



COOKSON HILLS
HELP. HOPE. HEALING.



COOKSON HILLS EQUINE PROGRAM

The purpose of the equine program at Cookson Hills is to capitalize on the genuine and dynamic nature of horses while providing life-changing experiences for kids under our care. These experiences can occur in the context of professional counseling services as well as natural and experiential learning opportunities.

In counseling, horses can be used to assess a client's current mental status, stress, emotional tolerance level, problem-solving and survival strategies, and self-concept in the context of basic approach-avoidance relationship dynamics. Additionally, the human responses that are elicited in the first Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) session can reveal truths about a client that normally would take 20 or more "talk therapy" sessions to elicit.

Horses represent an extremely high quality resource for providing life-changing experiences for kids and adults. Because a horse is always true to its nature, a horse's response to a person's behavior and even a person's emotions is always genuine. When a horse reacts fearfully, it is because the human is doing something that is fear-inspiring, whether that human recognizes this in himself or not. When a horse reacts in a confused manner, it is because the human is sending mixed messages or is confused himself.

When a person is exposed to these truth-based equine reactions and responses and begins to struggle with them, that is where the therapeutic impact of these

interactions can be capitalized upon by our staff.

Two staff members have been trained and certified in Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) and Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP). These staff members have been trained directly by Greg Kersten, the founder of EAGALA and the "Father of EAL/EAP." One staff member is a Licensed Professional Counselor with 16 years of experience in professional counseling, and the other has over 30 years of experience in the equine field as a farrier and trainer.

THERAPEUTIC SERVICES VISION

To provide experiences that facilitate:

- the healing of traumatic emotional wounds
- the unlearning of dysfunctional beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
- the learning of more adaptive (truth-based) beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors

INDIVIDUAL EAP/EAL SESSIONS

Hands-On Horse Training

Older teens can sometimes be incorporated into direct, hands-on training activities with horses (with proper supervision). This experience exposes Jr. High or High School students to the realities of horse training and allows them to generalize the principles of horse training to their own lives.

EXAMPLE: A teen needs to stick with a horse that requires two hours of training to become desensitized to having a plastic bag rubbed all over its body before it stops reacting nervously to it. This training can help the teen learn that when a teacher asks him to keep trying a certain math problem it is not because the teacher is being mean. The teacher is *sticking with* them until they are no longer afraid of the task at hand and are able to receive help. The reason it's important for a horse to become desensitized to a plastic bag is so that when a rider is on his back and a plastic bag blows across the pasture in front of him, he will not freak out and injure himself or his rider.

Many of these training experiences occur spontaneously, such as when our horse trainer is working with a horse and tells a teen, "Hey, I can use an extra hand. Do you want to help?" But often these experiences can be pre-planned, such as when we have a teen who is being very rebellious and we want to begin to expose him to the discipline that it takes to work with horses "from the ground up," involving everything from proper grooming to proper saddling to the proper riding technique. In order to succeed with a horse, the teen has to change his attitude...and the beautiful thing is that he doesn't even know that he has been participating in his own therapy by his involvement in equine activities.

EAP (Equine Assisted Psychotherapy)

EAL (Equine Assisted Learning)

At the heart of the Cookson Hills equine program is the individual 50 minute or 80 minute Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) session. Some of these sessions occur spontaneously using generic and previously practiced EAP exercises or activities. Other sessions are premeditated, taking time to carefully tailor the type of EAP exercise to the specific issues that the therapist is asking the child to work on in counseling.

EXAMPLE: One young lady was not seeing herself as

being able to overcome a number of fears in her life through regular *talk therapy* counseling sessions. It was determined that an equine session might be more successful by challenging her with an actual experience of overcoming her fear of a certain horse and helping her to overcome other fears in her life.

A specific uncooperative horse was chosen. The girl was asked to get the horse to follow her around in the arena without touching the horse, without using a lead-rope, and without using food as a bribe. When she failed at this task, it was suggested that she try it with a horse that she was known to be moderately afraid of. When she agreed to try, this previously feared horse immediately began to follow her around for several minutes. The smile on the young girl's face was incredible to behold. She's now riding horses at a trot...when only three months ago it took her two sessions to even put a halter on the most easy-going horse.

GROUP AND FAMILY EAP/EAL SESSIONS

Visit Saturday Trainings

On the third Saturday of each month, custodial parents who have placed their child at Cookson are invited to come for a visit. While here they can sign up for a two-hour EAL family training session. These sessions involve EAL activities that are geared to highlight common family issues that are usually the reasons a child was placed at Cookson Hills (issues such as communication, listening, perceptions and expectations, discipline, obedience, conflict resolution, anger, body language, etc.). These EAL sessions are very effective in bringing out these issues so that they can be safely processed leading to improved family dynamics.

