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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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Introduction

“Mental disorders, as a group, are the third leading cause of health loss for New Zealanders” (Mental Health Foundation, 2014, p. 1).

Psychotherapy is the use of psychological methods by a trained practitioner, in order to assist an individual in alleviating distress, be it as a result of psychological, behavioural, or psychosocial problems (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). Its foremost function is the promotion of mental health and wellbeing, through treatment and prevention. In New Zealand, issues of mental health (and likewise, research into the mitigation, treatment, and prevention of mental health disorders) are especially pertinent. In 2010, the Ministry of Health began a study analysing the burden of disease, injury, and risk factors in New Zealand in 2006, with projections forward to 2011 and 2016, investigating the level of health loss by New Zealanders due to various causes. Mental health issues were found to be one of the top three causes of health loss for New Zealanders across almost all age groups (Ministry of Health, 2013). It was found that for the overall population, mental health issues were the third most virulent cause of health loss; for youths between the ages of fifteen and twenty four they were second only to alcohol abuse disorders (which in many ways fall within the realm of mental health issues themselves); for young adults between the ages of twenty five and forty four they were the leading cause of health loss; and for middle-aged adults between the ages of forty five and sixty four, they were once again second, after coronary heart disease (Ministry of Health, 2013).

These statistics show the pressing need for effective approaches to psychotherapy in New Zealand. Not only is providing for the safety of those at risk of mental health issues of paramount importance, but so is fostering well-being, mindfulness, and increased quality of life. These things will become increasingly important in New Zealand as time passes, as it

has been projected that, despite increasing access to a variety of treatments options and decreasing social stigma, mental health issues remain one of the leading causes of health loss in our country and that, the burden will grow (Mental Health Foundation, 2014; Ministry of Health, 2013). New Zealand's aging population, increasing population size due to immigration, and unique bicultural societal structure, make it imperative that there is a broad range of effective treatment options available for individuals seeking help, as it is the case that what works well for one may not work at all for another. A wide range of treatments, based on an inclusive and comprehensive approach to health (for example, the uniquely Māori philosophy of Hauora, and Te Whare Tapa Whā) provides greater accessibility to a wider variety of people, who may view certain approaches as more or less socially appropriate, effective, and culturally relevant to their own specific background and the issue for which they are seeking help.

Alternative therapies are beginning to take the place of more traditional office-bound therapies. The simple act of moving traditional talk therapy into an outdoor setting can have an impact on the client's outcome, how the client relates to the therapist, and the success of the course of therapy overall (Frame, 2006). Because of the expanding range of therapies available, it is important to have a broad and robust field of data and literature on the effectiveness of the various approaches, both to aid clients in deciding what is the best therapy for them, and to aid practitioners in deciding what course of therapy may be most effective for a particular client's needs. Research into the effectiveness of the various and emerging therapies is especially important in New Zealand as we have a national health service that entitles individuals to subsidised mental health care in certain circumstances. Research is important in order to establish what works, and who it works for. In New Zealand we have a culture of focusing, and relying most heavily, upon evidence-based practice; therapy models whose effectiveness are backed up by critical research are more likely to

obtain government funding and thus be more accessible to those in the community who need them.

Animal-assisted psychotherapy is a therapeutic approach that has been gaining popularity and validation in the literature in recent years. Animals are increasingly being seen as a positive influence on human health, both mental and physiological, and as useful and effective adjuncts to psychotherapy for a wide range of psychological issues. Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) is an even more specialised field, utilising horses, donkeys, and mules, both for the positive influence of the human-equine bond, and their apparently unique characteristics as large, highly social prey animals, that behave them to successful participation in the therapeutic process. This thesis will focus upon equine-assisted psychotherapy, looking first to its status in the literature, and second to how two New Zealanders who have participated in a course of equine-assisted psychotherapy on the Kapiti Coast of the North Island experienced this emerging form of therapy.

Literature Review

Animal-assisted Psychotherapy

Animal-assisted psychotherapy is one of the myriad terms used to label an emerging field of therapy, which comes with as many names, purposes, theories, and practices as there are animals used within it. Terms and definitions vary throughout the literature, with the field sometimes being referred to as animal-assisted therapy or psychotherapy, pet or pet-facilitated therapy, animal-assisted activities, zootherapy, and so on (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). The differences between the terms are oftentimes difficult to discern. Nimer and Lundahl (2007) define animal-assisted psychotherapy as the incorporation of an animal into treatment in order to achieve results that might not otherwise be possible with more traditional therapies. Granger and Kogan (2006) use the Delta Society's definition of animal-assisted activities, as activities designed to enhance quality of life through "motivational, educational, recreational and/or therapeutic" means (Delta Society, n.d., as cited in Granger & Kogan, 2006, p. 264). Animal-assisted activities are often used for team building, and personal or professional development purposes, whereas animal-assisted psychotherapy is used to "generate change (or learning), allowing people to better overcome their problems" (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011, p. 400). According to Grandgeorge and Hausberger (2011), the catchall term 'animal-assisted intervention' has risen to prominence amongst practitioners and researchers as a way of referring to all programs, interventions, and activities involving the use of animals for human aid and well-being.

Definitions of animal-assisted psychotherapy vary between publications, but most incorporate trained professionals working within their scope of practice, working in partnership with clients towards therapeutic goals, and involve specifically trained animals as a pivotal cog in the mechanism of therapy (Barker & Dawson, 1998; Berget & Braastad,

2011; Dimitrijevic, 2009; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; Nimer & Lundahl, 2007; Tedeschi, Fitchett & Molidor, 2005). Interventions vary with short term and long term; structured activities, and unstructured interaction; the use of the animal in a companionable way, and the use of the animal as an adjunct, or assistant, in therapy; the animal used; the people it is designed to aid; whether it is a group, or individual therapy setting; and the actual physical setting in which the therapy takes place (Barker & Dawson, 1998; Dimitrijevic, 2009; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; Netting, Wilson & New, 1987).

This broadness of scope and flexibility of definitions does confound the research that is done in this field. Furthermore, there are issues with literature quality, with many being descriptive or reviews, having small participant numbers, poor controls, poor transparency, and a high incidence of researcher bias and conflict of interest (All, Loving & Crane, 1999). A large proportion of the literature does no more than record anecdotal reports of serendipitous interactions with animals and humans, which while occurring in a professional setting, have none of the trappings of the therapeutic process (Beck & Meyers, 1996). All et al. (1999) state that the most basic form of animal-assisted therapy comes in the form of pet visitation, resulting in improved social behaviour, and increased pleasure and morale, among a range of other results. However, when one takes the Delta Society's definition of animal-assisted psychotherapy into account, which states that the therapy must be goal-directed, it would seem that while this form of 'therapy' may result in positive interactions and positive results, simply putting a client and an animal in proximity to one another and celebrating the benefits may not exactly count as therapy as such. Indeed, much of the research focuses less on therapy at all, and more on the benefits of animal ownership and companionship (All et al., 1999). While these benefits seem very likely to exist, and can inform therapeutic practice in a positive manner, focus now needs to turn towards more specific aspects of the therapeutic process, and the wide range of therapy programs in current use internationally, if

the field is to grow and improve in the direction of evidence-based practice that is so important for New Zealand psychotherapy.

History of the field. It is generally accepted that animal-assisted psychotherapy has its roots in the late 18th, and early 19th, centuries at the York Retreat in Northern England, where William Tuke established an asylum for the moral treatment of individuals suffering from mental illness (All et al., 1999; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; Heimlich, 2001; Mallon, 1992; Netting et al., 1987; Reichert, 1998). In his treatise on the Retreat and its practices, Tuke's grandson Samuel Tuke (1813) wrote,

The superintendent has also endeavoured to furnish a source of amusement, to those patients whose walks are necessarily more circumscribed, by supplying each of the courts with a number of animals; such as rabbits, sea-gulls, hawks, and poultry. These creatures are generally very familiar with the patients: and it is believed they are not only the means of innocent pleasure; but that the intercourse with them, sometimes tends to awaken the social and benevolent feelings. (p. 96)

Later, circa 1867, the Bethel Institute in Germany also began to incorporate animals into its treatment regimen; first for epilepsy, but later extended to patients with a much wider range of both physical and psychological disorders (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; Netting et al., 1987). Animals were first used in a comprehensive therapy program in the United States of America towards the end of World War II in New York. Recuperating army veterans rode horses and worked at a farm on the grounds of the Army Air Force Convalescent Hospital, as well as a nearby forest, as part of their therapy (All et al., 1999; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011, Mallon, 1992; Netting et al., 1987).

The advent of animal-assisted psychotherapy as we know it began with the child psychologist Boris M. Levinson, who coined the term ‘pet therapy’ in 1964 (Cirulli, 2011; Cirulli, Borgi, Berry, Francia & Alleva, 2011; Heimlich, 2001; Mallon, 1992). Levinson noticed that his pet dog, Jingles, who was at the first present only incidentally, seemed to have a positive effect on a severely withdrawn child who had been brought to Levinson by his parents for therapy (Cirulli, 2011; Cirulli et al., 2011; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). The dog seemed to help to bridge the divide between the therapist and child, naturalising a formal office setting and allowing the child to relax, thus aiding and facilitating a client-therapist relationship where one had previously struggled to form (Friesen, 2010; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). Following Levinson were Elizabeth and Samuel Corson, psychiatrists who – similar to Levinson – also came upon their revelations of animal-assisted psychotherapy at first by chance and happenstance. The Corsons studied the behaviour of dogs and had kennels installed at the hospital in which they worked (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). When some patients in the hospital became aware of this, they asked to visit with the dogs and the Corsons, noticing a positive effect from this interaction, embarked upon a study of the use of pets as adjuncts in therapy for those patients who had not been helped by more traditional therapies (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). They found improvements in feelings of responsibility, self-esteem, and social interactions, and a decrease in psychotropic drug requirements (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). Both of these serendipitous occurrences and the studies that followed sparked enthusiastic research and practice that has led to the broad and diverse field of animal-assisted psychotherapy that we know today (Mallon, 1992).

Beginning in the 1980s, a large proportion of the research surrounding the use of animals in the mental health arena has focused less on psychotherapy programs and more on the specific effects of human-animal interaction. Over the years and across a broad expanse

of literature, animals, particularly companion animals, have been found to have a variety of positive effects upon humans who choose to engage with them – so much so that pet ownership has been considered as a valid prescription to treat various ailments, particularly cardiovascular ones, by some practitioners (Beck & Katcher, 2003). In this vein, the human-animal bond has also been a close focus of research, including speculation on the origin and purpose behind the seemingly reciprocal emotional relationships that develop, and the positive effects this bond can have for human and animal wellbeing alike (Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997). It has been shown to mitigate depression, loneliness, and anxiety, and to improve self-esteem by making one feel loved, needed, and accepted by a non-judgemental companion (Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997).

Effects of animal-assisted psychotherapy. One of the primary facets of human life that animals seem to have an effect upon is stress and relaxation and, relatedly, autonomic response, blood pressure levels, mood, and anxiety levels (Barker & Dawson, 1998; Beck & Katcher, 2003; Beck & Meyers, 1996; Beck, Seraydarian & Hunter, 1986; Bernstein, Friedmann & Malaspina, 2000; Dimitrijevic, 2009; Fine, 2006; Friedmann & Tsai, 2006; Friesen, 2010; Heimlich, 2001; Lefkowitz, Prout, Bleiberg, Paharia & Debiak, 2005; Yorke, 2010). Research on the physiological aspects of this positive health effect, such as cardiovascular health, has been particularly pronounced. The reason for this is largely due to a pivotal study by Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, and Thomas (1980) – the first medical publication to show such a link – that found that pet (mainly dog) owners had better rates of survival after a heart attack, compared to non-pet owners (Beck & Katcher, 2003). Lynch (1985, as cited in Allen, Blascovich, Tomake, & Kelsey, 1991) further discovered that when pet-owners spoke to a researcher, their blood pressure rose substantially, whilst their blood pressure stayed the same, or even lowered, when they spoke to their pet. Relatedly, Allen et

al. (1991) found that female participants performing a stressful task had far greater levels of autonomic reactivity (indicative of stress levels) when they did so in the presence of a close female friend, than when in the presence of their pet or alone. This is thought to be due to the non-evaluative, or non-judgemental, type of social support provided by a pet, acting as a buffer against the stress of the activity (Allen et al., 1991). These results support the findings of earlier researchers who have shown that the same can be true even if the animal is not the participant's pet and is unknown to the participant at the commencement of the study, and apparently regardless of the species of animal involved (Barker & Dawson, 1998). The lynchpin of the studies in this vein is that the presence of animals, and interaction with pets, seems to have a calming effect on humans both psychologically and physiologically (Fine, 2006; Kruger & Serpell, 2006).

The calming effect of animals upon humans can contribute positively to the therapy process, its nonthreatening presence serving to facilitate the development of a trusting relationship, which can then be expanded to include a therapist (Tedeschi et al., 2005). The presence of, and interaction with, an animal can help a client to relax, easing the development of a therapeutic relationship, and rapport, and facilitating disclosure by both its calming effects, and the distraction it provides. In addition to this, a therapist can use the relationship between the client and animal to gather clues as to wants, needs, and state of mind of an uncommunicative client (Alfonso, Alfonso, Llabre, & Fernandez, 2015; Reichert, 1998; Tedeschi et al., 2005). According to Reichert (1998), clients will often use the animal as a canvas, or mirror, onto which they may project their feelings. The animal can reflect back non-judgemental, unconditional regard, and can both give and accept love and affection in a neutral and nonthreatening manner.

Along these lines also falls the idea of animals providing some intangible attribute not otherwise present in therapy involving only a therapist and client – a unique form of support,

or benefit to therapy, rapport, or general well-being that would otherwise not be present (Friesen, 2010). Through the animal adjunct, communication and understanding may be reached between the therapist and client – or clients, if a group setting – that may not have been possible through the sole efforts of the therapist (Friesen, 2010; Netting et al., 1987). It is because of this unique ability or effect that animals are often described as a social lubricant throughout the literature, easing the path to clients opening up to the therapist and catalysing constructive communication (Mallon, 1992; Netting et al., 1987). Indeed, one of the prime benefits of the incorporation of animals into therapy seems to be that they can improve motivation and participation in the therapy itself (Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997; Barker & Dawson, 1998; Bernstein et al., 2000; Perelle & Granville, 1993). Holcomb and Meacham (1989) found, in their retrospective study on attendance in in-patient treatment groups, that the animal-assisted therapy group had the greatest rates of participation compared to groups in other therapy conditions, and regardless of diagnosis of the participants. Bernstein et al. (2000) reported evidence that animal-assisted psychotherapy programs involving volunteers bringing in animals for residents to interact with, and talk about, can improve positive affect, increase enthusiasm, activity, and social interactions. Cirulli (2011) states that for the treatment of anxiety and mood disorders, dogs are often utilised as they can have an effect on social interaction and communication. Tedeschi et al. (2005) mention a wide range of benefits that the research has shown can be effected by the inclusion of an animal adjunct into a therapy program, including the improvement of cognitive and perceptual deficits; empathetic development and reduced aggression; greater socialisation, motivation, and self-esteem; improved attention and ability to focus; and an overall reduction in stress levels.

How it works. Friedmann and Tsai (2006) state that animal-assisted psychotherapy works by facilitating and catalysing “attention to and interaction with the outside world.” (p.

96). It is often termed an experiential therapy, and the process is designed to allow and encourage participants to focus on the experience of the present moment, giving them – even if only temporarily – relief from stress and anxieties they might feel as a result of a formal and potentially unsettling therapy setting, and whatever distress has brought them to therapy (Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997; Frame, 2006). This view of animal-assisted psychotherapy draws on the work of Levinson, and fellow pioneer Searles, who believed that the presence of a companion dog could be beneficial for clients suffering from schizophrenia, as the relationship that formed between them helped anchor the client in reality (Barker & Dawson, 1998; Mallon, 1992).

With concepts like these in mind, it is not difficult to see why there has been such a surge of interest in the field of animal-assisted psychotherapy. When an individual enters into a therapeutic relationship, they are being asked to divulge potentially distressing details of a highly personal nature to someone who is, or until recently was, a stranger. Anything that can ease the formation of a therapeutic bond, and strengthen rapport between the client and therapist, can only be a positive thing. Likewise, anything that can mitigate the stressful effects of such a situation is worthy of note and further interest.

The animals involved can also vary widely. Companion animals, such as cats and dogs, are commonly used as are birds, and fish and, as such, much of the literature focuses upon them; horses, donkeys and mules are also common, as well as other large farm animals but these have been less of a focus for researchers and are only now starting to see a surge in attention directed towards them and their potential benefits for human wellbeing (Adams et al., 2016; Berget & Braastad, 2011). Berget and Braastad (2011) recommend the exclusive incorporation of animals from domesticated species in order to protect the safety and wellbeing of both clients and animals. The notion of protecting and improving the wellbeing of both the human client and the animal adjunct is a common theme throughout the literature

(Dimitrijevic, 2009). Also often alluded to – though it is difficult to tell how well implemented it is in practice – is the claim that animal-assisted psychotherapy should only be used where more traditional methods have failed or may prove less effective (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007). The intent behind this is to protect both vulnerable human clients and vulnerable therapy animals. As animal-assisted psychotherapy is feasibly more expensive, and more difficult to arrange, compared to more traditional therapies, and places a risk on the safety and wellbeing of both animal and human, it should perhaps only be used when the risk and cost is justified.

Equine-assisted Psychotherapy

Equine-assisted psychotherapy, or animal-assisted psychotherapy, using only animals from the genus equus, is, like its parent field, a treatment designed for the help and healing of people suffering emotional challenges and distress, psychological problems, and mental health disorders (Bachi, Terkel, & Teichman, 2012; Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, & Klontz, 2007; Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004; Schlote, 2009). It is client-centered and, like many therapies, it enables a person to explore their experiences, behaviours, feelings and emotions, and allows them to consider these in a safe and supportive environment. An ongoing therapeutic relationship and established rapport between a client and qualified mental health professional, in addition to well-defined treatment goals developed in concert, is necessary for successful therapeutic work (Bachi et al., 2012; Schlote, 2009; Trotter, Chandler, Goodwin-Bond, & Casey, 2008; Symington, 2012). Unlike most therapies, a third and fourth party are also present – a horse, or sometimes horses, which acts as an adjunct to the therapy, facilitating certain activities, techniques, and progress throughout the therapeutic process, and a specialist horse-handler (Chalmers, & Dell, 2011; Frewin, & Gardiner, 2005; Smith-Osborne, & Selby,

2010; Symington, 2012). This might be through the client interacting directly with the horse, or observing the horse, or horses, and their interactions with one another (Bachi et al., 2012; Lentini, & Knox, 2009). The client and therapist will explore these interactions to learn more about the client's lived world, and often they will be used as a metaphor for more day-to-day personal interactions (Symington, 2012). Often the therapy is experiential and solution-focused, using experience in the present moment as an agent for change, while engaging and empowering clients to find and work towards their own solutions (Chalmers, & Dell, 2011; Frame, 2006; Klontz et al., 2007; Schlote, 2009; Smith-Osborne, & Selby, 2010; Symington, 2012). An important benefit mentioned by Alfonso et al. (2015) is the opportunity equine-assisted psychotherapy offers for the therapist to observe the client's interactions with another creature, and to observe their unmediated behaviour. Importantly, equine-facilitated psychotherapy is distinct from therapeutic riding, in which the learning of equitation is catered to the therapeutic needs of an individual, and from hippotherapy, which is a physical therapy for the treatment of neurological, muscular, and speech disorders to name a few (Vidrine, Owen-Smith, & Faulkner, 2002).

