other, more traditional, equine therapy programs. I am hopeful that the information you share will help me to better understand equine-assisted programming and the HopeFoil Project from your perspective. Information obtained through this study will be used in a master's thesis. In addition, it may be used for future presentations or publications, and a summary of the findings will be presented to Medicine Horse Program.

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed in-person, and the interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be tape-recorded and I will transcribe it in order to ensure that I am accurate with your statements. You will be asked questions regarding your experience with the HopeFoil Project, and your view of its impact on clients. I am especially interested in the use of difficult or unpredictable horses, and how this aspect might change or impact the therapeutic process for clients. Only current or former HopeFoil therapists will be able to take part in this study. Personal information (for example, age, race, and gender) will also be collected. The interview will take place at Medicine Horse or, if you prefer, at a separate, public location (i.e. a coffee shop or bookstore).

Risks from participation are unlikely. There is a possibility, however, that you might feel distressing or uncomfortable emotions while discussing your clinical work. You will not be paid for your participation, but you might enjoy being able to share your perspective and have your voice be heard. I am hopeful that the information obtained from your interview will help to illustrate the importance of programs like HopeFoil, and possibly help other agencies to develop effective equine-assisted therapy programs. In addition, this study may contribute to the field of research by highlighting the reciprocal healing nature of HopeFoil – a model that is rarely used in equine therapy.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of your responses, although anonymity will be impossible since I will be conducting the interviews face-to-face. In the final report, data will be presented as a whole, and any direct quotes from your interview will be disguised. My research advisor will have access to the data, once all identifying information has been removed. No one besides me will have access to your personal information (i.e. name, age, etc.) and I am bound by research guidelines to

protect your privacy. In participating in this study, your voice will be heard and your privacy will be protected. I am not associated with Medicine Horse Program and your responses to interview questions will not be linked to your name, nor will anyone be able to connect responses to specific participants. Medicine Horse staff will see the study's findings once the data are disguised, which may help to generate more awareness regarding therapists' views of the program.

In keeping with federal regulations, data will be kept by me in a secure location for three years, and then destroyed after it is no longer needed. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refuse to answer any question asked. You may also choose to withdraw from the project at any time, in which case all materials connected to you will be destroyed. The final date for withdrawal (so that I have time to write the full report) will be May 15<sup>th</sup>; after this date, your information will be included in the final project.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at any time with additional questions, to express any concerns, or to withdraw from the study. I can be reached at [information removed]. In addition, I encourage you to contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974 to discuss any concerns. Please keep one copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS, AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

---

Signature of Study Participant

---

Date Signed

---

Signature of Researcher

---

Date Signed

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Demographics & Background**

How old are you?

How do you identify yourself in terms of race or ethnicity?

How do you identify yourself in terms of gender?

What is your educational background?

How long have you been utilizing EAP in your work?

Have you facilitated EAP programming besides the HopeFoil project?

#### **Program Experience**

1. What, if any, differences have you observed between EAP that uses horses who are easy to work with, as compared to EAP with more difficult or unpredictable horses?
2. In your work with EAP, have you observed client's lives being affected by their participation in the program? If so, how?
3. Have you noticed any differences in results between the HopeFoil Project, which uses EAP with a reciprocal healing model, and participation in a typical EAP session? If so, what are the differences?
4. What impact have you seen the program have on clients? Are there specific changes that you have witnessed from the beginning to the end of participation?
5. How do you think the relationship between client and horse may impact the client's experience in the program or provide reflection on the client's life away from MHP?
6. What do you see as the most important aspects of the EAP model that would not be possible in a typical clinical setting?



**Appendix D**  
**Agency HSR Request Letter**



December 2009

Smith College  
School for Social Work  
Lilly Hall  
Northampton, MA 01063

To Whom It May Concern:

Medicine Horse Program gives permission for Samantha Pugh to locate her research in this agency. We do not have a Human Subjects Review Board and, therefore, request that Smith College School for Social Work's (SSW) Human Subject Review Committee (HSR) perform a review of the research proposed by Samantha Pugh. Medicine Horse Program will abide by the standards related to the protection of all participants in the research approved by SSW HSR Committee.

Sincerely,

Kathy Johnson  
Executive Director  
Medicine Horse Program