**Equine-Assisted Therapy Information**

**What is ‘Equine Therapy’?**

‘Equine therapy’ is a term actually that doesn’t do a great job of helping people understand what it is – no wonder people become confused! ‘Equine therapy’ is when a licensed therapist incorporates horses into their therapy sessions. So at The Simpatico Center, ‘equine therapy’ means that we provide occupational therapy services that incorporate horses to support participants in achieving their goals.

**Why Horses?**

This is another great question! Horses are expensive, and large, and require you to work outdoors. On the surface, it doesn’t seem very logical, does it?

When horses are incorporated into therapy sessions, sessions move from ‘talking about things’ to ‘doing things’; sessions are experiential in nature, meaning that participants are actively moving and interacting throughout the session practicing skills in-the-moment during their sessions.

Horses also have some species-specific characteristics that make them especially helpful when engaging in therapy sessions:

-Horses are are very sensitive to changes and incongruencies in their environment (or inconsistencies between a participant’s feelings, behavior, and language)

-Because horses don’t speak, participants need to be extremely aware of the horse’s movements and gestures in order to ‘read’ their intent and respond appropriately to develop a relationship with them

-Horses allow participants to practice real-life skills without the challenges of language and encourage them to use their entire self in an integrated way (providing opportunities for embodied engagement)

**What Skills Can Be Addressed During Therapy Sessions at The Simpatico Center?**

Due to the features noted above, horses can be especially helpful during therapy sessions in addressing some of the following skill areas:

 -Improving Problem Solving Abilities -Decreasing Anxiety and Improving Self-Image

 -Enhancing Motivation -Improving Executive Functioning Skills

 -Improving Emotional/Behavioral Regulation -Decreasing Hyperactivity and Reactivity

 -Improving Confidence and Self-Esteem -Developing Empathy

 -Building Trust -Improving Communication and Social Skills

**What Types of Individuals May Benefit from Services?**

A wide variety of participants can benefit from therapy services incorporating horses. Research has shown that this type of therapy is effective with individuals who have experienced trauma, as well as participants with ADD, ADHD, mental health diagnoses, and Autism.

**Select References**

Bloch, E., Franklin, A., Kramer, Z, & Pauda, G. (2019). The lived experiences of equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT) on veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy,* 73. https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2019.73S1-PO6028

DiMarco, C., Davies, L., Hargett, C., Kimberly, H., Odle, A., Takeno, E., Jelenek, A., Karros, J., Wilson, J., Lishia, D., Scuderi,

A., & Murphy, L. (2015). The effects of an equine assisted occupational therapy program on adaptive behaviors in

children and youths. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy,* 69, 1295-1297.

https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2015.69S1-PO1103

Gilboa, Y., & Helmer, A. (2020). Self-management intervention for attention and executive functions using equine-

assisted occupational therapy among children aged 6-14 diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

*Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 26(3), 239-246. https://dio.org/10.1089/acm.2019.0374

Hemingway, A., Carter, S., Callaway, A., Kavanagh, E., & Ellis, S. (2019). An exploration of the mechanism of action of an

equine-assisted intervention. *Animals,* *9*(6), 303. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani9060303

Kearney, B.E. & Lanius, R.A. (2022). The brain-body disconnect: A somatic sensory basis for trauma-related disorders.

*Frontiers in Neuroscience,* 16-1015749. https://doi.org/10.3389/frins.2022.1015749

Malcolm, R., Ecks, S., & Pickersgill, M. (2018). ‘It just opens up their world’: Autism, empathy, and the therapeutic effects

of equine interactions. *Anthropology & Medicine,* 25(2), 220- 234. https://doi-org.proxy-

etown.klnpa.org/10.1080/1364870.2017.1291115

Mason, J. & Stagnitti, I. (2023). Occupational therapists’ practice with complex trauma: A profile. *Australian Journal of*

*Occupational Therapy,* 70(2), 190-201. https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12846

Mazzo, G. & Bendixen, R. (2023). Community-based interventions for childhood trauma: A scoping review. *OTJR:*

*Occupational Therapy Journal of Research,* 43(1), 14-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/15394492221091718

McKissock, H. B., Bowen, A., Dawson, S., Eldridge, L., McIntire, J., Stanojevic, C., Tamas, D., & McCormick, B. P. (2022).

Manualized equine-assisted therapy protocol for clients with autism spectrum disorder. *Therapeutic Recreation*

*Journal,* 56(1), 39-54. https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2022-V56-I1-10862

Peters, B. C., Wood, W., Hepburn, S., & Moody, E. J. (2022). Preliminary efficacy of occupation therapy in an equine

environment for youth with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders,* 52(9),

4114-4128. https://dio.org/10.1007/s10803021-05278-0

Pugh, H.K.& Heatwole Shank, K. Theoretical and Methodological Alignment Through Multi-Modal Research Designs:

Advancing the Transactional Perspective of Occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science.* https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2023.2213697

Pugh, H.K.& Heatwole Shank, K. (*In Press*). Multi-species occupation involving equines: An action-

oriented inquiry to inform occupational therapy practitioners. *OTJR: Occupational Therapy Journal of Research.*

Pugh, H. K. (2022). Employing an Action-Orientation to Expand our Understanding of Equine

Human Occupations. *Journal of Occupational Science,* 29: sup1, S1S116, https://doi.org/[10.1080/14427591.2022.2111001](https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2022.2111001)

Pugh, H.K. (2016, October). Pairing Strengths for success: Collaborating with external researchers. *Professional*

 *association for therapeutic horsemanship international (PATH Int’l) Strides.*

Roux, C. (2020). Horse riding: Its influences on sensory processing and relevance to occupational therapy. *New Zealand*

*Journal of Occupational Therapy,* 67(3), 9-14.

Scopa, C., Contalbrigo, L., Greco, A., Lanata, A., Scilingo, E., & Baragli, P. (2019). Emotional transfer in

human-horse interaction: New perspectives on equine assisted interventions. *Animals,* 9(12), 1030.

https://doi.org/10.3390/ani912030

Shelef, A., Brafman, D., Rosing, T., Weizman, A., Stryjer, R., & Barak, Y. (2019). Equine assisted therapy for patients with

post-traumatic stress disorder: A case series study. *Military Medicine,* 184(9/10), 394-399.

Wood, W., Alm, K., Benjamin, J., Thomas, L., Anderson, D., Pohl, L., & Kane, M. (2021). Optimal terminology for services in the United States that incorporate horses to benefit people: A consensus document. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine,* 27(1), 88-95. https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2020.0415