Issues in the literature. Equine-facilitated psychotherapy is an important area for further research as, while much of the current literature on the subject has shown that it has strong potential for effectively treating a variety of different mental health issues, the total amount of research that has been done is relatively small, and many of the studies suffer from methodological flaws (Bachi, 2012). In fact, a recent meta-analysis by Anestis, Anestis, Zawilinski, Hopkins, and Lilienfeld (2014) concluded that the literature on what they referred to as equine-related treatments for mental disorders was so fraught with methodological flaws and threats to validity that they recommended these forms of therapy not be offered to the public until a body of methodologically sound research could be presented that justified its

use. Bachi (2012) conducted a review for similar purposes and found that much of the research focussed on the physical benefits of animal- and equine-assisted intervention to the exclusion and detriment of investigation into psychological outcomes. This is concerning, as the use of these therapies for psychological reasons is increasing internationally. Many of the studies that do focus upon psychological issues rely on individual researchers' personal doctrines rather than on a standardised theory (Bachi, 2012). This idiosyncratic approach has led to an eclectic range of theories and postulations as to the mechanisms by which equine-assisted psychotherapy may be successful. This eclecticism which characterised the literature weakens the field, particularly when combined with small participant number case studies, and anecdotal reports, described by potentially biased practitioners, and explained in ways that, as yet, have little basis or support.

The distinction between different terms and definitions is something of a related problem in the literature as many, if not most, studies available have poorly defined, or undefined terms and definitions, appearing to be chosen somewhat arbitrarily by researchers and practitioners. The term equine-facilitated psychotherapy is equally likely to be used to refer to a mounted, or riding, therapy, as a ground-based therapy and indeed, much of the literature on equine-facilitated psychotherapy refers to mounted therapies (Bachi et al., 2012). While this is not a significant problem, per se, as one can always read further to discover exactly what the authors are focussing on in their study, it does make it difficult for a reader to parse the body of literature into digestible portions, and needlessly confuses a field fraught with other concerns. In addition, the fact that many researchers seem to consider the two interchangeable is somewhat concerning, given the obvious differences. Therapeutic riding grants unique physical benefits, which equine-facilitated psychotherapy does not. It also focuses less upon the relational and social dynamics and use of metaphor, which equine-facilitated psychotherapy hinges upon. Finally, therapeutic riding can easily be considered

more physically dangerous, and thus has different issues and concerns for safety and ethical practice. Equine-assisted learning is also a term that complicates matters as, like equine-assisted psychotherapy, it refers to a largely experiential form of intervention (Adams et al., 2016). Differences are difficult to parse from the literature, but it seems to refer to group-only interventions focused on ground-based group activities, which provide “opportunities for participant self-development and to internalize this awareness within the sessions and generalize it to other life situations” (Adams et al., 2016, p. 3). The primary difference seems to be that while equine-assisted psychotherapy will focus upon particular issues or problems which are causing a person distress and then working towards resolving these, equine-assisted learning is focused more upon improving life skills and insight in general. The issues arise when researchers use the definitions and literary evidence of one form of practice towards the aims of another and vice versa, muddying the waters of their distinction.

Another issue is that the majority of published studies focus on the effects of equine-facilitated psychotherapy on children. Its use and effectiveness with adult populations has been largely overlooked. Given that this is a branch of therapy that is growing in popularity and practice, there are issues of generalisability - a problem with the overall lack of diverse investigation. One hopes that as the field continues to grow in popularity, and interest peaks, a greater range of research will grow from the base of what exists and rectify these weak points. More concerning is the fact that a large portion of the research that has been done is purely anecdotal, suffers from staggering conflicts of interest, and lacks any clarity or transparency when it comes to methodological processes – effectively rendering replication and verification impossible. Later this will be discussed in greater detail as individual studies are highlighted and their methods, results, and conclusions are evaluated with these issues in mind.

The benefit of horses. Prochaska and Norcross (2010) show that there are a number of common factors across different types of therapy that, if they are present, will contribute significantly to its effectiveness. For a therapy such as equine-assisted psychotherapy to be worthwhile, it needs to be effective above and beyond those common traits or it will not be worth the risk and expense.

Horses do seem to be uniquely suited to the work of therapy. One common suggestion often repeated within the literature is that their nature as prey, flight, and most specifically herd, animals has caused them to evolve to be highly tuned to a variety of verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, as they depend upon their herd mates for safety and survival (Adams et al., 2016; Frame, 2006). They are also highly tuned to their environment, and potential changes within it, as their safety and the safety of their herd can depend upon picking up on environmental cues instantly (Adams et al., 2016; Smith-Osborne, & Selby, 2010). Once domesticated, humans can take the place of the herd, and horses will look to people with whom they have developed a relationship of trust for safety and security (Frame, 2006; Lentini & Knox, 2009). These features make horses ideal candidates for use as “living biofeedback mechanisms,” as they are able to mirror and respond to extremely subtle verbal and nonverbal cues from the humans with which they work (Smith-Osborne, & Selby, 2010, p. 300). They are able to potentially pick up on changes in mood and behaviour that an individual may not yet have noticed within themselves (Smith-Osborne, & Selby, 2010). A psychologist or psychotherapist well-trained to work with horses will be able to pick up on and interpret the resulting interactions between a client and the equine adjunct, and work with the client to discuss and discover the reasons behind their behavioural, mood, and emotional changes. Yorke, Adams, and Coady (2008) mention the fact that a strong therapeutic bond, or rapport between the client and therapist, can often be more effective in psychological healing than the specific type of therapy, or therapeutic techniques employed. One of the strongest

signs for the usefulness of equine-assisted psychotherapy is that the presence a horse, or horses, can facilitate the formation of this bond, and indeed can make it stronger and more effective than it would have been on its own. This facilitates and improves not only the traditional elements of the therapy, but helps the therapist to better understand the interactions between client and horse.

Research with children. Much of the research on equine-assisted psychotherapy has focused on children. While the results of this may not be perfectly generalisable to adults, they can definitely be used to inform current practice and future research, if considered within their limitations. Here current research with children has been critically evaluated. Selection of studies to review was limited to interventions with a therapeutic ground-based focus.

In 2011, De Rose, Cannas, and Reinger Cantiello's conducted a pilot study on a rehabilitative donkey therapy program for children aged 6-12 with "emotional-relational disturbances, communication difficulties, psychic distress and depression symptoms, behavioural disturbances, hyperactivity, mental retardation" (p. 393). They found that it was effective for both highly verbal and verbally impaired children, levelling them out to a middle ground of verbal expression, and allowing them to also develop abilities for physical expression. This meant that overly verbal children were able to calm this form of expression when interacting with the donkey and develop their physical expression and communication abilities. At the same time, verbally impaired children were drawn out of their shell, so to speak, and encouraged towards greater verbosity when interacting with the donkey. The researchers used drawings to allow the children to communicate their "emotional-perceptive response" (p. 393) to the therapy and found a greater attention to realistic details and colours

in later evaluations, compared to the brief monochrome sketches drawn in the first instance. These results imply that the children were respectively calmed, and roused, depending upon their own specific needs, due to their interactions with the donkey. This development of their interaction styles encouraged them to engage more fully in the world around them, and allowed them to develop alternate methods of communication and expression. This shows that an equine-facilitated therapy can be versatile in its action, effecting improvements for children with diverse needs. While De Rose, et al.'s (2001) study had some interesting results, it was more of an exploratory investigation and, having only four participants and no control group was limited in that regard.

Ewing, MacDonald, Taylor, and Bowers (2007) completed a three year study with children aged 10-13 who were recruited from an alternative education school. Many of the participants were identified as having below average IQ in addition to behavioural, emotional, and developmental problems, and “were considered to be at-risk due to a wide range of behavioural problems” (p. 63). The content of the therapy program they used is difficult to parse from their published work, as they combined both equine-facilitated psychotherapy and equine-facilitated learning, and seem to have incorporated therapeutic riding into the treatment regime for some, but not all, participants. However, it consisted of twice-weekly two hour sessions for a total of nine weeks, the incorporation of equine themes into regular school classes, and participants were taught to care for their chosen horse, its tack, and its stall. Unfortunately, none of the hypotheses proposed by the researchers were supported by the study. They found that the therapy program had no effect on the self-esteem, interpersonal empathy, internal locus of control, or feelings of depression and loneliness of the children who participated. However, the researchers also compiled qualitative case studies of the participants, and did go on to detail anecdotal evidence of success with five example participants. With this in mind, it is possible that, if those five examples are indeed

indicative of the success of the program as a whole, the researchers simply chose poor methods of either collecting or analysing data - or both. While the researchers did use a number of different measures, the information they provided about each was sparse (only one of five was shown to be internally consistent and reliable, and one other was indicated as having “adequate internal and temporal consistency” and “encouraging” divergent and convergent validity), so it is difficult to evaluate this from simply reading the article (p. 64).

The researchers were thorough in their consideration of what may have gone wrong in their study, but it was concerning to read their overly confident explanation of why they were unable to find any significant results. Such explanations can only be speculative until further future research has been conducted, with those limitations dealt with and accounted for. The article read as one written by researchers already convinced about the efficacy of equine-facilitated psychotherapy and, this being the case, the poor results could only be explained as being due to extraneous errors and complications, not due to the therapy program itself. As they say themselves, “equine-facilitated psychotherapy and learning is still in its infancy” and as such, it is entirely possible that it is not, in fact, an effective or worthwhile method of therapy. This is something that one needs to keep in mind both when reviewing the literature thus far accumulated on the subject, and when conducting research oneself (p. 70).

Holmes, Goodwin, Redhead, and Goymour’s (2012) study is a prime example of one of the many studies in this field fraught with flaws. The researchers investigated the effects of an equine-assisted activities program on the anxiety levels and self-esteem of a group of eleven 12-14 year old children. The researchers found a significant decrease in state anxiety, but no significant change in self-esteem over the course of the program. The aims of this study are difficult to fully understand as they purport to desire to further research in the field of equine-facilitated psychotherapy and yet the program they use towards these ends is one of activities, not therapy, and they explicitly do not involve a trained therapist in their research.

This is an example of a problem that in many ways seems endemic to the field – poor definition of terms and poor distinction between distinct techniques (therapy and activities) towards psychological improvement. Activities are often used to improve self-esteem, in the sense that they promote teamwork and team building, and individual mastery through successful completion of potentially difficult tasks. Activities however are not explicitly a type of psychotherapy in and of themselves, particularly when used in the absence of a psychologist or therapist.

The activities program evaluated in this research involved the children learning about and learning to care for horses and their equipment, and used both living horses and a ‘control’ model horse. The purpose of the model horse control is difficult to discern. In its accepted form a control can be one of two things. The first is a confounding variable kept constant in order to minimise its effects on the variables of interest. The second is a control condition, as in a randomised controlled trial, used for comparative purposes in order to see if the condition of interest is different, (often better or more effective) to the control condition (often a placebo, or more standard version of the variable of interest) (Howell, 2008). It is obviously the latter that the researchers were going for in this study, but as there was no randomisation aspect, and as all students interacted with both the live horse and the model horse in every session, outcome measurements taken at the end of each session would not be able to give any indication if either had a different effect. Approach and avoidance behaviours were measured in an attempt to show that, across the course of the study, participants tended to approach the live horse more frequently and avoid the model horse more frequently. The results for these measurements showed no significant change in approach behaviours for either ‘type’ of horse but did show a significant decrease in avoidance behaviours for the live horse only. The researchers attempted to link this behavioural change to the decrease in trait anxiety but found no significant relationship,

which even if it had been found would be impossible to confirm as being due to the live horse alone, given the study's design.

Furthermore, the researchers did not administer any measurement scales after the first session in order to avoid the novelty effect, wherein participants in a novel situation respond differently in the first instance to how they would usually respond in a 'real-world' setting (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011). This effect is a threat to the external validity of a study, damaging how well the results can be generalised to other populations and situations, as the results until the novelty effect wears off will be specific to that research setting. In this instance, however, the results from the first session, even if they had been unusual due to a novelty effect, would be perfectly relevant as the introduction of children to a new program *is* a novel experience and how they react to such in the initial exposure is useful information.

Schultz, Remick-Barlow, and Robbins (2007) evaluated the progress made by sixty three children aged 4 –16, referred to an equine-facilitated therapy program for a variety of psychological issues including ADHD, PTSD, mood disorders, adjustment disorder, and disruptive disorder. The children received varying numbers of sessions (1 – 116, with an average of approximately twenty), implying that the therapy is flexible to the needs of individual children. The measurement Schultz et al. (2007) used was the Children's Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF), which measures the psychological, social, and educational functioning of children, and found that all children improved on their GAF scores, and that there was a significant relationship between greater improvement and a greater number of therapy sessions. They also found that female participants showed statistically significant greater improvement compared to males, and younger children compared to older children. Interestingly, they further found that children with a history of physical abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, or parental substance abuse showed greater improvement compared to children without such histories, the difference between children

who had been victims of physical abuse and neglect and those who had not being statistically significant.

This study recorded and analysed a large amount of data and relationships between different variables, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and number of sessions, finding some interesting correlations. The GAF does not have very specific outcomes and lets one know only the general level of difficulty an individual is experiencing, and not the details of those difficulties. So while it can show general improvement in overall symptoms, it does not show which symptoms the therapy was effective at improving. A similarly conducted study, with more specific hypotheses and which measured more specific problems or diagnoses with tailored measurement scales may give clearer and more precise information about how the therapy was working, and which aspects of psychological dysfunction it was helping to heal. Unfortunately, the researchers only measured GAF scores at baseline and post-therapy. A further administration at a follow-up point in the future would have provided useful information about whether the therapy was successful in engendering long term change without therapy sessions to maintain it.

Trotter et al. (2008) compared the efficacy of equine-facilitated counselling with a more traditional classroom-based counselling program, for intermediate school-aged children who had been flagged by their school counsellors as at-risk of academic or social failure. Progress was measured on the Behavioural Assessment System for Children and the Psychosocial Session Form. When rating themselves, children who participated in the equine-facilitated counselling program showed significant improvement on measures of emotional symptoms, clinical maladjustment, atypical behaviours, sense of inadequacy, and relations with parents. Children who participated in the more traditional non-animal therapy showed significant improvement on measures of emotional symptoms, personal adjustment, social stress, and self-esteem. When rated by their parents, equine-facilitated counselling took the

lead, with children showing improvements in behavioural symptoms, externalising problems, internalising problems, adaptive skills, hyperactivity, aggression, conduct problems, anxiety, depression, somatization, adaptability, and social skills. This compared favourably to parents' ratings of their children's progress in the more traditional therapy, who saw only improvements in depression.

While these results appear positive for the validation of equine-facilitated psychotherapy, Trotter et al.'s (2008) study had some limitations. The control had a sample size that was just over a quarter that of the equine-facilitated counselling and session times were halved. With these limitations, it is difficult to say if the equine-facilitated counselling was truly more effective than the control, or if the control was simply handicapped by fewer participants and shorter intervention times. A further limitation is one that often crops up when comparing equine-assisted therapies to more traditional controls. The two therapies being compared were radically different in a fundamental way - in addition to involving horses, the equine-facilitated counselling was also an outdoor therapy, whereas the control therapy was classroom-based. This contextual difference in and of itself is likely to have had an impact on how the children assigned to the different therapies improved in a variety of areas. While one can still make comparisons between therapies, it would require further research to be able to definitively say it was the equine-aspect of the therapy that caused the differences in results – perhaps by comparing equine-facilitated psychotherapy to a non-animal outdoor-based therapy.

Chardonens (2009) described a case study of a single eight-year-old boy. 'M' suffered from severe psychological and behavioural problems and was referred to a therapeutic farm for a one year stay, following a year's hospitalisation in the closed ward of a psychiatric institution. A team of mental health professionals and volunteers worked with 'M' using Rogerian person-centred therapy, and specifically person-centred animal therapy. Over

the course of a year they were able to help him move beyond uncontrollable crises, violent and aggressive behaviour, abandonment anxiety, multiple phobias, refusal to participate in any form of schooling, and refusal or inability to connect with any of the professionals attempting to help him. At the end of his stay, he had made progress in his learning and was able to read and write (about animals), had formed a therapeutic relationship and rapport with the therapist who worked at the farm, had decreased the frequency of his crises to one a month (or less often), no longer required medication, and had learned and accepted the rules for acceptable social behaviour. The researcher attributes the success of this therapy to its person-centred approach and to the social and relational abilities the child was able to learn from his interactions with the animals on the farm. The animals were a great motivator, as 'M' had previously been identified as an animal-lover. Through his interactions with them 'M' was able to learn to respect both himself and others, about personal space and intimacy, and that failure to succeed would not lead to rejection (this from the non-judgemental nature of animals, and the unconditional positive regard of Rogerian therapy). Once he was able to establish positive, secure relationships with the animals on the farm, he was able to extrapolate this to the professionals working at the farm. Ultimately 'M' was able to accept a therapeutic relationship and schooling, and agreed to undergo psychological testing which successfully disproved a previous diagnosis of intellectual disability.

While this seems to have been a highly successful instance of animal therapy, there are limitations. This was a case study of a single participant, and 'M's was a singular and extreme situation. However one of the positive aspects of person-centred therapy is that it is highly malleable to the situation of an individual, as it focuses upon the client and their specific needs. While this study is not necessarily generalisable, what it does do is provide a plethora of examples of the ways in which human-animal interaction can have a positive effect on human behaviour and relational styles. The researcher successfully draws from

previous research and theory on the human-animal bond and applies it to the specific situations that were encountered throughout 'M's' therapy. The information contained within this research might be used by future researchers to inform the design of their own studies, or to help with the development of therapy programs for at-risk children.