EAL Houseparent Trainings

A portion of the training and support Houseparents receive during their work with kids includes EAL activities that are designed to help these *house-families* identify, process, and discuss their relationship dynamics in a safe environment. Other as-needed EAL activities are structured to facilitate improved relationships between kids and/or between staff and kids.

Cowboy Jamboree

Each Fall the Cookson Hills staff plans an all-out fun day for the entire campus called *Cowboy Jamboree*. The heart and soul of this day is a lineup of various equine-based games. This gives kids a chance to simply enjoy

being around the horses without having to participate in therapy or do anything where they feel people are looking at them and evaluating them.

Right Rein

Basic horsemanship classes are offered weekly to kids in the 4th through 8th grades. While working with and learning about the horses, kids are taught Christian character traits that are closely associated with different aspects of handling a horse. Involvement in this beginning level activity often sparks interest in kids who want to pursue higher levels of involvement with equine activities or equine related vocations.

Saddle-Up

Saddle-Up is geared toward families to offer an enjoyable experience with the horses and is offered three evenings a week. Each person participates in Saddle-Up activities according to their current level of knowledge and experience, with the goal being that eventually every person in the family will be “eligible” to ride a horse with the entire family. These activities involve riding and equine-based games in the indoor arena and may eventually lead to longer trail-rides and picnics for the family to enjoy together. Saddle-Up offers opportunities to improve riding skills, positive self-image, and personal confidence.

Trail Rides

Trail rides offer an adventurous “out of the barn and out in the wild” experience for kids. Rides create great memories and a sense of accomplishment when the kids successfully navigate their horse among the trees and sharp bends, around hillsides, and then back home. Kids are able to bond with their favorite horses, trail guides, and other riders.

Horsemanship Training (Basic, Intermediate, Advanced)

Intensive horsemanship classes are offered to students who want to improve their horsemanship skills and participate in trail rides and competitive equine activities. At the end of this hands-on training, each class of graduates is rewarded with an extended trail ride. This class also offers kids an opportunity to face and overcome fears. When trepidation around horses shifts to joy and a sense of accomplishment, the kids are being set up for success in other areas of their lives as well.

Range Rides

Overnight equine-based campouts are offered to teens who have demonstrated intermediate or advanced level horsemanship skills. Participants ride out to a remote campsite, set up camp, cook dinner, enjoy an evening around the campfire, tether their horses for the night, wake up and check their horses, prepare breakfast, break camp, and finish out the morning with another extended trail ride. These experiences offer all the benefits of a fun equine-based activity while also offering high therapeutic potential in how they shape a teen’s self-image, their sense of being a positive part of a group sharing the same goals, and teamwork skills and cooperation.

Team Sorting (boys)

Team Sorting enables boys with advanced horsemanship skills to compete in local competitions. Both teamwork and confidence are built into these competitive activities. Kids are able to go off-campus enabling them to develop positive experiences in the broader community.

Team Sorting involves teams of two people, each on horseback, using their horses to sort or cut one of 10 numbered calves out of the herd and chase that calf through a gate. The goal is to get each calf through the gate in numerical order.

These kinds of competitive activities encourage the pursuit of excellence in the face of worthy opponents. Additionally, opportunities for problem-solving, developing patience and endurance, supporting and working closely with a teammate, and fundamental positive shifts in the area of self-image and self-esteem abound as a result of this kind of participation.

Drill Team (girls)

Drill Team provides high school girls with advanced horsemanship skills the same competitive opportunity that Team Sorting does for the boys.



FUTURE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Pack-In Trips

One of the things we would like to offer in the future is five day campouts where participants travel on horseback to a pre-approved wilderness area with everything they need being carried on their horses and one or two pack-horses.

We anticipate being able to offer this kind of event (perhaps as early as 2010) as an incentive to kids who have participated in Right Rein and other EAL activities. This kind of experience generates special memories that can last a lifetime and also serve as a *right of passage*. A teen will forever be able to point back to this event and say, "Look at what I did!"

These trips may also be creatively combined with our high school curriculum to offer the lab portion of earth and/or environmental science classes.



CURRENT EAP/EAL PERSONNEL

BRANDI HARRIS, L.P.C.

- MA Counseling
John Brown University

MIKE SCHURMAN

Wrangler, Horse Trainer, Farrier

- EAL certified through the O.K. Corral Series with the completion of a 21 clock hour course

KELLY SCHURMAN

Horse Instructor

- Teaches hands-on skills necessary for kids to learn how to handle and ride horses safely and effectively

CATHY WILLIAMS

Director Of Children & Family Services

- MS Family & Child Development
University of Central Oklahoma, 2001
- Trained and certified in EAP/EAL through EAGALA and Greg Kersten's O.K. Corral Series
- Offers EAL sessions during our Visit Saturday family/parenting trainings

OUR MISSION

To serve our partners by providing Christ-centered services to children and families in crisis.

OUR VISION

To restore children and families in crisis to a life-changing relationship with Christ.



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COOKSON HILLS CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES

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