



# VALLEY THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN ASSOCIATION

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## HOOFPRIENTS PROGRAM

### WHAT IS EQUINE GUIDED THERAPY?

Equine Guided Therapy, (EGT) is a valuable alternative to traditional office-based “talk therapy” where clients interact with a treatment team consisting of a Certified Mental Health professional, a Certified Equine specialist and one or more horses. EGT incorporates a range of counselling, experiential learning and personal development approaches. Hands on activities and interactions with the horse are designed by the team around the client’s goals and may include greeting, haltering, leading and grooming the horse as well as leading the horse through obstacle courses or activities in the arena or round pen. All interactions take place on the ground. There is usually no riding involved and no horse experience is necessary.

### HOW DO HORSES HELP?

As prey animals, a horse’s primary concern is to feel safe. Because of this horses have a highly developed sense of their environment as well as the emotional state of other herd members. This includes humans when we interact with them. Horses instantly assess how we are actually feeling rather than what we think we should be feeling and can bring our deeper concerns to our awareness by providing non-judgemental feedback through their body language and behaviour. EGT has been shown to speed up the therapeutic process due to its hands on, concrete and experiential learning approach. Being in the presence of a horse tends to sharpen our focus and engages all of our senses. The learning that occurs is experienced as well as talked about and tends to be more powerful and enduring for the client. There is nothing more empowering than influencing a beautiful and powerful 1000lb animal to cooperate with our wishes!

### WHAT DOES A TYPICAL EGT SESSION LOOK LIKE?

A typical session is an hour in length, beginning with a check in and a discussion with the team about the goals or wishes for the session. Safety around horses and barn ground rules are reviewed. A guided relaxation/grounding exercise happens before any interaction with the horse/s to help access our “horse sense”. The chosen activity takes place and the role of the Equine Specialist is to facilitate this while the Mental Health Professional draws out the therapeutic learning and reflects this back to the client. The session ends with time to reflect on the take home messages including ideas on how the client can apply this in their lives and relationships.

## **WHAT SHOULD I WEAR AND BRING TO A SESSION?**

Sessions take place outdoors or in the covered arena so clients should dress for the weather of the season. Boots are advisable in the winter months. No open toe shoes are permitted at the barn. Helmets are mandatory and are provided. A journal and pens are a good idea to record the experience. The horses always enjoy a treat like a carrot or apple after the session.

## **WHO IS THE TREATMENT TEAM?**

Valley Therapeutic Equestrian Association has a team of 15 horses who come from a variety of backgrounds. The horses are selected to work primarily with disabled riders so are required to be gentle, predictable and calm. In an EGT session the horses are treated as sentient partners and co-facilitators and are treated with equal respect and dignity.

Gillian Ashley-Martz is a Registered Social Worker, Registered Clinical Counsellor and Certified EMDR trauma specialist. Gillian has been practicing counselling for over 20 years and has trained with leaders in the fields of trauma and PTSD, couple and family therapy, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy and Equine Guided Therapy and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Julie Matijiw is the head instructor at VTEA and has been involved showing and training horses for most of her life and the last 14 years has been a CANTRA II therapeutic riding instructor. Talented in all areas of horsemanship, Julie's particular gift is understanding the non-verbal communication between horse and human. Julie has achieved Level 5 Equine Canada status and has her own Equine Massage practice.

## **WHERE IS THE EQUESTRIAN CENTER?**

The center is located on the outskirts of Aldergrove on a 27 acre rural property. A pretty network of trails surrounds pastures for the horses where eagles fly over ancient and towering trees. To get there take the 264<sup>th</sup> St exit off highway 1 and turn left onto 264 St south to Aldergrove. Turn right onto Fraser Highway and left after a couple of minutes onto 256 St. The property is on the left.

For more information on the **HOOFPRINTS** Equine Guided Therapy program at Valley please contact Gillian Ashley-Martz at 604-418-0767 or [gillianashleymartz@shaw.ca](mailto:gillianashleymartz@shaw.ca) or Julie Matijiw at 604-857-1267.