Dell et al. (2011) presented an exploratory qualitative study on the usefulness of equine-assisted interventions, specifically equine-assisted learning, for treating First Nations and Inuit children who were struggling with substance (primarily solvent) abuse problems. The purpose of the study was to find out whether this was a viable treatment option for the state to invest in, but the focus was on culturally specific, non-Western aspects of the healing process, as this program was being developed specifically for youths of Canada's indigenous tribes. They worked with fifteen participants, roughly halved by gender, and aged 12 – 17 years. The male contingent was described by the Nimkee NupiGawagan Healing Centre, where the research took place, as 'normal' for their cohort, whereas the female contingent was described as 'difficult,' with roughly half of the female participants being briefly incarcerated during the course of the study. The researchers collected data in the form of interviews with participants, as well as the three treatment staff, and journal entries that the youths recorded on a weekly basis during their residency at the treatment centre.

Three key themes emerged from the researchers' engagement with the data: spiritual exchange, complimentary communication, and authentic occurrence. Spiritual exchange referred to an experiential connection with the horse, where participants could exist 'in the moment' with the horses, feel welcomed and accepted, trusted and trusting, and in turn could feel similar things in their relationships with the program facilitators. Complementary communication referred to communication skills beyond the verbal, that interacting with the horses allowed the youths to develop. This involved body language, intuition, and a greater awareness of emotions – both the genuine nature of the horse's emotions and behaviour, and

the way that they as humans are able to disguise their emotions and act in a non-congruent way. Complementary communication also extended to the participants' learnings about mastery over various tasks, and extrapolating their insights to their interactions with facilitators and each other. Authentic occurrence involved the experience of genuine and natural aspects of both everyday life and life specific to the farm-setting. Participants were able to experience healthy physical touch by hugging and petting the horses, something many of them had had negative experiences of with sexual and physical abuse. They were able to learn about caretaking and nurturing, cleaning and hygiene, reproduction and sexual intercourse (as some of the horses were pregnant, or had foals) – all in a safe and healthy environment, where they felt secure and comfortable enough to ask questions and be inquisitive. The facilitators and researchers, coming from an “Aboriginal place of knowing” were able to interpret these themes and how they related to Aboriginal culture, and the ways this had been disrupted and damaged by the historical and ongoing effects of colonisation (p. 330). One of the important findings of this research was that the therapy and farm-setting provided an alternate experiential space, where participants could reclaim aspects of their culture, and cultural way of being. This reclamation came through connecting with nature and each other in a physical immediate way and a more spiritual and holistic way. As the authors addressed, the study was limited by its highly specific topic of enquiry, but despite this it may be useful in informing similar situations in New Zealand, as the history and present circumstances of the First Nations and Inuit peoples mirrors (to an extent) that of the Māori in New Zealand.

Research with adults. While much of the research on equine-assisted psychotherapy has focused on children, there have been a number of useful studies with adult participants. Klontz et al.'s (2007) study on experiential equine-assisted psychotherapy has shown some

positive results. Participants were 23-70 year olds who attended group equine-facilitated experiential therapy. While the researchers do not detail the reasons for which participants sought therapy, they do show that there were significant short and long term decreases in psychological distress, and increases in psychological well-being. Participants reported feeling more oriented to and better able to live in the present moment, as well as less concerned with fears about the future. They also reported decreases in feelings of regret, guilt, and resentment, and greater independence and self-supportiveness. The researchers used the Brief Symptom Inventory, and specifically its Global Severity Index. They found that at baseline, 60% of their participants scored in the clinical range. After the conclusion of therapy, this had improved to 20% (a significant improvement), and after a six month period, this dropped by only 7% (a non-significant decline). They also used the Personal Orientation Inventory, a measure of self-actualisation, or the motivation to meet one's full potential. They found significant improvements from baseline to post-therapy, and slight, non-significant, declines at a six month follow-up point.

As noted by the researchers themselves, the study was not a randomised controlled trial, and so there is some difficulty when interpreting these results as to whether they are due specifically to the therapy itself, or perhaps to some extraneous conditions, or confounding variables in the self-selected sample. They also note that equine-assisted therapy as a whole could benefit from a dismantling study, in order to assess to what degree the horses themselves affect treatment and outcomes, and in what areas. This is a very good point because, as mentioned earlier, when one is supporting the establishment of a new, but potentially more dangerous or risky, treatment there should be an onus to show that it is better, or different, than current established treatments, and in what way.

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Russell-Martin (2006) compared equine-facilitated to solution-focused couple's therapy. Participants were heterosexual couples aged

21 – 45. She found that after six weeks of therapy there was a significant difference between the efficacy of the two therapies, with the couples participating in equine-facilitated couple's therapy scoring more highly on measures of consensus, satisfaction, cohesion, and affectional expression. It is also worth noting that she found no significant gender differences among participants, implying that the therapy program was equally effective for men and women. As the researcher notes herself, there are a number of limitations with this study, the first and possibly more important one being that the therapist involved in the study was also the one doing the research. This presents a significant conflict of interest, as there is no way of knowing whether her (conscious or unconscious) desire to see one therapy outperform the other may have affected the results of the study. In addition, as the researcher also notes, there was no control group. Two control groups present themselves upon first consideration – a waitlist group, comparison to which it would be possible to determine how the couples' relationships may have improved or degraded over time without therapeutic intervention, and also an outdoor therapy control group to see if the change in setting from office-bound traditional therapy to an outdoor, novel environment may have had an effect on its own, thus mitigating the effect of the equine-aspect (Frame, 2006).

Christian (2005) presented a case study of how equine-assisted psychotherapy was used in the context of a residential Christian treatment centre to help a young woman in her twenties in overcoming anorexia nervosa. A variety of mounted and unmounted activities were described, in which the horses were used as props or tools in exercises that functioned as larger-than-life metaphors. These were designed to help 'Lori' gain understanding and insight into situations and relationships in her life, and how they may be helping or hindering her progress in overcoming her difficulties. Lori participated in a variety of other therapies each week, but the equine-assisted psychotherapy was credited with giving her motivation to engage in the therapy process, helping her form and maintain healthy boundaries and

relationships, and helping her develop a greater sense of self-esteem and mastery. These results were attributed, beyond interaction with the horses, to successfully completing tasks that involved lateral thinking, and complex problem solving. There is a possible conflict in that the author is herself an equine-assisted therapist, and worked at the treatment centre during the time that Lori was being treated. While this is not necessarily a problem, one should keep this in mind when reading the article, and most especially when reading the conclusions drawn regarding the success of the equine-assisted therapy program. Because Lori was also participating in a variety of other types of therapy multiple times a week, it is possible that her progress was due to any of these other therapies, or even simply to the therapeutic milieu of the centre (though the latter is unlikely, given the author's report of Lori's criticism and negativity regarding just that).

Alfonso et al. (2015) conducted a randomized controlled trial with twelve participants – young women between the ages of eighteen and twenty nine – in order to investigate the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioural equine-assisted psychotherapy in ameliorating social anxiety. Their participants were initially self-selected. Further participants were selected via snowball sampling, and all were then screened for eligibility via a measure on which they needed to identify a minimum of four symptoms of social anxiety with which they suffered. Participants were randomly allocated to the experimental group, which received the therapy, or the control group, which received no therapy. All participants completed the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale at three different points over the course of the study – first to establish a baseline, prior to treatment group randomisation, then approximately six weeks into the study (called immediate-post), and finally six weeks after the second administration (called follow-up).

One problem with this design immediately becomes clear: it is difficult to interpret results where the control group is a non-treatment group, due to the common effect that

merely receiving attention can cause an improvement in psychological symptoms. A better design would have been to have the experimental group undergoing the new equine-assisted cognitive behavioural therapy, and the control group undergoing regular cognitive behavioural therapy – a therapy which has been shown by a large body of literature to be effective at treating anxiety disorders (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). What the study, as designed, shows is that the equine-assisted cognitive behavioural therapy the researchers have developed may be better than no therapy at all, but it is impossible to say whether improvements would be due to the common factors between this therapy and traditional cognitive behavioural therapy, or the additional presence of horses and the unique activities possible because of them. What they would show with a traditional cognitive behavioural therapy control group is how it performs compared to an established, effective therapy, and that any improvements were likely due to the added benefit of the horses.

The results of the study show, as might be expected, that participants in the experimental group showed a significantly greater decrease in social anxiety symptoms between baseline and immediate-post, and immediate-post and follow-up compared to those in the control, and that these differences were not due to any apparent differences between the two participant groups. The authors postulate that the success of the therapy program was due in large part to the way in which it encouraged participants to divert their attention from themselves onto their equine partner, allowing them to successfully complete tasks, positively reinforcing this and the coping skills they had been asked to employ. Something that Alfonso et al. (2015) emphasised in this study, which has important implications for the current research, was the acceptability and feasibility of the therapy for the participant. Feasibility was judged by the fact that 80% of participants attended every session, and the remaining 20% attended five out of six sessions, though transportation was described as the greatest barrier to attendance. Acceptability was judged by measures of usability, comprehension, and

competence of facilitators, which all participants scored highly. An important facet of therapy, which many studies leave unmentioned, is whether or not the participants themselves find the therapy useful, worthwhile, and effective. Despite its flaws in design, this study does well to mention this aspect of the effectiveness of a therapy.

Earles, Vernon, and Yetz (2015) conducted a study on the effects of the Equine Partnering Naturally program, an equine-assisted psychotherapy program developed and practiced by co-author Jeanne Yetz, on adults suffering from anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. They recruited sixteen participants, twelve female and four male between the ages of thirty three and sixty two. Participants attended therapy in groups of five or six, for a weekly two hour session, for six weeks. Group therapy sessions involved a mixture of learning about horses and horse-involved exercises, and more typical therapeutic topics such as setting boundaries, listening skills, and dealing with stressful situations. Baseline measures were completed a few weeks prior to the start of therapy, and a second set immediately after the final therapy session. The test battery consisted of thirteen different measures, for psychological and physical health, mindfulness, coping strategies, and social support. Each measure, bar one, was recorded alongside its Cronbach's α value, denoting its internal validity (or how well the items on a test relate to each other item) and these ranged from .68 to .97. While this is a valuable piece of information for determining the acceptability of a measure, further information is generally required to evaluate its suitability for what it is attempting to measure.

Earles et al. (2015) found a significant decrease in symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression, in addition to decreased emotional distress, alcohol use, and mindfulness. No change was found for physical health, proactive coping strategies, feelings of self-efficacy, life satisfaction, optimism, or social support. They explained these results as positive, showing that equine-assisted psychotherapy can be effective at treating PTSD in spite of

other important factors that may impact mental health remaining unchanged. There was a significant conflict of interest in this study, in that one of the three researchers is also the developer and sole practitioner of the therapy program under inspection. There is opportunity for, and no way to rule out, either deliberate or unconscious bias on the part of this researcher, given what is at stake for them should the results prove negative. But even taking that into consideration, the results do show a strongly significant improvement in symptoms of PTSD. This study could have been improved with the addition of a waitlist control group, especially given that the participants continued whatever treatment and/or medication they were already receiving, making it impossible to say whether improvements were due specifically to the equine-assisted psychotherapy administered in the study.

The Current Study

As can be seen from the current literature as it has been reviewed here, the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy has a number of areas in which there is room for improvement, and greater research focus. This study has been undertaken by a researcher who is not a practitioner, who has not previously been involved with this kind of therapy, and who therefore has no stake in the results. This is important, as it removes an opportunity for potential bias. Much of the research in the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy has been performed by, or involving, the same professionals who practice it, a situation which is less than ideal, as when it comes time to evaluate the results of these studies, one can never be entirely secure in their legitimacy. This study has also endeavoured to be thorough and transparent when it comes to methodology and procedure. That much of the research published in this field lacks these characteristics has contributed significantly to how difficult it is to critically evaluate these studies and determine to what extent one can accept their

results as reflective of reality. When reviewing the literature, it has often been difficult to discern the exact methods and procedures different researchers used. While there is not necessarily anything biased or nefarious in this, this lack of clarity adds uncertainty to a field already fraught with it.

This study involves participants describing their experiences of equine-assisted psychotherapy, and the conclusions they have drawn about it. It is hoped that this will add important and meaningful information to the current literature, as most of the eclectic theory behind how and why it works, and which aspects of it have the biggest effects in which areas have been developed by practitioners through anecdotal evidence and intuitive opinion. While these participants did discuss some of the established theory with their therapist, in large part their experiences were spontaneous and the conclusions they drew were based on their in-the-moment experience of the therapy. A client's experience and opinion of whether this therapy works, how and why it works, and whether the horses themselves added anything unique or significant is a valuable piece of information that will help to develop a more standardised and evidence-based body of theory, from which future researchers will be able to draw. This study has also been undertaken from a qualitative approach, and specifically from an interpretative phenomenological standpoint. Qualitative research is under-represented in the literature, and for a therapy that involves a holistic and multi-modal experience, it is important that a research method that is able to capture this nuance is used to investigate such an area.

Methodology

Introduction

“ . . . [M]an is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.”

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xi).

The quote by Merleau-Ponty (1962) above refers to one of the key tenets of qualitative methodologies, and especially Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the lived-world context. IPA is a qualitative research methodology that was developed in the mid-1990s as a distinctly psychological research paradigm (Eatough & Smith, 2008). As psychology is the study of mind and behaviour, and qualitative research is used to study the nature of human experience, IPA is used for a close examination and interpretation of the lived-world experiences of human individuals and how they make sense of those experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It is, in many ways, an attempt to bring psychological research back to the natural human, in the context of their physical and social environment, as opposed to the usually reductionist and isolationist principles of quantitative research methodologies.

Research Aims

This research project aims to explore the experiences of individuals who have completed a course of equine-assisted psychotherapy in New Zealand, and how they were affected by these experiences. A qualitative research methodology, specifically IPA, was selected as the methodology of choice due to the emphasis on individual human experience and how participants make sense of their experiences. In much of the research on the greater topic of equine-assisted psychotherapy, to date, there has been little consensus on the efficacy of

various programs, and while there seems to be greater consensus for the mechanisms of success, there is little evidence to back these theories up.

By undertaking a qualitative investigation, with a bottom-up, inductive analysis method, it is hoped to gain insight into how participants have actually experienced this form of therapy, setting aside the anecdotal claims and conjecture which is so heavily peppered throughout the current literature. By identifying what parts of the therapy were most important and what the various aspects of therapy actually meant to participants, we can further our understanding of this form of therapy which shows great potential, and find ways to strengthen its usefulness for those in need. According to Ashworth (2003), the founder of phenomenology, Husserl, advocated his philosophy of a 'return to the things themselves' as a way to combat this problem exactly – imperfectly and partially developed concepts – by seeking greater information about the phenomena in question, as it exists in its contextualised, natural state.

Qualitative Research

When formal psychological research began, the research method most highly regarded was the scientific method, experimental and quantitative, the gold standard of which being the randomised, controlled trial (Ashworth, 2003; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Draper, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). In many ways, and in many other fields, this is still the case, but a penchant for qualitative methodologies is growing more prominent with each passing year, as researchers begin to recognise the limitations of the quantitative approach, and the depth and richness of data that can be gained by using qualitative methods (Ashworth, 2003; Willig, 2008). Quantitative research predominantly takes a positivistic approach, holding to the assumption that the world is constructed of observable, measurable, and objectively

comprehensible facts and phenomena (Aguinaldo, 2004; Ashworth, 2003; Draper, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). Its object is the quantification, measurement, and analysis of causal or directional relationships between variables (Draper, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). These variables are arrived at through the reduction of phenomena into measureable and controllable fragments, representations of a greater whole, just as participant samples are seen to represent greater populations (Ashworth, 2003; Golafshani, 2003). It seeks to answer specific questions of how much, how many, or to what degree, by the testing of pre-postulated hypotheses and expressing results in the form of statistical statements, and likelihoods of generalisability (Ashworth, 2003; Draper, 2004).

Generally speaking, qualitative research is simply research that does not involve results arrived at through statistical methods (Golafshani, 2003). In the field of psychology, qualitative research methodologies (for they are many and varied) are often used to attempt to access the inner world of individuals' experiences (Ashworth, 2003; Draper, 2004; Willig, 2008). Qualitative researchers attempt to capture a glimpse of the phenomenon of interest as it occurs within its natural context, usually with as little input as possible from the researcher (Draper, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). While quantitative research is certainly accepted as a valid method of research for certain phenomena, qualitative researchers consider it inappropriate for the study of the human life-world, consciousness, or the nature and content of human experiences (Ashworth, 2003; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

Qualitative research strives towards the explication of a first-person perspective – always accepting and acknowledging that the inevitable processes of translation and interpretation will render this imperfect at best. It is a perceptual approach, assuming that knowledge is gained through consciousness and thus is necessarily subjective (Ashworth, 2003). It is idiographic and concerned with an in-depth investigation of individual accounts of the phenomena of interest (Ashworth, 2003; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). In many of

the qualitative methodologies, to greater or lesser degree, it is considered that consciousness, behaviours, and ways of assigning meaning to experiences are socially constructed – a result of the social and historical culture of a person's upbringing – and that language is a primary tool with which reality and meaning is conceived (Ashworth, 2003).

Participant selection in qualitative studies is purposive, drawing from a specific group which has had a specific experience, and thus will have something to divulge about the phenomena of interest that will deepen our understanding of that particular aspect of human experience (Draper, 2004). The data gathered is rich and dense, in the form of semi-structured interviews, diaries, focus groups, observation, and in-depth case studies, and data collection is flexible and participant-driven, relying on the insider-knowledge of the participant to show what is most important about the topic under consideration, and minimising the influence of the researcher in the direction data collection may take (Draper, 2004; Thorne, 2000).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an experiential research methodology that seeks to explore, in detail, the lived-world experiences of individuals, and how individuals make sense of their world. Its focus is experiences and the meanings individuals ascribe to them (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Chapman & Smith, 2002; Finlay, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA has roots in phenomenology, or the philosophy of experience, due to its interest in individuals' perceptions of phenomena, and in hermeneutics, or the philosophy of interpretation, due to its focus on translating the meanings individuals assign to personal experiences from a personal account to a concise set of themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, 2004).

