
Your Letters

Dear HQ

I am writing this in response to an article (HQ50) on how horses are being used in counselling. I am also involved in equine-assisted psychotherapy work. Most people are aware of riding for the disabled, but psychotherapy work is a fairly new concept in South Africa. We have so much to learn from our four-legged friends – they are the experts in body language.

I worked in the field of child protection for seven years in the UK, which offered me the opportunity to specialise in assessments for high risk cases, such as Internet child pornography and risk assessments on individuals convicted for offences against children. I completed my EAP training (Equine Assisted

Psychotherapy) during this time through EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association) and now run an Equine Assisted Psychotherapy operation in the Eastern Cape (about 45 minutes from Graaff Reinet).

This past couple of years working with the horses confirmed the unexplained insight they have. They are the experts in body language and we as humans are therefore not able to lie or hide anything from them. We are forced to confront and face the issues. They read our emotions fully. The fact that they do not judge us but help us in getting insight into our own emotions, life skills, relationship skills and perceptions around behaviour, allows the individual to take stock on what works and

what needs to change. This method is especially successful with adolescents who do not always understand their own reactions and struggle with confidence and choices.

Horses are also very effective in the team building programmes. The activities with the horses are based on cooperation, negotiation, decision making, leadership, communication, reading other peoples' body language, creative thinking and problem solving, to name a few values. The bond and connection that people form with the horses help to restore the connections and relationships people lose.

Thanks for the interest shown in the work we do with horses.

Marle Slabbert

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