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Equine-assisted psychotherapy in New Zealand: A Phenomenological Investigation

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of two New Zealanders who have undertaken a course of equine-assisted psychotherapy in New Zealand. Using the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, two participants were interviewed. It was concluded that through the therapy, the participants experienced a process of transformation into a new self, a theme composed of transformation, and a new way of thinking and being. The experienced the therapy as fundamentally different from, but complementary to, traditional therapy. Their experiences were grounded in the real world and real experience, a theme that was made up of the natural environment facilitating different conversations; the experiences with the horses making the therapy real and meaningful; and hands-on, in-the-moment activity. The participants experiences with the horses, and of therapy, was spiritual and beyond explanation, a theme that showed their experiences were spiritual and meaningful, beyond explanation, and that the horses embodied symbolic representations. One participant became a convert and an advocate and this theme was composed of overcoming negative preconceptions, a positive experience, and becoming an advocate for its use. These themes and experiences were supported by the literature and provide insight into how and why equine-assisted psychotherapy is an effective therapeutic intervention.

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