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that arose in the early 20th Century and was interested in experiential ways of knowing (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It is concerned with human experience, and its proponents postulated that our perception of the world is as a result of practical experiences with others, objects, and phenomena, and that these experiences are innately meaningful (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Its originator, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), established the original concepts of phenomenology as a way to develop a standardised theoretical basis for the fundamental concepts underlying not only psychology, but all disciplines – sciences and humanities alike. He believed that for most concepts and constructs in various fields of knowledge, definitions were based on assumption and ‘common sense,’ rather than systematic investigation. Husserl wanted to provide a firm foundation of technical terms to facilitate clear, concise, and accurate discussion and further research (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In order to facilitate this, he advocated a ‘return to the things themselves’ as they are experienced by people without confusing or conflicting preconceptions and assumptions.

As this refers to IPA, we seek ‘the things themselves’ by focussing upon the experiences of the individual as they are perceived by that individual, initially setting aside (or bracketing) what we think we already know about the phenomena and instead engaging with the individual’s personal account of their experience of it (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Finlay, 2008). Participants are considered to be experts of their own experiences, and as we are interested in the insider-view, we should attempt to record and present this in as pure a state as possible, without tainting it with what we think we know about the phenomenon (Larkin et al., 2006; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). In equine-assisted psychotherapy in particular, where the current state of the literature is rather chaotic and lacking in systematic enquiry, rife with anecdotal and arbitrary understandings of mechanisms of action and which components are required for successful therapy, this is of particular import. It is important

that the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy be given an opportunity to bracket the ingrained persistence of the largely unsubstantiated claims that govern its practise and allow for the development of new, evidence-based ideas from the fresh well of those who have sought its aid (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Important to Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology is intentionality, or the idea that consciousness must always be conscious of something (Finlay, 2008). In order to perceive, there must be an object of perception, something must be loved, hated, wanted, scorned, etcetera, and this ascription of meaning to the perception of objects translates them to a phenomena of experience (Finlay, 2006). One cannot observe without inadvertently performing some act of judgement, thus the internal self and the external world are linked by intentionality (Willig, 2008). It does not happen that one experiences this, and it means that; the meaning of an experience, and the experience itself are inextricably linked, as one interprets meanings as objects are perceived; "perception is always intentional" (p. 51, Willig, 2008; Finlay, 2008; Larkin et al., 2006). It is because of the intentional nature of consciousness that the study of experience becomes also the study of meaning. Meaning is essential in the study of psychological topics, as it is the way by which external phenomena are translated into internal, psychological ones. It is of signal import in the study of therapeutic processes, as these typically involve another – the therapist – external to the individual seeking support, guiding and helping an individual with distressing internal thoughts, feelings, or emotions. In the case of equine-assisted psychotherapy in particular, the therapy itself focuses heavily on metaphor, using examples contained within the therapeutic setting to illustrate issues that extend beyond it. The horse as adjunct may be used to 'mean' one thing or another, and so a research method that recognises the significance of meaning-making, and sense-making will help to ascertain whether and how these approaches might work, and how various aspects of the therapy program are mentally processed by participants.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a student of Husserl and added to the philosophy the concept of Dasein (being-in-the-world) or the idea that humans are inextricably situated in a greater context, and it is only through this context that we can know of the world (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Finlay, 2008). Dasein rejects the division of self and world, mind and body, instead embracing the idea that the body is an important, and inescapable, aspect of mental experience, and the self is embedded within the world (Finlay, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006). One perceives and experiences through one's body, and as one's body is unique, one's experiences and how one makes sense of them are also unique (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The body is important to both Husserl's and Heidegger's conceptualisations of phenomenology as it is only through one's body and one's embodied consciousness that one can experience the world, or understand reality (Finlay, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006).

The lived-world is what we call the interwoven web of context in which an individual exists, combining social, historical, and physical influences and experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Finlay, 2008). Because one's lived-world is unique, we can only learn about another's experiences through them, specifically through the first-person accounts they may offer us (Larkin et al., 2006). It should be obvious how this aspect of IPA is important to the study of psychotherapies. While any two individuals may seek therapy for the same basic concern, the intricacies of each individual's situation will be entirely unique due to the life they have lived, how they have lived it, who they have lived it with, and also the body they have lived it in. A research methodology that takes the idiographic nature of mental distress, the causes thereof, and how it might be mitigated, into account can only be appropriate in the study of psychotherapy. While it is absolutely true that mental health issues are a concern for people from all walks of life, and are in that sense somewhat nomothetic, is it also true that each person experiences these issues differently according to their lived-world (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

With equine-assisted psychotherapy, the lived body has special significance, as many of the therapeutic techniques used involve physical interaction between the client and the horse, and the ways a participant may react to this, or gain benefit from it will depend upon the enmeshed context of their life and experiences leading up to that point. A savvy individual with previous equestrian experience will likely not experience the therapy in the same way as one naïve to such experiences; similarly a physically more robust or confident client will have a different experience compared to one who is smaller, more vulnerable, or less confident. These differences in people's lived bodies, the subsequent differences in experiences and – most importantly – the meanings ascribed to those experiences, mean that each participant will tell a unique account of their therapy, and the researcher with their own lived-world context will interpret those diverse accounts in different ways (Engelsrud, 2005). It is here that phenomenology intersects with hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the philosophy of interpretation and was originally developed as a method for interpreting and deriving intended meanings from biblical texts. It is now extended to the interpretation of texts in general (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In IPA, data is collected as, or transcribed post-collection into, a written account, and thus hermeneutics is an important philosophical approach for researchers attempting to analyse these pieces of data. According to Moustakas (1994), hermeneutics involves reading a text so that the intended meaning behind it becomes clear and understood. IPA, however, involves a double hermeneutic. In divulging their account, the participant is trying to make sense of their lived-world, and in analysing their account, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant making sense of their lived-world (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Paul Ricoeur (1970, as cited in Ashworth, 2003) considered hermeneutics to break down into two distinct forms – meaning-recollection and suspicion. In IPA we are much

more concerned with the hermeneutics of meaning-recollection, as this focuses upon accurate disclosure and attempts to describe a participant's account as faithfully to their intended meaning as possible (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2004). The hermeneutics of suspicion do have a place within IPA. This refers to a method of analysis in which one attempts to look within the account offered by a participant and challenge its accuracy, and the intent behind what has been divulged (Smith, 2004). All involved in research can be thought of having some often undisclosed motive – a good researcher is seeking to discover new, or previously unknown information, but a participant may be trying to articulate a particular meaning or portray their experiences in a particular light, or indeed may be unwilling to entertain a certain view of themselves or what they have experienced. These motives will become apparent to the researcher when interpreted critically (Smith, 2004). It is important to be completely faithful to the hermeneutics of meaning-recollection in the first instance, and only once this level of analysis is complete should one aspire to reconsider this interpretation through the hermeneutics of suspicion (Smith, 2004). If one does go down that path, transparency, full-disclosure and intensive reflexivity are necessary to make plain any biases, conscious or otherwise, which will influence the results of that enquiry (Reid et al., 2005).

Because the researcher is attempting to develop the formal knowledge on a particular subject, a further level of interpretation where the sense-making activities of the participant are evaluated in light of existing knowledge and theoretical constructs is required (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2004). This interpretative activity deconstructs the action of bracketing, linking what has been faithfully evaluated from the participant's account with current evidence in the field.

Language is obviously an important aspect of IPA, and indeed all forms of research, as data is collected through spoken language, transcribed to written language, and analysed and the subsequent results disclosed via the same. Unlike methodologies like discourse

analysis, the composite parts of language are less important to IPA, compared to the way in which it may be translated or interpreted; the way an experience is spoken of, or described, is at least as important as the experience itself (Vis, 2008; Willig, 2007). Symbolic interactionism has a place here, with its belief that consciousness and language are continually constructed through social interaction (Eatough & Smith, 2008). This is an important consideration for research into psychotherapies, as one is enquiring into a somewhat unusual type of interaction, between a therapist and client (and, in the case of equine-assisted psychotherapy, rendered even more unique by the addition of an equine 'personality' into the therapeutic relationship), and as the method of enquiry involves a further unusual social interaction between researcher and research participant. These aspects of this type of research will certainly have an effect both on how the participant divulges their experiences, and how the researcher both responds during data collection, transcribes the account, and interprets it during analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Engelsrud, 2005).

Procedure

Sampling. This study used purposive sampling. As a research method, interpretative phenomenology is used to explore the experiences of individuals who have lived through a specific phenomenon or event, in this case a course of equine-assisted psychotherapy, and thus purposive sampling is necessary to obtain a small, homogenous sample of participants with the appropriate experiences, and to whom the investigation will be significant (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). As stated by Smith & Osborn (2003), the number of participants one requires is partially determined by how many participants are willing to take part.

I recruited my participants by enquiring with New Zealand-based psychologists and psychotherapists who were equine-assisted psychotherapy practitioners, and who worked with adults. I provided these therapists with information packs, which they then distributed to those clients of theirs that they felt were suitable to take part in the research project. Appropriate participants were specified as being over the age of sixteen, proficient in English, and who had recently completed their course of therapy. Their clinical presentations had to have been mild to moderate (that is, not severe) and participants had to be judged by their therapists to be high-functioning and mentally healthy. I did not exclude participants based on the reason for which they sought therapy. I aimed to gather a sample of four participants, with an even mix of male and female individuals, however due to initial low response, and some participants withdrawing prior to data collection, I ended up with a sample of two, one man and one woman. Although a small sample, this is not considered a set back within the IPA methodology, as IPA has a commitment to in-depth, idiographic analysis, and a number of researchers consider there to be an unfortunate dearth of case studies within the wider field of psychological research in general (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Larkin et al., 2005; Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). As we are not generalising to a greater population, and are instead attempting to provide an in-depth, rich, and full interpretation of the experiences of individual people, having a small sample is beneficial, as it allows a researcher to allocate more time, and engage more fully, with each account. Having two participants will allow the space to focus intensively on each account, while still offering a chance to make tentative comparisons, and identify any experiences that are similar, or strikingly different.

Participants. This research project involved two participants, a male (Tom) and a female (Lucinda). Tom was forty one years old and Lucinda while she did not explicitly disclose her age, was an adult within a similar age range. Tom attended eight or nine one-

hour sessions of therapy at a rural location, over a six month period, starting approximately eleven months prior to the interview. Lucinda attended six one-hour sessions of therapy, over a six week period; five were located at one rural location, and one took place at a different rural setting. She did not disclose exactly when this therapy took place, but intimated that it had been less than a year prior to the interview. Both Tom and Lucinda attended therapy with the same therapist, and both of their therapy experiences followed the same basic format of conversation or discussion with the therapist between periods of free interaction with the horses, or structured activities with or without the horses.

Tom sought therapy to attempt to overcome undesirable patterns of experience or behaviour, which he linked back to a traumatic experience earlier in his life. He had previously attended eight or nine sessions with a clinical psychologist, and one or two sessions with a psychiatrist for the same problem for which he sought equine-assisted psychotherapy. Lucinda sought therapy due to a problematic relationship causing stress and anxiety in her life, and had (approximately one year prior to the interview) attended a course of more traditional therapy for the same problem.

Data collection. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview, of approximately 80 – 90 minutes, which was sound-recorded and later transcribed. The semi-structured interview is an ideal method of data collection, as it provides a guiding, standardised framework around which to structure the interview, but allows the flexibility necessary to fully engage with and follow a participant's particular experience and what they consider to be most worthy of note (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Semi-structured interviewing, compared to its structured alternative, allows room for the development of rapport between the interviewer and the participant, which is important when discussing matters of a sensitive nature, and especially if you want the participant to volunteer information which they feel to be relevant and important (Smith &

Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2008). The interview questions act as a way to draw the interview roughly along the interviewer's line of interest and enquiry, but as we are interested most in the experiences of individuals and the meanings they ascribe to experiences and phenomena, it is more important that the participant feels the freedom to venture down paths which the interviewer may not have covered with their questions, but which may be vital to the interpretation and understanding of the phenomena of interest (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2008).

The interview schedule, which was offered to the participants before the interview, on request, was as follows:

What was your view of the idea of taking part in equine-assisted psychotherapy, before you started?

-Why did you agree to this type of psychotherapy?

Do you feel this therapy has been beneficial or worthwhile to you, and why?

-Has it helped with reducing your symptoms/distress, and how?

What type of things did you do in your therapy sessions?

-Why do you think your psychologist had you do these things?

-Which aspects of this psychotherapy do you feel have been most beneficial, and why?

How did the activities make you feel?

-What parts did you like best, and why?

-What parts did you like least, and why?

How did you feel following your sessions?

Have you ever taken part in a different type of psychotherapy, and what?

-How has this been different?

-Did you feel this was more or less beneficial, and why?

Did you learn anything new about yourself by taking part in this type of psychotherapy?

Did you learn any skills, and what?

-Do you feel they are relevant to your situation, and how?

-Do you feel you can use them in everyday life, and how?

Do you have anything else you'd like to add aside from what I've asked you about?

The interview schedule was developed based to some degree on the one used by Dell et al. (2011) in their phenomenological study of an equine-assisted learning program, which was designed to help First Nations and Inuit youth in Canada in the recovery from substance abuse problems.

Transcription was detailed and verbatim, with care taken not only to record speech, but to also record such things as significant pauses, places where speech wasn't entirely clear, mistakes and moments of confusion, or comments unrelated to the interview, as well as vocalisations such as laughter and sighing (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). After transcription, these transcripts were sent to the relevant participants for approval and editing if they so chose. These final approved transcripts were then used for analysis.

Data analysis. IPA requires an intensive case-by-case analysis of the transcripts of individual accounts of an individual's experiences within a certain domain (Chapman &

Smith, 2002). We are interested in analysing the meanings participants ascribe to certain experiences and certain parts of experiences, as these meanings show how they have understood and internalised these specific experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Analysis in IPA involves the hermeneutic circle, an inductive method of analysis and interpretation. The account is read and processed first in its entirety, so that one will be able to better understand its constituent parts (Eatough & Smith, 2008). One must then interpret said constituent parts in order to better understand the account as a whole; the account being broken down into subordinate themes, which are grouped under summarising, overarching themes, which then coalesce back into a cohesive representation of the account in its entirety. Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) identify four stages of the interpretative process for IPA research: first, the initial reading of the text; second, rough themes described; third, grouping rough themes under overarching themes; fourth, summarising final themes in a table. Each transcript is analysed completely, before any subsequent data sets are engaged with, ensuring that each account is understood in its own right, and without the influence of the accounts of other participants.

In the first instance, analysis requires a circular and repeated re-reading of each transcript, noting thoughts and reactions to each element of the transcript, as they occur (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Chapman & Smith, 2002; Willig, 2008). The initial readings serve to give a holistic overview of the account as a whole, a stage important to the hermeneutic circle (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It is important that the initial readings of the transcript aim to stay faithful to the account as it is written, without allowing the researchers preconceived notions of the subject to influence how the text is analysed (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). The researcher then codifies the text thematically, recording themes where called for and referring to the interpretative comments already recorded (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Willig, 2008). Connections are then drawn between these subordinate themes, and they

are then grouped under overarching themes that, collectively, best represent the experiences of the participant as they have described them, and the meanings these experiences hold for the participant (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Willig, 2008). The multiple thematic structures created for each participant are then collated into a final, overall thematic structure that represents each account, and all accounts together (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Finally, these overarching themes are translated into a succinct and comprehensive narrative of participants' accounts which describes what it is like, and what it means, to experience the situation of interest, illustrated with quotations from the transcripts (Chapman & Smith, 2002).

Bracketing is important at the initial stages of the analysis, when subordinate and superordinate themes are developed, as the researcher is trying to give voice to the participant's lived-world experience. This is necessary to ensure that the unique voice of the participant is heard, and their message is clearly received, without influence by what the researcher thinks they already know about the topic of the interview (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Chapman & Smith, 2002). In the latter stage, when the dissembled thematic structure of the account is coalesced back into a cohesive whole, bracketing is abandoned so that the researcher's interpretative activity might be incorporated into the resultant portrayal of the experience of interest, along with theories and concepts from the greater pool of literature that may be relevant to what has been elaborated (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA is inductive in its analysis of data, and it is possible to tentatively formulate theories from the results of analysis and interpretation, leading to a more abstract form of interpretation (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2004). Thus the process of analysis develops from shallow, descriptive interpretations, towards deeper, more abstract and conceptual interpretations; levels of meaning are layered upon one another, crafting an account which at

once lays bare the constituents of human experience and reveals its ineluctable complexity (Finlay, 2008).

It is important throughout the analytic process that the researcher maintain an open mind, a sensitivity to the meanings imparted by the participant, and a willingness to entertain the participant's ideas and sense-making explanations without judgement or prejudice (Finlay, 2008). Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), a student of Heidegger, referred to this, and the subsequent process of enlarged understandings, as a fusion of horizons. For an individual, ensconced within their own lived-world context, to facilitate the voice of the participant to shine through above and beyond the researchers own conceptualisations of the topic of enquiry, the researcher must allow their horizons to broaden beyond what they know, facilitating a 'fusion of horizons' that expands their capacity for knowledge (Finlay, 2008; Vis, 2008).

In this study. Each transcript was analysed fully, in turn, so that the analysis and resultant thematic structure for each was independent of the other. The process followed for each was the same. The transcript was read closely, with extensive notes taken alongside to put the words of the participant into a format that was easier to follow than the spontaneous and free-flowing nature of speech, but using the verbatim words and phrasings of the participant wherever possible. Notes were also made of possible themes, links, and ideas that came to the researcher as the transcript was read. This body of notes was then re-written and condensed, with reference back to the original transcript when necessary, dropping the parts which seemed less relevant. Using this second body of notes, a series of flash cards were created, each bearing all the notes and pieces of information that seemed at all related to one another, some having a place on multiple cards. These cards were then condensed onto a further set of cards, with repetitions removed and notes that did not quite fit put aside or reordered onto the cards with which they had a better fit. The second set of flash cards were

then laid out in such a way that related ideas and concepts were grouped together, and each group was rewritten onto a further set of cards in a highly condensed manner with the researcher summarizing notes and ideas into thematic concepts. These thematic concepts were considered within their related groups and, from these, themes and subthemes were constructed.

Once a set of themes and subthemes was created for the participant, the original transcript was then revisited and re-read. Each theme was written, following by each subtheme, and as the transcript was read, every quote that might be even slightly relevant was noted alongside, with a page reference for easy retrieval. At the end of this process for the transcript of the first participant, all of these notes were set aside and the process was started afresh for the transcript of the second participant. When the process was completed for both transcripts, the thematic structures for each participant was revisited, and both were amalgamated into an overall thematic structure that represented the experiences of both participants together. This final thematic structure was the one used to write the results, constructing a narrative and description of the participants' experiences that incorporated both the differences and similarities between their individual accounts.

Ethics. This research project was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern (MUHECN 12/097). Participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the details of the research project, their rights regarding participation and withdrawal, and the contact details of the researcher and research project supervisor; all documentation they would be required to sign; and given an opportunity to ask any questions they might have prior to agreeing to participate. Participants signed informed consent documents and, once provided with the transcript of their interviews, transcript release authority documents.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place of the participants' convenience, but in a neutral location (a spare room at the University campus) that ensured safety for both researcher and participant. Refreshments were provided, and efforts made to ensure the comfort of participants. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, before the interview, and after the interview were given a period of two weeks in which to change their mind for any reason and withdraw their data. The participants' emotional state was also considered throughout the interviews and if, at any point, had become upset, stopping the interview would have been offered.

All identifying information has been removed from the transcripts and quotations, and both participants are referred to under pseudonyms. Raw data, transcripts, and consent forms have been kept in a private and secure location, and only the researcher and research project supervisor have been permitted to listen to, or view them. Following the completion of this research project, participants will be provided with a copy to read at their leisure.

Researcher disclosure. The researcher is a postgraduate student of psychology at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand. I have been a horse-owner in the past, and it was this which led to my initial interest in equine-assisted psychotherapy. Like many New Zealanders, I have struggled with issues of mental health in my life, and my connection with horses has aided me with this in the past. My mother, still a horse-owner, swears by horse-riding, and spending time with horses, as a cure for stress, anxiety, and low mood. With this background, I initially anticipated that I would find strong evidence supporting the success of equine-assisted psychotherapy as a psychological intervention. However upon my engagement with the literature of the field I was quickly disabused of this notion. The chaotic state of the current body of research is such that it is hard to tell in which direction consensus leans, and the presence of a large number of anecdotal accounts, or studies of therapeutic

programs peppered with flaws and bias, made me uncertain as to what I would find through my own research project.

I believe that a solid body of literature is important for a therapeutic intervention such as equine-assisted psychotherapy, as there is such opportunity for things to go wrong when you combine potentially vulnerable individuals, and large unpredictable animals such as horses. With this being the case, it seems reckless and unethical for this form of therapy to be promoted as useful and worthwhile without evidence to back up such a claim. Because of this, I have been critical of the literature, trying to expose the flaws as I see them, as it is only through awareness of these issues that future researchers will be able to avoid them. My impression, following the analysis of the data from these participants, is that this therapy has been and can be successful for adults in New Zealand. I believe that the findings of this study will be able to inform the development of a standardised and comprehensive theory as to the mechanisms of action and change by which this therapy works.

With my equestrian background I have attempted to be strict in my bracketing, during my initial readings of the participants' transcripts, and also careful to situate my interpretations within the context of the greater body of literature. I have never participated in a course of equine-assisted psychotherapy, so in my attempts to minimise my own influence on the data and findings, I hope to bring to light the reality of what it is like to experience this therapy, for those who have experienced it. The participants are the experts here, and it is their words and their impressions that are the most important.

Accountability. Accountability, or trustworthiness, in qualitative research methodologies is considered in light of four requirements which a researcher must attempt to fulfil in the design and implementation of their research project: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Gupa, 1981; Shenton, 2004). The degree to which a

researcher can show that their research project's design and execution fulfils these criteria will inform future readers of how trustworthy the results are, and to what extent those results can inform their own investigations. A research project and its findings achieve these criteria through transparency of method, design, and procedure; reflexivity of the researcher; and how well the researcher backs up both their methodological decisions with reference to the literature, and how well they situate their findings within the literature of the field.

Credibility addresses the concern of how closely the results of a study reflect reality – in this case, the reality of the idiographic experiences of the participants (Gupa, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of this study are transferable to different contexts (Gupa, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Dependability, closely related to credibility, refers to how repeatable the findings are, which encompasses how present the researcher's voice is in interpretation, and how transparently the research design and procedure is described (Gupa, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Confirmability ensures that the findings of a research project are due to the actual experiences of the participants, and not the influence of the researcher or the limitations of the research method.

Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) provide a checklist of guidelines one should attempt to follow in order to produce trustworthy research that fulfils the above criteria:

Owning one's perspective. This ties into all four criteria, as it relates to the disclosure and reflexivity of the researcher. When the researcher is explicit about their perspective and potential biases, and the orientation of the research method, it enables readers to critically evaluate the findings in light of this (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). I have disclosed those aspects of my background that I feel are relevant to this research topic, have provided a critical theoretical explanation of the research method and the reasons for its use, and have attempted to provide as true an account of the participants' experiences as possible.

Situating the sample. This also ties into all criteria. Transparency on this subject is important as it enables readers and future researchers to judge to what extent the findings and situation of the participant are transferable, or generalisable, to a current situation or future research (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). Insight into this can also aid in judging how closely the findings reflect the reality of the participants. I have disclosed this as explicitly as possible in my procedure, and also included the transcripts of my data so that a reader may inform themselves if they require.

Grounding in examples. The use of quotations and extracts from the data source is necessary, as it is what ties the interpretation of the researcher to the actual accounts of the participants, ensuring that their voice is made plain, and not solely the voice of the researcher (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). I was careful to err on the side of exhaustiveness when initially sorting extracts from the transcripts alongside their appropriate themes and subthemes,

Providing credibility checks. This is necessary in order to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data is credible beyond their own opinion (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). I have performed member checks by providing the opportunity for participants to edit and approve their transcripts before analysis. I have also had my supervisor review and amend where necessary my analysis and results.

Coherence. This requires that the findings be presented in a way that is well integrated and makes sense, while preserving the voice of the participant and the subtleties of the data (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). I have attempted this by synthesizing a 'master list' of themes that encompasses the experiences of both participants, but ensuring that the similarities and differences between their individual experiences are still made clear.

Accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks. This requires that the limitations of the research project be adhered to when it comes to drawing conclusions (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). This study, due to the restrictions of the number of participants, and its focus on the ‘thick description’ of idiographic accounts can only draw specific conclusions regarding the experiences of the participants. However where appropriate, these experiences have been linked with evidence and examples from the existing body of literature for this field, allowing the degree of generalisability possible from the accumulation of a number of similar accounts.

Resonating with readers. The completed manuscript should be written and presented in a way that immerses the reader in the narrative, and expands their horizons in regards to the topic under consideration (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2008). I hope that I have done so.

Limitations. While this research project draws strength from its efforts towards transparency, accountability, and a focus on meticulously researched evidence, something which is lacking in much of the literature in this field, there are naturally still some limitations.

The number of participants that took part in this project was lower than desired. While the final number was acceptable for IPA standards, the quality of any research can only be improved with the inclusion of more data from which to draw conclusions (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Larkin et al., 2005; Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). This was unavoidable in this instance, due to the constraints of time and participant interest, but a larger sample size would have allowed for greater opportunity for comparison of similarities and differences between idiographic accounts, and given greater transferability to the findings. Because IPA is a methodology that strives to focus closely upon the personal accounts of a few individuals,

generalisability is not the object. As the research stands, it is a limited snapshot of two participants' experiences of one particular therapy in New Zealand. Both participants attended therapy with the same therapist, so that while their experiences were more closely comparable, they are less transferable. As my discussion will have shown, however, the themes which were formed from this data mirror much of the established theory and knowledge in this field, allowing greater trust to be placed in both those findings, and my own.

I have only used semi-structured interviews for my collection of data, precluding the use of triangulation to add greater trustworthiness to my results. I am also a postgraduate student who has just completed her first research project. Before I undertook this study, I had not performed an interview however I read extensively on interviewing for IPA and practiced beforehand, so I believe my interview style was acceptably true to the aspirations of IPA. I have included my interview transcripts so that future readers may judge this for themselves if they feel it is necessary. Because my participants confidently contradicted my choices of words, when they felt it was necessary, I believe that I have not put words or phrases into my participants' mouths, and that their comments are true to their own experiences.

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the themes and subthemes that are a result of intensive analysis and interpretation of the interview data are presented and explained. These are then translated into a narrative account, and illustrated with quotes and extracts from the interviews. The themes are discussed, taking into account their relationship with the current literature. The limitations of the study are then commented upon.

Results

Five key themes delineate the experiences of the two participants as they took part in a course of equine-assisted psychotherapy, how they perceived the therapy itself and how they perceived the changes it wrought within them. These have been synthesised from a close reading of each participant's idiographic account of their experience of the therapy, followed by a fusion of the two into a comprehensive thematic structure that accurately represents them both. The themes, when considered together, draw a picture of experiences outside the everyday experience of contemporary life, where participants exist in the moment and experience not just the natural environment within which the therapy is set, but a connection and relationship with animals – horses – acting in natural and instinctive ways. This therapeutic milieu inspired change in the participants which they had not been able to find through the course of more traditional therapies.

Theme	Subtheme
Transformation into a new self	Transformation
	A new way of thinking and being
Different but complementary to traditional therapy	Different to traditional therapy
	Complementary to traditional therapy
Grounded in the real world and real experience	Natural environment facilitates different conversation
	Experiences with horses made the therapy real and meaningful
	Hands-on, in the moment activity
Spiritual experience beyond explanation	Spiritual and meaningful
	Beyond explanation
	Symbolic representation
Convert and advocate	Overcoming negative preconceptions
	Positive experience
	Advocate for its use

Table One. *Table of themes.*

The first theme is *transformation into a new self*, and is comprised of the subthemes *transformation*, and *a new way of thinking and being*. This theme is understood as the experience of change from an older self, who was attempting to overcome difficulties with

mental health and relationships, to a new self who has dealt with those difficulties and is better able to cope with, and navigate, the challenges of life. One participant, Tom, described this transformation as a journey, while the other, Lucinda, described it more in terms of abrupt change. This experience of change also involved a shift in participants' ways of thinking and being, and the development of a new framework with which to relate to the world. For Tom this involved learning new ways to interact and communicate with others, and acceptance of his life experiences. For Lucinda it involved learning to put herself first, becoming more confident and at ease with herself.

The second theme, *different, but complementary to, traditional therapy*, breaks down into the subthemes *different to traditional therapy*, and *complementary to traditional therapy*. This theme is understood as the participants' experience of the equine-assisted psychotherapy as different to the more traditional and clinical types of therapy that both participants had previously participated in. One participant, Lucinda, found the equine-assisted psychotherapy to be better than her previous therapy experiences, while Tom found them to be different, but complementary experiences. The presence, and use, of the horses as a therapeutic tool was especially pertinent to the participants' experience of this difference, as was the novel outdoor setting.

The third theme, *grounded in the real world and real experience*, encompasses the subthemes *natural environment facilitates different conversation*, *experiences with the horses made the therapy real and meaningful*, and *hands-on, in-the-moment activity*. This theme is understood as the participants' experience of a natural, rural environment, set aside from the everyday experiences of a modern, urban world, and their connection with living, breathing nonhuman beings in a therapeutic relationship. The experiential nature of the therapy was such that it engaged all the senses, and this led to remarkable and memorable therapeutic moments.

The fourth theme is *spiritual experience beyond explanation*, and is made up of the subthemes *spiritual and meaningful, beyond explanation*, and *symbolic representation*. This theme is understood as the participants' experience of their connection, and interaction, with the horses as a spiritual, and fundamentally meaningful experience that could not be explained in words, and did not need to be. For Lucinda, the horses also acted both as symbols for abstract concepts that had therapeutic relevance, and as a physical representation of metaphor, symbolising different things as they were needed.

The fifth theme, *convert and advocate*, consists of the subthemes *overcoming negative preconceptions, positive experience*, and *advocate for its use*. This theme is understood as Tom's experience of needing to overcome the negative ideas that the greater public has of a 'horse therapy,' and embracing this as a positive therapeutic choice that, if integrated into mainstream therapy, could be a powerful agent for change.

Discussion

Theme one: Transformation into a new self. This theme is one that encompasses the transformative nature of equine-assisted psychotherapy, as these two participants experienced it. It is broken down into two subthemes. The first, *transformation*, was a mechanism both participants spoke of consistently. Through the course of their therapy, both Tom and Lucinda transformed into new and, in most instances, better versions of themselves. For Lucinda, this seemed to involve a somewhat sudden and abrupt change, and for Tom the culmination of a therapeutic journey. This theme was present for both in a number of different forms, showing the extent of their transformation, and its reach into many aspects of their lives. The second subtheme, *a new way of thinking and being*, refers to the new ways both Lucinda and Tom learned with which to relate to, interact with, and think about

themselves and their life experiences, those they have relationships with, and the world in general. These new frameworks both came from, and contributed to, their greater transformation into a new version of themselves.

Subtheme: Transformation. Both Lucinda and Tom spoke of the ways in which they changed through the course of their therapy. For Lucinda, transformation was somewhat abrupt. Obvious change occurred immediately after her first session, but the powerful imagery of transformation which she related was a realisation that came later, after her final session. Lucinda commented that, initially,

[I]t seemed to have quite an immediate impact on me ... I think after that first session I went and organised an exhibition, like that very day, like an art exhibition, rather than going hmm, should I? Should I? Hmm, doubt, self-doubt, you know?

She described her change using different metaphors: she had been looking for transformation, “shedding the old skin,” and “the butterfly coming out of the cocoon.” She found this transformation through the therapy, and did not want to go back to the way she had been before. She described the process as the re-shaping of a clay pot on a potter’s wheel, that “the pot had maybe been squashed and reformed.” Following her final therapy session, on the drive home, Lucinda experienced an “awful, awful headache” that was so bad she had to pull over to wait for it to abate. A friend told her that they too had experienced severe headaches in the wake of life changing events. Lucinda embraced this experience as a confirmation of her change, interpreting it as, after its reformation, the pot had to “go in the kiln, to keep its new shape, and that kiln is like the headache. And the pot, the pot was a new way of thinking, a new way of being.” This was Lucinda’s experience of transformation.

Tom described his process of transformation as the final stage of a therapeutic journey, and he described both his therapy and his overall life experiences with mental health problems, in this way. He described himself, prior to therapy, as,

[A] confused 41 year old who was sick of finding certain, you know, patterns kept on coming back that were holding me back both personally and professionally. I was like, I'm done with that now. I'm sick of it. So, that journey... But it was a mental health issue, you know, it's an experience. . . . I've never been to the edge, but, you know, I've been on the journey.

He described the therapy itself as having a “journey-ish nature to it,” and also that “it was the third step in a journey.” Tom had previously attended eight or nine therapy sessions with a clinical psychologist, and one or two with a psychiatrist, and viewed this course of equine-assisted psychotherapy as a “vehicle back into the world,” following these medical and clinical experiences. He explained that his experiences of clinical psychology and psychiatry were helpful to him at the time, and allowed him to learn the facts of his situation. “[T]here are some facts about my situation that are facts, and that are, you know, there's a reason why these things [clinical psychology and psychiatry] work . . . So there were some facts that were established,” but this wasn't enough to complete his journey of acceptance and healing, feeling that “they didn't provide a cohesive world view at the end of it, and so for me, that was putting it all together, and going back into the world with a new framework.”

For Tom, clinical psychology and psychiatry had helped him to a point, but had then left him in a place of uncertainty and abstraction. Equine-assisted psychotherapy provided a transforming journey through this confusion to a place of acceptance. He described this therapy as “a bridge to come back, you know, into the world, having dealt with that, right? . . . [A] way of going from not having dealt with it, to saying, right, ok, that's a journey I've just been on.” This process of travelling from a state of unsettling abstraction back “into the

world” was a process of transformation for Tom, changing from someone for whom there was trauma still undealt with, to a person who could accept even the negative life experiences he had been through, and had dealt with and processed his “darkest hour.”

This subtheme, comprising the participants’ experiences of their transformations through EAP appears to be unique in the literature. While there are comments and speculations as the mechanisms of change by which EAP works as a therapy, the actual quality or nature of that change has not yet been commented upon. The manifestations of this theme seem to be largely due to characteristics unique to each participant, but seem relevant to the way in which they approach therapy, and what they wanted to get out of the therapeutic process. This is certainly relevant to how a therapist might approach therapy with different clients, and how those clients would experience the therapeutic process.

Subtheme: A new way of thinking and being. Both participants gained through their therapy a new framework with which to relate to both themselves and their experiences, and the greater world. A human life is a complex network of social relationships; different relational structures that individuals have to learn to navigate in the day-to-day. Both participants experienced processes by which they learned new ways of interaction and understanding. They were then able to generalise these new modes of operation from the sheltered microcosm of therapy to their more complex and enmeshed daily lives. Through this, both Lucinda and Tom were able to make real and useful change in the way they thought about themselves, their lives, and those around them, and how they acted and existed within the convoluted milieu of day-to-day life. For both participants, the changes to their ways of thinking and being, and the aspect of the therapy that engendered these changes, were firmly enmeshed. Beyond relationships and interactions, both participants experienced change within themselves. That is, not only did Tom and Lucinda experience interactive transformation, but also personal transformation.

Their new insights into their lives and behaviours came through their observation of the therapy horses, and their interactions and the connections they forged with them. Tom's attempts to freely interact with the horses required him to reassess his styles of interaction, if he wanted to successfully form relationships with such "sensitive" creatures. The changes he needed to make to achieve this gave him insight into how he acts in everyday life, and how similar changes might allow him to better navigate the relationships he has with colleagues, peers, and family. Lucinda learned more from structured tasks and activities, where the horses acted as the physical representation of metaphor, and allowed her insight into how her interactions play out in her everyday life, and showed her which parts of her interactive style were undesirable, and thus what she would like to change.

Tom's new way of thinking and being was a complex transformation of his normal modes of operation and communication: his ways of thinking about and dealing with himself and his experiences, and with others – be they colleagues or his family. Tom's experiences in therapy, trying to connect and communicate with nonverbal horses, taught him to seek greater understanding of the people with whom he interacts, and to allow interactions and relationships to unfold on mutual terms, instead of imposing his will. Tom described his change of his "normal modes of operation" which came from needing to "turn off" and "let the horses tell you . . . what's going on." He spoke of trying to find a way to "become part of the child herd" in his house, and that now, instead of wanting "to always fix it because you . . . want the bullshit to stop, but now you can say, well, the bullshit will stop if I let it stop, instead of forcing it to stop." Tom spoke, also, about applying a similar method to his interactions with his peers, that in order to form relationships with others you need to learn,

[T]o put less of yourself in . . . to get something out of it. And so the ability to be less of my... self, rather than imposing my... Well, I can do whatever I want! It's just been the

way I've grown up. I'm now . . . [more] inclined to . . . Allow things to happen, rather than force things to happen.

Tom evaluated this transformation as a new way of interacting. He said that he,

[K]new that I could be more graceful, but I didn't see any point. What was the point?

When it . . . was inhibiting me . . . I had to accept that the other way would actually have a, you know, bigger benefit.

He spoke of now experiencing a "softer version of the world" compared to his modes of interaction prior to the equine-assisted psychotherapy, and said that "there's some subtleties that I didn't have before."

Tom attributed this new understanding to what he learned through his interactions with the horses, and their need for subtle nonverbal methods of communication. Through this he was able to incorporate an entirely new method of communication and understanding into his interactive repertoire.

When you can't use words to explain to an animal why you want to build a relationship with it, you have to go deeper . . . trying to just sort of let the horses know that I needed them and that I wasn't a threat, I had to let them know that I was accepting of their ways.

He learned a greater awareness of nonverbal communication through watching the horses' behaviour, and their reactions to him and not only his behaviour, but his emotional state also. Tom describes using actions to show his intentions: "if they came closer to me, I might make a response and go closer to them, and if they moved further away I might follow them to show them that I wanted to be part of it." He observed that when he was feeling angry or tense, or "discussing something that was very negative, or sad, or difficult, then the horses were generally far away," and when they were "back to the easy part, then the horses would come in." Tom described profound experiences trying to "build a relationship with an animal

that can't speak, that is willing to have a relationship with you, if you understand... horse... land," and simply interacting with the horses in a natural way, such as when a horse, upon Tom's transition into a "more positive, relaxed conversation" relaxed herself, and rolled close-by which, as Tom described, "horses don't do unless they know that they're safe."

Tom was able to take these insights into his professional and home lives, saying that he's,

[N]ow aware certain people just don't like me. . . . Now that's a very different perspective . . . I can't make those people like me, by going in my old style. . . . [A]nd now I'm more... You know, it's okay, well, we can have a professional relationship but it doesn't have to be that we really, really get on.

In addition, he is now able to tell when people are sending nonverbal cues his way, and "now I can read that, I never used to be able to read that."

The participants' expressions of the theme of a new way of thinking and being, generated by equine-assisted psychotherapy, is confirmed in the literature. Previous studies have identified the same phenomena that they each describe. Chardonens (2009) attributed the changes individuals experience in their interactive styles to the intrinsically genuine nature of horses. When a horse reacts in "total authenticity" to the actions, attitude, and emotion of an individual, that person is forced to re-evaluate and become aware of the difficulties they are facing, and the possible solutions to these, if they wish for the interaction to continue – because the interaction can only continue on the terms of the horse (Chardonens, 2009, p. 328). Likewise, Frame (2006) believed that becoming attuned to, and respectful of, the reactions and behaviours of the horses was the mechanism for change. This is what Roberts, Bradberry, and Williams (2004) referred to as resonancy, and what Dell et al. (2011) uncovered in their phenomenological analysis as 'complementary communication.'

Adams et al. (2016) explained that due to their status as a prey animal, which has evolved to be highly sensitive to cues from the environment and those in their social group, horses are ideal therapeutic adjuncts for exploring interactive and relational dynamics. Horses are sensitive to subtle body language and emotional cues, and when combined with observation from and discussion with a therapist, can give insight into interaction that are likely taking place in one's day-to-day life (Symington, 2012).

Tom also said, of his daughter who is on the autistic spectrum, and has “been behaviourally difficult for most of her life,” that “I understand her a lot better now, and I can understand her behaviours . . . It's like she is channelling some communication. Or the not-need-to-speak thing. And I can associate more with that now.” Thus it was learning to understand and pick up on nonverbal communication, via his interactions with the horses, that led Tom to his new way of thinking and being; his new self.

For Lucinda, interactive and personal change were intertwined, as the personal change she sought was an increase in confidence, and a decrease in fearfulness and anxiety, while one of her primary reasons for seeking therapy she was, “problems with this person causing anxiety and stress in my life.” Lucinda was able to transform her interactive style, becoming less inclined to accede to the desires of others and more able to put herself and her needs to the fore. She gained new insight into herself and her behaviours through activities involving the horses and resultant discussions about their behaviour and hers. As Lucinda said, “through the horses I think I saw how I went about things.” For Lucinda, the horses acted as larger-than-life metaphors, helping her become aware of patterns of interaction in which she often found herself. For example, with one particular exercise wherein she was tasked with getting two horses, representing herself and her partner, over an obstacle that represented their relationship,

[T]he white horse went over immediately and you gave it nothing. You gave it no reward. The other horse *didn't* do what you wanted and you gave it all your attention. So that was kind of a very clear, you know I never reward myself for anything.

With another, she was tasked with getting a number of horses to move in the same direction, without halters or leads. Using handfuls of grass to tempt the horses to move towards her made clear an interactive style which she had used before with her partner, of “sex for favours . . . you do this, I’ll give you that type of thing,” and allowed her to realise the how this was problematic in her relationship. A third example was an exercise which required her to build a structure around a horse and move around it three times. The manner by which she completed this task brought her insight into how she arranges her relationships, as the structure,

[R]epresented the rules of your relationship, or how you control them, or just how you kept them in, doing what you want to do, or in the place you want them. . . . Which, like, means I’ve got this person in this structure, but I’m free to do what I want. And I didn’t think that was very fair. . . . People should be completely free.

Subsequently, when Lucinda was tasked to do the same thing with no structure, she “was surprised at how easy that was. So that made me think, yeah maybe the person wants to be with me just because they like being with me, or . . . And I don’t need to try and keep them in place.” Each of these exercises prompted Lucinda to reflect on the ways in which she treats herself and others, and in all of them she discovered the kernel of an undesirable behaviour or tendency. Lucinda’s decided to change, and bring these behaviours more in line with the person she hoped to be. This was her transformation into a new self.

Further to these discrete instances of realisation, Lucinda was able to become less anxious and fearful, and more confident and relaxed, both in the therapy setting when she

was able to start working with a horse she had initially felt was “too big and scary,” and in her general daily life. She experienced a “theme of feeling less anxious, fearful, and feeling more at ease with myself. And confident.” This was a goal she had sought from this therapy, and its achievement signals a new way of being for her. Lucinda’s newfound confidence and ease with herself meant,

It’s almost like I don’t care what other people... I didn’t care about the reactions of other people. . . . I’ve had a tendency to be way too mindful of what other people think, but I was like just me, my path, and my life. And everyone else is just doing what, whatever they’re doing. It’s like, that feeling that I didn’t have the right to pursue my own path, prior to it, and then feeling like, yes, I have as much right as anyone else, *of course*.

Upon our meeting for the interview, Lucinda was assertive and confident, and said, “Right, I need coffee and chocolate!” (I had provided bottled water and sandwiches). She commented that,

I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t have done what I did prior to that therapy. It’s like, my rights, and what I need, and what I want, are actually just as relevant, or actually, the most relevant! . . . So if my so-called boyfriend does anything I don’t like, I tell him immediately.

With this comment, she shows the success of her desire for change, proving by her actions that she has transformed into a new, and more assertive and confident self. She continued,

You could say I’ve become more selfish! Which, for some people is not good, but for others is really good. . . . [F]or someone who’s incredibly... Not unselfish, but denies their own... I dunno... Subservient... Makes themselves submissive... It’s probably really good to become the other.

She became “far clearer on what I want and have me centre-stage instead of him.”

Lucinda attributed this change, in part, to the imposing physical presence of the horse, saying that,

[H]orses are quite big and could be considered, one could be afraid of them, because they're big and strong, so to, it's almost like they could represent one's fears. So if one faces that, and gets friendly with that, maybe the fears evaporate.

Further to this, she attributes her transformation in part to the way in which the equine-assisted psychotherapy was different to her normal realms of operation, saying that "maybe it was just doing something different, and out of my normal sphere . . . [I]ike doing something challenging. Not that, well it wasn't really challenging. . . . Taking me out of myself." She questioned "[w]hether it's just doing something different, or that sort of odd, out of the box challenge." Lucinda's expression of the process of change has been confirmed in the literature. Selby and Smith-Osborne (2013) comment in their article that change comes from discomfort – that people will only seek or enact change if they are in an uncomfortable situation. Similarly, Burgon (2011) felt that in order to improve self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, it is necessary to participate in activities with a component of risk. Lucinda's supposition that it may have been the difference from her normal sphere of life that led to change, for her, supports this idea.

Tom's personal transformation was more discrete, compared to his interactive change, though the two were related through his development of greater understanding, and a more intuitive interactive style that accepted the choices and opinions of others to a greater degree. Tom now has "a different set of emotional needs, if you will. Maybe emotional needs where before I didn't have any." Tom learned, through therapy, to be "more in touch with feelings and all that sort of emotional side of myself." Chardonnens (2009) posited that interactions with horses require honesty and sincerity, and for a person's behaviour and outer expressions to be congruent with their inner feelings and emotions. Because horses can, and will, pick up

on subtle body language and affective cues, interaction with them can cause an individual's hidden or suppressed emotions to be forced to the fore. This process is seen in Tom's disclosure above.

He was able to learn to accept his experiences as they are, as opposed to "saying, oh well, what does that mean? You know, looking to someone for an answer." Speaking about his life experiences and the traumatic nature of some of them he said, "There is an acceptance that it's not... I'm not alone (A), B, that it's not catastrophic, C, that I can go beyond it, those experiences, there are ways of growing through it and this is one of them." He found himself "able to accept *that* as a part of my life, rather than . . . looking to someone for an answer." Tom was able to accept that his experiences "are, they have happened, that doesn't mean that they are anything other than that they've happened." He elaborated that,

I just accept it now, accept that . . . it's part of my life. It doesn't make it a bad part, if you will, even though it was negative, it's not a bad thing in its own right. I'm still here, you know.

This was a change to a new way of thinking for Tom. His revelations of himself and his experiences in therapy showed him to be someone who was constantly desiring answers and explanation. The ability to accept his past experiences and live in peace with them, and himself, shows a positive change for Tom. Tom's journey through dealing with his past traumatic experiences, and coming to a place of acceptance where he can cope with them and not be overwhelmed, lends further evidence that equine-assisted psychotherapy is an effective therapy for aiding in recovery from trauma, which previous studies have also found to be the case (Johansen, Wang, Binder, & Malt, 2014; Yorke et al., 2008).

Both Tom and Lucinda expressed some uncertainty over these profound changes to their outlooks. Tom felt at times, "this new little neurosis, if you will, and it's like the new,

you know, sort of the benefits of it, I've got to get used to the benefits, right?" He felt that he had, "stepped out of the cut-and-thrust of that, there's nothing wrong with it, but at the same time I've sort of lost a bit of confidence, in a way, because this is a different me in a lot of ways." As Tom describes, his change in outlook and the new framework with which he views the world will take some getting used to, as it is substantially different to how he related to the world prior to this therapy. Like Tom, Lucinda too felt the uncertainty of the changes she had wrought. For Lucinda, this manifested as a "fear you're going to lose anything you've gained. But being fearful of losing it doesn't help keep it." When likening herself to a butterfly coming out of its cocoon, she commented, "[P]oor little butterfly, I don't want it to go back into the cocoon!" indicating her satisfaction with the new person she has become, and her desire to maintain the effects of her transformation.

It is not surprising that both participants experienced change and transformation as such a dominant part of their therapeutic experience. Therapy is a process of change and learning, from a place of negativity, stress, or trauma, to a place less so, where one can cope with these issues and become better equipped to face the world (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). Successful therapy, which both Tom and Lucinda proclaimed this therapy to have been, implies that change has taken place.

In the existing literature, interactions with horses have been shown to lead to increased self-esteem and self-confidence, decreased phobias, decreased anxiety, and a decrease in the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Bachi et al., 2012; Bass, Duchowny, & Llabre, 2009; Burgon, 2003; Burgon, 2011; Chardonnens, 2009; Earles et al., 2015; Frame, 2006; Holmes et al., 2012). Some of these studies have suffered from methodological flaws which affect the confidence with which one can consider their results, or like this research project itself, are conducted in specific circumstances with limited transferability. Compared to this study, they have focused on different demographics, or used

strikingly different therapeutic methods, such as therapeutic riding, or immersive residential therapies. Despite these differences, these studies and the present study have all shown that interactions with horses are able to decrease feelings of anxiety, fearfulness, and self-doubt, and increase feelings of self-confidence, assertiveness, and being at ease with oneself. A significant point is that, though a number of the aforementioned studies used therapeutic riding as an intervention, this is not – in this instance – necessary. This is important to note as horse-back riding carries the potential for injury and things to go wrong, so if the same results can be arrived at without that risk, it is worthy of note.

While Tom did not disclose if he had ever had a diagnosis of PTSD, he was seeking to move past traumatic experiences he had been through in the past, and to find a way to deal with them beyond the clinical and medical methods of explanation, diagnosis, and medication. He claimed that his experiences in therapy did just this, teaching him acceptance of his past, and the trauma he had been through, and allowing him to change his perspective on them so that they were no longer a negative force in his life. One of the reasons that Lucinda sought therapy was to help her overcome her anxiety and fearfulness, and she felt that her success in this was a theme throughout her experience in therapy – an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, and a decrease in self-doubt and anxiety. These changes are the processes by which Tom and Lucinda transform into new selves.

A further area of the literature relevant to Tom and Lucinda's experience of transformation is the change EAP seems able to engender in participants with their interactive styles, and manner of relating to those around them. Studies have shown that interaction with horses in a therapeutic setting can improve the development of empathy and respect, and the development of communication skills beyond the verbal – what Dell et al. (2011) called 'complementary communication' (Burgon, 2011; Chardonnens, 2009; De Rose et al., 2011; Symington, 2012). Russell-Martin (2006) also showed positive results for relationship

problems, with equine-assisted couple therapy. Though, as previously mentioned, these studies are not directly transferable to the situation of this research project, it is significant that the same, or highly similar experiences were had by the current participants. Lucinda learned to set boundaries, and to identify when such boundaries are maladaptive, in her relationship. She gained insight into negative patterns of interaction she had been involved in with her partner, and learned to put her own needs first. That she felt it was a successful therapy in this sense, and has now managed to remove herself from the relationship she had felt trapped within, this research project can stand as further evidence as to the usefulness of equine-assisted psychotherapy for individuals seeking help with relationships.

Tom commented extensively upon how his relational style, and manner of social interaction, were both strongly affected by his experiences in therapy, and how he was able to learn to be less imposing and more subtle in his interactions with others. This research project shows that such changes can occur in a range of different therapeutic environments, and for a wide range of individuals.

Theme two: Different but complementary to traditional therapy. This theme is one that encompasses the distinctness of the experience of equine-assisted psychotherapy, compared to other forms of therapy. It is broken down into two subthemes. The first, *different to traditional therapy*, was prominent in both accounts, as both participants had attended courses of more traditional therapies prior to their courses of equine-assisted psychotherapy. Lucinda had completed a course of therapy to which she was referred through the same mental health program that led her to equine-assisted psychotherapy. Tom had taken part in, first, a course of therapy with a clinical psychologist, and then a pair of sessions with a psychiatrist. Both Tom and Lucinda spoke about the difference between these more

traditional (and in Tom's case, distinctly clinical) therapies, and the equine-assisted psychotherapy they had participated in most recently. Their views of the difference were similar, however Lucinda emphasised that the equine-assisted psychotherapy had been more beneficial for her, compared to the previous therapy; Tom emphasised strongly that aside from their differences, he felt the equine-assisted psychotherapy to be complementary to his previous two therapies, and felt that the three as a whole resulted in a complete, and successful therapeutic journey. This view of Tom's, of the equine-assisted psychotherapy as complementary to traditional, mainstream therapy, is the idea behind the second subtheme: *complementary to traditional therapy*.

Subtheme: Different to traditional therapy. One of the primary differences between the two types of therapy was, as should be obvious, the presence of horses as a nonhuman, nonverbal third party. There was also a fourth party present, in the form of the horse handler. Much of the research claims that the horse handler is an essential element of the treatment team, but neither participant mentioned this individual in more than passing, implying they are not so integral to an individual's experience of therapy as might otherwise have been thought (Symington, 2012). Lucinda considered the horses to be a necessary component of the therapy, mentioning first that a friend had commented that, "it might have worked, even if they were bricks!" but Lucinda herself "doubt[ed] it." She later followed this up by saying, "I don't think it would have been the same with bricks at all. Or dogs, cats." Tom also felt that the horses were uniquely suited to their work as adjuncts to the therapy. He commented that they had "that unique non-verbal part," and that therapy would not work the same with most other animals, that "horses, I think, are unique in that regard." For Tom this related to the "odd relationship between humans and horses," and the "sensitive" nature of the animals. Lucinda felt that one aspect of this unique nature of horses was that they "were like mirrors . . . they reflect the way we are." The therapist had mentioned to her that their attitudes when

around her, “very peaceful . . . and quite gentle,” were due to their reflection of her own state, and that if they got “stubborn, that’s because they’re feeling that in the person.” Tom commented on this aspect of the horses’ nature also, saying that,

[T]he horses did things that reflected, the most amazing part of it was when we were discussing something that was very negative, or sad, or difficult, then the horses were generally far away. . . . [W]hereas if we were . . . back to the easy part, then the horses would come in.

Tom mentioned a specific time, the “anger session,” when his anger prevented work with the horses. They were “right over there, you know, ‘let’s hide behind the tree!’ You know, ‘this guy’s having issues today!’” And even when he was feeling calmer, “they were having none of it.” This naturally receptive nature of the horses served to bring into stark relief the feelings and emotions of the participants, alerting them to their own nonverbal cues and making it difficult to deny or ignore the way they were feeling. Lucinda referred to the horses as being “like spirit guides, and they were gonna help me. And they had a, a knowing. Just a being. A wisdom, which they shared through osmosis somehow.” About her previous therapy experience, she said that she “didn’t have the power of the horses there. . . . They’re a pretty big tool to have in your toolbox, as a counsellor.”

As has already been mentioned, horses are able to pick up on and respond to subtle emotional cues, and those of body language and nonverbal communication. This manifests in therapy as a ‘reflective’ ability (Adams et al., 2016; Johansen et al., 2014). In their reactions to these cues, the person participating in therapy can see their own state of mind, and emotional state reflected back at them. This is a powerful tool, when compared to more traditional office-bound therapies. The horses’ reflective abilities can be seen from the descriptions from Tom and Lucinda, above. A therapist might be able to talk to a client about their unacknowledged affective, or attitudinal states, but when it is made clear by a half-tonne

animal, it is impossible to ignore. This type of reflection can reveal to the individual that other people are likely to react to their actions and behaviours in a similar manner to the horses (Johansen et al., 2016). This is the “stunning piece of learning” that Tom experienced, and that he applied to his daily interactions with colleagues and family. Because of this, Tom now “gets into less situations.” Smith-Osborne and Selby (2010) refer to horses as “living biofeedback mechanisms” which can force individuals to see the reality and consequences of their behaviours and styles of interaction (p. 300; Frame, 2006; Symington, 2012).

Tom felt that it was the “nonverbal nature of communication [with the horses],” and their interactive style, that proved one of the biggest differences. To him, the horses were a reflexive, “unpredictable”, and spontaneous element of the therapy, contributing to a process that was “very unstructured, very fluid,” and contrasting to the “prescriptive . . . techniques that different psychologists use to do certain things.” Tom described his therapy experience as “sitting in a field with a horse.” His therapy sessions were structured with a “short conversation at the start, a conversation in the middle, and then a conversation at the end . . . but what happened with the horses was entirely unpredictable.” Through his observation of this behaviour, Tom was able to gain insight into his own emotions, behaviours, and interactive styles. He described how the more blatant methods of communication that humans often resort to weren’t helpful when dealing with horses, saying,

[I]f you go into a field with horses and you say, right, I’m coming in, I’m gonna say hello, you’re going to make me feel welcome, you’re gonna get fuck all. They’re gonna be standing on the other side of the field and go, you don’t understand horse theory, do you? Right? Come back when you do.

He put particular emphasis on the value of nonverbal communication, saying, “[w]hen you can’t use words to explain to an animal why you want to build a relationship with it, you have to go deeper, and you may or may not find the resources to do it, but I did.”

Tom felt that, “context is everything,” and that the natural, rural, outdoor context of equine-assisted psychotherapy facilitated conversation, disclosure, and rapport between himself and his therapist in a way that simply wasn’t possible with traditional office-based therapies. He elaborated that,

There’s a huge difference between a field, fresh air; strip lights and a desk. Even with a nice chair, and a very softly spoken, friendly, smiley, well-experienced, well-trained, highly professional therapist, [the CBD] is not a field, right? And it never will be.

Tom also felt the unusual setting, “outdoors, in . . . a fenced arena with some grass around it . . . so there’s a little bit of space,” “was enjoyable because we were outside. And it was summer, so it was sunny. . . . So it was very nice to be outside in the beautiful environment, you know, streams, babbling brooks, and birds, and you know, nature.” He felt the comparison between this and “a clinical office, with a door” was “stunning, how much of a difference that makes.” Tom was interested in equine-assisted psychotherapy because, after his previous experiences, he was seeking “more a personal journey than a clinical journey.” He felt that there “was nothing wrong with a clinical setting necessarily, but it has its limitations because it has more of a formal boundary,” and that a strength of the equine-assisted psychotherapy was that it was “less bounded in note-taking and report-writing.” Because he was not talking to a professional with a medical label, and wasn’t expecting a diagnosis as with his previous therapies, Tom was able to tell,

[T]he same story [but] I didn’t find myself making a formula out of it, whereas going through the sessions with the others, I found myself, you know, deciding to tell it a certain way. Even though I didn’t want to, necessarily, you do. And in this, I didn’t, I found myself going and exploring it, and coming to some conclusions about it from a different [perspective].

Frame (2006) describes this as a parameter shift, where the therapeutic framework must be expanded not only to include a horse, but also to include the novel, naturalistic environment. An issue with some previous research studies in the consideration of whether EAP is an effective therapy, and whether it is more or less effective than a control, has been the lack of a control condition that appropriately deals with the differences of both the horses, and the naturalistic environment (Russell-Martin, 2006; Trotter et al., 2008). The question has been, whether the horses themselves add anything unique to the process of therapy, above and beyond the novel outdoor setting which, as mentioned by Tom and often in the literature, facilitates “a very different conversation” (Johansen et al., 2016; Klontz et al., 2007; Selby & Smith-Osborne, 2013). While Tom was struck by this quality of the environment, and Lucinda did comment upon it briefly, for her it was much more the presence of and interaction with the horses that had therapeutic effect. Both Tom and Lucinda felt the horses were uniquely suited to therapeutic work, and facilitated experiences not otherwise possible through more traditional types of therapy.

Lucinda was less affected by the physical setting, and more by the way the experiential aspect of the therapy anchored her in the here and now in a way that traditional therapy had not. Both participants felt equine-assisted psychotherapy differed in that it was better grounded in real life; a more concrete experience. Lucinda felt that traditional therapy had been too abstract. She used an analogy that,

[T]he first lot was like going to a restaurant for a meal, but just looking at the menu and not actually getting the food. You can only do so much looking at the menu. . . . [Y]ou’re just dealing with what’s up here, and you’re not going outside of it. You can think about what’s on the menu, but the horses actually provided something real.

She felt that the exercises put her “in the here and now, in a way that maybe regular therapy wouldn’t? With regular therapy it might be like wandering off in your thoughts.” The

experiential aspect of equine-assisted psychotherapy was an important one for both participants. Tom also found the “holistic” nature of the experiences possible through equine-assisted psychotherapy to be a useful and positive experience, feeling that his experiences with his previous talk-based therapy had been limited.

[W]ords are a very... It's hard to describe the experience using one, but they're a... Poor excuse for an experience. An experience that is nonverbal, given that we have lots of senses, not just our ears, experiences that are visual, physical, multi-modal . . . are deeper than, you can get more into what we as humans can experience. The verbal experience, in a clinical setting, is valuable, but is limited.

This grounding element of experience was not just useful for its “hands-on” and “in the moment” qualities, but also in the way that such profound experiences engaged in with the horses proved singularly memorable. Tom commented that,

[T]hat made it real for me, because it's those... Talking to anybody who cares and is a professional, has value. When you have . . . another party that isn't human, as part of that experience, for me, I didn't know what to expect, but it really made it real and I was able to, sort of, associate the conversations with how the horses . . . behaved, and that sort of grounded it, and later you'd see how that conversation yielded this, and go, okay, so that was a purpose for the conversation. . . . And the difference between that and a psychologist was, yeah, I mean it was a good conversation, but once you left there was no lasting memory, other than a conversation.

He mentioned further that “[t]here were some experiences in there that I think I will never forget. Whereas there were conversations that I had with my psychologist, most of which I *have* forgotten.” While Lucinda didn't comment precisely upon how memorable the equine-assisted psychotherapy was, it is interesting to note that she, too, found the more traditional office-based talk therapy to be remarkably non-memorable, commenting that “I can't, I don't

have a clear memory of it. I didn't seem... Oh I dunno, maybe it was effective at the time," and later, reiterating that "I can't remember enough about it." Only time will tell whether the same will be true, for her, of the equine-assisted psychotherapy, but it was certainly a clear concept for Tom that the immersive experiences with the horses made the equine-assisted psychotherapy especially memorable, and almost self-maintaining, as he was able to,

[G]o back and remember, . . . there's a very strong experience I can go back to and go, oh yeah, that's how I got that thought and the reason why I was sort of able to move beyond that was because of that experience, and I can go back to it, and reengage with it, and use it again, because it's a very, very real thing.

In addition to this, Tom mentioned that while most of this sessions followed the same pattern of interacting with horses, followed by conversations, he did have one where he didn't interact much with the horses, and interestingly, while with "[e]very other session there was something special happened," with that particular session, "that didn't happen." Lending credibility to the idea that it was the interactions with horses that made the equine-assisted psychotherapy so memorable, he added that, "I don't remember the details of what I talked about particularly." This seems to show that it was the special moments experienced with the horses that differentiated it from regular therapy and made it especially memorable, rather than standard and forgettable the way Tom's other therapies and, indeed, Lucinda's previous therapy had been.

Lucinda specifically seemed to feel that the traditional therapy she had undergone previously had not been as effective as the equine-assisted psychotherapy had been. She mentioned that "it was for the exact same reasons. Problems with this person causing anxiety and stress in my life." She was unable to fully recall the details of the therapy, and while mentioning that "maybe it was effective at the time," she also commented that "I do

remember thinking that I wasn't enjoying those sessions much, and I didn't feel I was getting much out of them."

As Selby and Smith-Osborne (2013) point out, by its nature that is so strikingly different, equine-assisted psychotherapy may motivate and attract those who have not found success with more traditional clinical or office-based therapies. Lucinda certainly felt it was more enjoyable than her experiences with traditional therapy, and both Tom and Lucinda expressed the pleasure of attending their sessions, that it was "peaceful," "gorgeous," and "stunning." Both Tom and Lucinda said they would return to the therapy if they ever required it, and Tom was motivated to return for a second session even when he did not fully understand or get comfortable in his initial session. Johansen et al. (2014) note that about 30-35% of clients who participate in an 'evidence-based' psychotherapy do not improve, and it seems that EAP could be uniquely suited to help those individuals who have not had success with more traditional therapies. Roberts et al. (2004) described the experiences of nursing students on a short placement at an EAP facility for children. One of the revelations of the students was that a therapy does not have to follow traditional conventions to be effective, and this research project shows this to be true.

Subtheme: Complementary to traditional therapy. Tom expressed a strong concept of the equine-assisted psychotherapy as a complementary experience. He "was looking for, not necessarily a replacement, but a complementary set of experiences to balance the whole thing out." He found his previous therapies "useful from an explanatory purpose, but it wasn't useful from a, you know, I didn't, there wasn't a transition in any way. It was just a function-solution, versus a personal solution." This concept of the equine-assisted psychotherapy being transitional was iterated by Tom, with his description of it as a "vehicle back into the world, if you will." He commented further that,

[Y]ou go and see these people [clinical psychologists and psychiatrists] because they, that's their job, it's to sort of go, and be able to be precise. If you're just left with that level of a precise description of yourself in an abstract, clinical way, you go oh, right, where's the bridge back? And for me . . . it was sort of almost a bridge to come back, you know, into the world having dealt with that, right? Rather than just being, say left with the clinical answer, you know, you then go off and explore it so it's sort of like a, you know, a way of going from not having dealt with it, to saying, right, ok, that's a journey I've just been on.

Tom said he was not only “glad” that he had participated in the equine-assisted psychotherapy, but beyond that, if he hadn't, “there'd still be something left to process.” He used an analogy of caving, wherein,

If you don't like going into small spaces, go caving! You'll get over it. Right? If you don't like dealing with your dark thoughts, go deal with them! Cos you'll get over it. Getting to the other side . . . If you go through caving, and you cave through a very very narrow hole, and all of a sudden you've got to jump off a waterfall... Phewph, you know? It's a bit of a stretch. And leaving the psychiatrist's office, unless you go off and have a whole bunch of, you know, debrief . . . it just doesn't make sense. You're sort of left still going phewph! . . . You've gotta have a transition sort of thing. . . . Don't go and process your darkest hour, if you can't, if you're gonna end up on a waterfall, a hundred feet above the water, with no other way out. That's not a good situation. And you could feel like that, and it felt like that. You know? So, it is a... I wouldn't go into the process of processing without knowing what the journey... You know, how to get back to the real world again.

Tom viewed his previous therapies as necessary, but limited, and the equine-assisted psychotherapy as necessary, in its own right, for closing off the therapeutic journey in a way

that his previous clinically and medically focused therapies had been unable to do. As he said,

The clinical therapy was... It needed just to happen, because there is a, there are some facts about my situation that are facts, and that are, you know, there's a reason why there things do work. . . . So there were some facts that were established, but they didn't provide a cohesive world view at the end of it, and so for me, that [the equine-assisted psychotherapy] was putting it all together, and going back into the world with a new framework.

In this one sentence, Tom sums up his opinion succinctly, showing that the more clinical therapies were necessary but so too was the equine-assisted psychotherapy at the end of it. He later mentioned that one might combine the two, stating that it "add[s] a lot of value, some of these other techniques that are... That I think should be part of mainstream therapy."

Tom did express uncertainty, however, that the equine-assisted psychotherapy would have been as effective as it was had it been the first, or only, type of therapy he sought – further solidifying his concept of it as complementary to more clinical therapies. He said,

I give compliment to all the aspects of it, not just the one. I wouldn't say that the horse therapy was the only one I should do. For me, it just happened that it was the third one, so I can't say that the others weren't relevant, cos I might not have been able to go through that conversation in my equine-assisted therapy had I not gone through it in clinical.

He commented further that,

[I]t was the third step in a journey. It might not have been as... I might not have been able to debrief in that way as easily if I hadn't been on stage three, if you will. So I don't know. And I might not have enjoyed that first conversation if it had been the first time I'd gotten round to sort of discussing stuff.

Johansen et al. (2014) commented that there is an increasing number of psychologists using integrative therapies in their practice. As both Tom and Lucinda noted, the addition of horses of the therapeutic process is a powerful tool for any psychologist to be able to use. Human beings are complex creatures and to think that the same therapeutic method will remain effective throughout the course of therapy, when the individual has (ideally) changed themselves, is counter-intuitive. The ability to incorporate aspects from an eclectic range of therapies, especially horses as an adjunct, is an incredibly powerful (Johansen et al., 2014).

In direct agreement with Tom's opinions and experiences, Corson and Corson (1979, as cited in Chardonens, 2009) believed that animal-assisted psychotherapy's strength was in its facilitation of adaptive social behaviours and interactions, and that it should be used in complement with traditional therapies as opposed to in substitution. This was the way in which Tom experienced equine-assisted psychotherapy, as the third step in a therapeutic journey, and it is a point of view that makes a lot of sense. If one of the concerns of equine-assisted psychotherapy is the potential for risk and physical harm, using it as a final stage in a therapeutic process, or journey, mitigates that risk. A high proportion of individuals can complete traditional therapies successfully but some, like Tom and Lucinda, are either not engaged or are left feeling that their journey is incomplete (Johansen et al., 2014). If equine-assisted psychotherapy was awarded a complementary position, and clients referred to it as necessary, the experiences of Tom and Lucinda suggest that there is a real chance it will be effective.

Theme three: Grounded in the real world and real experience. For both participants, a significant part of the therapy experience was the naturalistic outdoor setting, combined with the physically interactive, "multi-modal" aspects of engaging with the horses, and not least the connection and development of relationships between participants and the horses. This theme is one that encompasses this experiential nature of Tom and Lucinda's

encounters with the therapy. It is constructed from three subthemes. The first, *natural environment facilitates different conversation*, echoes one facet of the way in which equine-assisted psychotherapy differed from the participants' experiences of traditional therapy. This theme involves the way in which the natural environment anchored the therapy and conversations that the participants had with the therapist in real life. Away from the clinical abstraction of a psychologist's or psychiatrist's office, the participants were able to discuss and explore issues in a more natural and holistic way. The second subtheme, *experiences with the horses made the therapy real and meaningful*, refers to the profound and enlightening experiences both participants detailed of their encounters and developing relationships with the horses with whom they worked in the therapy environment. Both the experiences in their own right, and the discussions of them that followed provided learning opportunities for the participants, from which they were able to engender real change in their lives. The third subtheme, *hands-on, in-the-moment activity*, refers to the physicality and immediacy of the tasks and activities, spontaneous interactions with the horses, and overall experience of the therapy. The tasks required purposeful physical activity, and an engagement with the present moment that is often missing from more traditional therapies, and indeed from many aspects of everyday contemporary life.

Subtheme: Natural environment facilitates different conversation. For Tom, the natural and rural environment had a strong impact on how he experienced the therapy, and how he was able to relate to the therapist, and he felt that even "if you were to take a psychologist and go and sit on a park bench, you'd have a very different conversation." He felt that "context is everything" and that this therapy was, "more relaxing than an office which has got the word psychologist, Dr So-and-so on the door, you know, that's a very artificial environment." He felt that this novel setting had an effect on the rapport which he built with his therapist, commenting that,

Sitting in a field, with the sun shining, with someone who's had her own life experience that have brought her to this journey . . . of learning what she needs to be an excellent partner in a process like equine-assisted therapy wasn't an academic journey at all. It was an experiential journey for her that led her to this personal transformation to go off and guide people like me from my darkness to, you know, a little bit less of that. . . . So what sounds like a very woolly 'go sit in a field' is more.

He spoke further that even though the rural setting retained some of the trappings of urban life, it made a tangible difference to his experience of therapy.

Even though there was a stable here with cars, and other things going on, it was very, very peaceful. So it was very nice to be outside. If it had been a colder day, I don't think it would have mattered. But it was, of course, very beautiful. . . . It just wasn't a clinical office, with a door. Stunning, how much of a difference that makes.

Lucinda, too, echoed these sentiments, stating that her therapy sessions took place on two different farms, and that "[e]very day was absolutely gorgeous!"

Christian (2005) felt that the naturalistic setting was important for therapy as it got the client outdoors and "engaged in solving life's problems" (p. 65). This implies that the naturalistic setting is intrinsically a part of the experiential aspects of equine-assisted psychotherapy, which reflects the meanings that the participants of the current study assigned to it. Frame (2006) commented that this change in scenario required a change in parameters to accommodate not only the horses themselves, but the full environmental setting. This change in parameters led to a therapy experience that is unique from those which are office-bound, an experience clearly described by Tom.

Subtheme: Experiences with the horses made the therapy real and meaningful.

Both Tom and Lucinda iterated the concept of the horses grounding the therapy in real life,

the real world, and real experience. Lucinda commented that, “it was like real life, larger than life, symbolism.” The horses were “living beings, living, breathing beings, hanging out there, just eating grass, interesting. Very simple life,” and they “actually provided something real.” Tom felt that his experiences with the horses made the therapy real and meaningful. He described a “spooky” situation, wherein he was talking about his mother and one of the horses,

[S]he had lost a foal very early after she had given birth, so this horse was very motherly, she had mum issues, as a horse . . . and when I was talking about that, this horse, she came right over, and, you know, just sort of joined in the conversation – just sort of came over, and then, as if it was part of her world, and then, we’d resolved the conversation . . . she was relaxed, and she rolled, and you know, that’s the sign of a horse being very unthreatened, to roll in the presence of a predator.

Tom felt that experiences such as this were what “really made it [the therapeutic process] real . . . sort of grounded it.”

This aspect of the therapy made it easier to remember how certain revelations, and realisations happened and allowed him to, through his strong memories of these powerful and “fundamentally meaningful” experiences, re-experience and “reengage” with the memory, remembering how certain parts of certain experiences led to realisations and breakthroughs, providing a sort of ongoing and self-perpetuating therapeutic maintenance. He said that since he finished his therapy, things have remained “the same” because he has such “strong experience[s] I can go back to and go, oh yeah, that’s how I got that thought and the reason why I was sort of able to move beyond that was because of that experience.” In their study on the effects of EAP on psychological distress and wellbeing, Klontz et al. (2007) reported impressively low rates of recidivism at their follow-up measurement period, but did not speculate on to what might be the cause of this. If Tom’s and Lucinda’s experiences are at all

representative, it is possible that the ability of such experiences to have such a lasting impression could be a useful area for future research. This aspect of EAP is one that is particularly powerful, as it empowers the participants to maintain their own growth and breakthrough, without necessarily having to turn back to a therapist for help. The profundity, and lasting effect, of these experiences is easily understandable through Tom's description of one particular instance where,

[T]wo horses kind of, you know, locked me in a corner of the field, but not in a threatening way, in a protective way. They sort of, you know wanted to bring me into the herd with a protective kind of behaviour.

He said that he's heard,

People talk about their, having a – quotes – safe place, or a happy place, or wherever is in your mind where you can go when the walls are closing in... I didn't really know what people meant by that, but I have one now. Because my experience of being herded, and protected by the horses is a memory that I can go to where there's just this, it feels like the ultimate safety. There's no, you know, if anything had come that was a threat to me in that moment . . . I know that they would have defended me. And *that's* a place, that's a memory or an experience that you can't build another way.

Tom spent an hour in a field, trying to gain the trust of a “male horse who had a history of not being willing to work with male humans” enough that he might be able to put reins on the horse. The therapist had told him this would be a “very, very unlikely [occurrence], because he never lets anybody do that, and as it turned out the horse did let me do it.” He later commented that,

[W]hen you can get a horse to let you put on the reins with no... No English, no language, no previous relationship, you've got... That's a whole different set of things that just wouldn't come out of a, you know, psychiatrist's couch.

These concepts of protection and trust reflect one of the themes that Dell et al. (2011) interpreted from their study with Canadian Aboriginal youths – that of spiritual exchange. It involved the time spent connecting with the horses, and how this was able to lead to greater connection with the therapists and other treatment staff. It reflects the idea of an interactive exchange. While Tom needed the gain the trust of the horses, he also felt that they needed, or at least wanted, something from him. His ability to change his relational style to be more gentle and accepting, catered to put the horses at ease, was something he could offer back to them.

Tom said that the experiences with the horses were “interesting things [that] happened that we then talked about.” The experiences themselves, while profound, and therapeutic, did not encompass the totality of the therapy. Subsequent to interactions, and spontaneous experiences with the horses, the participants would discuss what had occurred and how they had processed it with their therapist. This was one of the primary aspects of the work of the therapy, but it was the experiences themselves that anchored these conversations in real life. It was a memorable experience in his second session that initially got Tom “into it,” when one of the horses he was in the paddock with, while having a conversation with the therapist, came up and,

[P]ut his snout right here! As close as he could possible go, nose touching nose! And goes [snorting noise] like that, right in my face, and I'm like going... I guess that's a hello. And then immediately after that, then the female [motherly] horse rolled.

Tom said that, “after that I was sorta into it, because I was like, if there’s gonna be more experiences like that, then I just won’t ever... I won’t have any other place.” Tom was clear, however, that it was the combination of real experience and therapeutic discussion that gave the therapy its true power. He commented that,

[I]f I went now to . . . just go and have a therapy session for the sake of it, it wouldn’t happen... Because you would just be arbitrarily looking for these experiences, as opposed to it just happening . . . [I]t was like, so relevant and poignant a conversation, that’s why it was important, not just snorting in my face, which would be... You know... Interesting.

This relates to Selby and Smith-Osborne’s (2013) comments that while interventions involving horses may be therapeutic, they require the structure and activity of therapy, and interaction with a trained professional, to count as such. Merely interacting freely with a horse, while it may still be a powerful experience, cannot constitute therapy. It also relates to their belief that horses may facilitate the establishment of a therapeutic relationship. In Tom and Lucinda’s experiences, the activities and spontaneous interactions with the horses provided opportunities for discussion with the therapist, and it was these discussions that led to insight and revelation, but also gave greater meaning and specialness to the interactions with the horses. In Tom’s experience, it was also the setting and context that facilitated the formation of a therapeutic relationship. He commented on multiple occasions that the context and the natural outdoor setting facilitated a different, broader, and more exploratory kind of conversation with the therapist than being inside on a psychiatrist’s couch.

According to Selby and Smith-Osborne (2013) the therapist observes as much as they speak, and the participant is often engaged in problem solving activities (as was the case with Lucinda’s therapy) which engage them on multiple-sensory levels. This aspect of the therapeutic process leads to an entirely different quality of relationship and allows the client and therapist to explore topics that they might not be able to, in ways they might not be able

to, in an office setting. This also aligns with Tom's notion that it was the context, and the interactions with the horses, that led to conversations that were fundamentally different to what he experienced in clinical and medical therapies. Lucinda also had a notion that the purpose of the exercises was so that she and the therapist could both learn how she went about things, and the discussions that followed the exercises led to her new realisations about herself and her behaviours and tendencies, a notion that the literature supports (Alfonso et al., 2015).

This was an important point for Levinson (1969, as cited in Chardonens, 2009), that simple interaction with animals, no matter how receptive, will not solve problems, and that there needs to be planned therapeutic intervention – an idea noted firmly by Tom, and alluded to by Lucinda. While the experiences engendered by interaction with the horses were profound and meaningful, it was the subsequent conversation and discussion that allowed the participants to see the experiences as metaphorical, or relevant to their daily lives, and the issues for which they were seeking help (Symington, 2012)

Lucinda spoke less about distinct experiences that unstructured interaction with the horses facilitated, and more about the value of building relationships with the horses with whom she was working. She described the therapy initially as, “hanging out with horses. It was communing with horses.” Lucinda described the horses as “equal partners in this thing,” fulfilling a different role and a different place compared to the normal relationship between horse and human – which usually involved the dominating act of riding, something she felt would have been inappropriate in her relationship with these animals. She talked about the affection the horses displayed, describing one instance when she was,

[G]rooming one of them, and then another one came over and I was grooming it, and then the two horses started grooming each other and it was kinda like a little horse... A horsey

lovefest! And then as I left they came over, they sort of accompanied me to the gate, just of their own free will, just like to say ‘Hi!’ and it was really sweet!

These relationships that formed between Lucinda and the horses with which she worked were genuine and spontaneous, not forced or contrived by either Lucinda or the therapist, and it was these real and genuine interactions were a part of what grounded the therapy in real life, for Lucinda. She felt a connection with the horses, and felt it was reciprocated. She felt they were “almost like spirit guides, and they were gonna help me. And they had a, a knowing. Just a being. A wisdom, which they shared through osmosis somehow.” She felt attracted to working with specific horses, and was able to choose which ones to work with in the sessions. “[T]here were other horses I just didn’t want to... I felt no affinity with.” However, this also changed over the course of the therapy as Lucinda herself changed.

[O]n the last day when I was hanging out with four horses – Pepper, Bonnie, Rocky, and Harry, the white horse – and Harry, the white horse, kept rejecting me, didn’t want me to pat it, whereas the other three did . . . Cos on the first day, the reason I picked it was because the rapport seemed...

This changing relationship is interesting in light of other comments Lucinda made, that she had initially felt that the white horse represented hope, and certain aspects of herself, but that through the course of the therapy she had changed enough that she felt a different horse represented the new her more closely. This change seemed to be perceptible not only to Lucinda herself, but to the horses also, as can be seen by the change in rapport between Lucinda and Harry. This alteration of relationships as people change mirrors the fluid nature relationships can have in the real world, and reinforces the ways in which this therapy uses honest and natural interactions and development of relationships as part of the healing process.

Subtheme: Hands-on, in-the-moment activity. Lucinda spoke about the immediate, in-the-moment aspect of the therapy. Her experience of therapy was much more focused around exercises and tasks which she needed to find a way to perform, compared to the more free-flowing and spontaneous interactions of Tom's experience. Lucinda found these exercises the most enjoyable part of therapy, saying, "I liked it when she gave me exercises. When she said right, do this, do that, even if it seemed impossible," and that "I wanted more fun exercises." She found the tasks "very hands on, you know, the exercises. Get the horse to do this and then, observing, me seeing how they react and how I react to how they react and the whole exchange." These physically involved activities reflected how events unfold in real life, and were what Tom described as "multi-modal" – experiences that, allowing for and incorporating the full range of human senses, "can get more into what we as humans can experience." Lucinda found that,

The exercises put me in the here and now, in a way that maybe regular therapy wouldn't? With regular therapy it might be like wandering off in your thoughts and with this it was just so hands-on and and there's something about that.

Selby and Smith-Osborne (2013) talk about the horses facilitating experiences in the 'here and now,' which extend throughout the many different sensory ways in which humans interpret experiences. Johansen et al. (2014) noted that therapies based only on conversation may fail some individuals who are unable sufficiently verbalise emotions and perceptions. As Tom said also, these therapeutic methods have value, but are limited.

These tasks and exercises which the participants completed were used in a metaphorical fashion, the horses and other props representing aspects of herself and others. The ways in which she attempted to complete the activities gave her insight into how she treats herself and others in her daily life. She commented that "it was like a larger than life, hands-on dream." Lucinda also admired the presence and immediacy of the horses, their

“ability to just be, and be who they are, and not... You know. There’s no worry in a horse.”

She felt that “I think too much. . . . Thinking too much is a huge problem,” and the therapy helped ground her in the “here and now.”

The exercises involved such things as:

[G]etting all the horses to move in one direction at the same time, you know, no halters and leads, I tried to get one to do in the direction, but of course I can’t lead them all, so to me it was impossible. This is utterly impossible, why are you asking me to do this, when it’s impossible? But then I thought, okay, I noticed they were eating grass as horses do so, so I dashed off and got a great big handful of grass and just shook it in front of them, and they all came to me.

The discussion about this exercise brought Lucinda to a realisation of an undesirable pattern of thinking in her interactions with others that “if you want people to do something, you’ve got to know what they want,” and of trading sex for favours with her “troublesome” partner. Another exercise involved, “getting the horses over the obstacle, like there was a little jump, about that high and I had to get two horses over, one represented me and one represented my... partner.” Lucinda needed to actively problem solve to complete the task, and the many ways she attempted to “woo” the horse representing her partner into doing what she wanted, and the discussions following this exercise, revealed to Lucinda that she doesn’t reward herself, and gives too much attention to her partner when he refuses to do as she wishes. Another instance involved,

[T]hree horses in a paddock . . . she said, find objects in the paddock to represent your family, as in family you were born into. All that was available was some firewood. So I got a piece of firewood for each member of the family, and put it down on the ground. And then, I had to introduce the horses to my family.

Lucinda found this exercise to be the most powerful, and felt very emotional even conducting the task of picking up and placing the pieces of wood.

The importance of existing in-the-moment is illustrated by Roberts et al. (2004) in their descriptions of nursing students' experiences observing mounted therapy for children. This type of therapy is not directly relevant to the current study, as the therapy mentioned in this research project was ground-based and lacks some of the poignancy that immediacy and the hands-on experience would have had in the setting of a mounted therapy. However, Roberts et al. (2004) spoke of the resonancy that develops between human and horse, and that the children were taught to use relaxation breathing as a way to get the horse to stop. In order to do so, authenticity between the child's thoughts and actions was required, and a focus on both themselves and the horse in the present moment. If their mind was focused on other matters, this would bleed through to their body language and emotional cues, and the horse would not stop. This is particularly relevant to some of Lucinda's experiences in her metaphorical exercises, for example when she was unable to get the horse representing her boyfriend across the obstacle representing their relationship. Her feelings of being unable to extricate herself from that relationship bled through, and her expectations that her boyfriend did not want to end the relationship affected how she felt and behaved when attempting the exercise.

Tom, too, engaged in structured activities, though he focused far more on the unstructured free interaction with the horses. He described an activity that came about because he found himself "very angry about what I'd brought," calling it "the anger session." His anger and tension precluded any interaction with the horses, as "the horses were right over there, you know, 'let's hide behind the tree!' You know, 'this guy's having issues today!'" And so he was instructed instead to, "construct something that represents how you feel about the anger side of things," using equipment from around the arena. The method of

his construction, and the arrangement of the structure (“unstable”) gave him insight into the concept of anger, and how it as an emotion is constructed. He was then given the option to “leave it here, if it makes you feel better to leave it, and you can sort of, say you built it, or you can take it apart if it helps for you to have built it and take it apart,” and his decision in that regard, as with Lucinda’s exercises, led to conversation and discussion about his actions, the reasons behind them, and how they might relate to real world situations in his greater life.

Symington (2012) commented that it was a strength of equine-assisted psychotherapy that clients are able to learn about themselves, their relationships and their patterns of behaviours in a supportive and non-judgemental setting, and then generalise these to other situations in their life outside the contained microcosm of therapy.

Theme four: Spiritual experience beyond explanation. This theme is one that encompasses the concept of “communing” with the horses, not only in a practical and relationship-building way, but in spiritual sense. This is connected to their nonverbal nature, and their existence in a realm of pure experience and reaction, beyond words and beyond the structure and composed calculation of human society. It is broken down into three subthemes. The first, *spiritual and meaningful*, refers to the way in which the participants interpreted their experiences connecting with the horses as spiritual experiences, and intrinsically meaningful. The second, *beyond explanation*, refers to how both participants were happy to accept that they could not explain exactly how the therapy ‘worked,’ or exactly why their interactions with the horses should be so therapeutic. The third subtheme, *symbolic representation*, refers to both how the horses represented, for Lucinda, archetypal abstract concepts, but also how they were practically symbolic, able to be used in a metaphorical fashion to represent not only different people in her life, but also different aspects of Lucinda herself.

Subtheme: Spiritual and meaningful. Spirituality was a theme that was interwoven most strongly throughout Tom's account of therapeutic intervention. Tom described his experiences throughout the therapy as spiritual experiences, in contrast to how he might have described things before taking part. He said, of himself, that,

I'm not a spiritual guy. I'm a hardcore atheist. I'm a scientist, I'm a rationalist. . . . The word spiritual, for me, would have always been a word that would not have entered my description of myself because it has. . . . It's a loaded term. Everybody thinks it means God, you know, religion, . . . a bunch of well-established belief systems that I don't subscribe to. But I would say that interacting with the horses without using language, . . . having gone into a field and literally followed a horse around for an hour, with the sole purpose of letting it near me, and letting me come near it, and proving to it that I'm not a threat, and it knowing that it's got issues, and I've got issues, and we're both, we both, you know, push things away and for that to happen was. . . . That was a spiritual experience.

Tom spoke of experimenting with drugs in his youth, in search of "the other side," and as an attempt to open "the door of perception." However, he didn't feel that any of the experiences he collected through drug use "were spiritual experiences. . . . I was manufacturing, and looking beyond the normal state of the neurons, and that was fascinating and an interesting experience," but with equine-assisted psychotherapy, it "wasn't an experiment. That's it. So I had some experiences that were genuinely – quotes unquotes – my own definition of spiritual." This describes Tom's idea that behind the spiritual nature of his experiences was the fact that they were purposeful, and thus "fundamentally meaningful." As he elaborated further,

I have experiences now that I can say are sort of spiritual experience, if you will, that I'm comfortable with, that are meaningful, that kind of have a purpose, rather than being people's sort of arbitrary going and looking for a spiritual experience [through drug use].

Lucinda also described the equine-assisted psychotherapy as “quite a spiritual experience.” She spoke of the “power” of the horses, and felt that it “worked on a very deep level.” Parts of the therapy felt to her like a, “really, really powerful dream.” For Lucinda, the horses were “almost like spirit guides, and they were gonna help me. And they had a, a knowing. Just a being. A wisdom, which they shared through osmosis somehow.”

As has already been mentioned, Dell et al. (2011), in their research with Canadian Aboriginal children with substance abuse problems, found a theme centered around spirituality also – spiritual exchange. As the authors mention, the concept of the spirit sits at the center of their cultural ways of knowing, saying that, “it is only through getting beyond the self that humans are able to connect with the rest of creation” (McCormick, 2000, p. 26, as cited in Dell et al., 2011). While Lucinda drew a strong spiritual meaning from her experiences, the fact that Tom felt it too, and so strongly as he did, is telling as to how powerful a link there is between spirituality and connection with horses. Tom described himself as a “hardcore atheist,” totally removed from the idea of spirituality before taking part in EAP. Now that he has, he is much more open to spiritual experiences, and much happier to describe them as such. Dell et al.’s (2011) concept of a spiritual exchange also related to the feelings of trust that developed between the children and horses. This is reflected by Lucinda’s experience of the horses as “spirit guides” with which she had a special relationship, and whom were going to help her somehow.

Subtheme: Beyond explanation. Both Tom and Lucinda described their experiences as beyond their ability to fully explain or describe, and both accepted the impossibility of attempts to do so. Tom’s concept of spirituality, and Lucinda’s of “mystery” and “power,” seem to both align with this concept of experiences beyond full comprehension. Tom described this aspect of his experiences when he said, “I don’t *need* to use my standard M.O. to explain it. I’m happy to accept it as a more natural thing.” He felt that his experiences, in general,

[W]ere fundamentally meaningful, and I can't pin on, you know, I can't explain using a scientific, you know, I can't explain. And I'm happy not to explain them. Whereas in general, that's just not me, you know, I'm normally one of those people who go, if you don't have an answer, you're not a happy camper. But I'm okay with that – quotes unquotes – spiritual nature, whatever it means, and it did expand my horizons.

In similar fashion, Lucinda spoke of the power and mystery she felt from her interactions with the horses. When asked about what part of the therapy she felt had caused the changes in her confidence and assertiveness, she said, “Well that's the mystery. That is the mystery.” She elaborated about the therapeutic process as a whole that, “it was just so hands-on and . . . there's something about that. It was pretty mysterious in a way and I think it worked on a very deep level and I haven't quite figured it out yet.” Like Tom, Lucinda seemed happy to accept that this mystery was one she hadn't solved, and might never solve. What mattered was more the experience itself, than the measured analysis of how it worked.

Dell et al. (2011) spoke about, related to the idea of a spiritual exchange, that just being with the horses was, for the children, a deep and special relationship beyond words. Tom and Lucinda, too, felt the inadequacy of words in the explanation of their experiences, and did not feel it necessary to do so.

Subtheme: Symbolic representation. For Lucinda, a significant facet of the therapeutic process was the symbolic nature of the horses. For Lucinda, the horses represented abstract, symbolic concepts beyond their mere physical actuality. She had an initial concept of a white horse as a symbol of hope, describing an anecdote of how this came about:

I went to [another country] with my boyfriend. And . . . I ended up getting into this dreadful emotional state over there and fighting with my boyfriend, and... And at the

lowest point, I, I saw this etched out horse from the train, down in [a part of the country]? There's a great big white horse etched out on the cliff. . . . I looked out the window of the train, and saw this, and just saw that as a symbol of hope that things would... Like the light at the end of the tunnel. . . . And then the white horse became this symbol for me, but I hadn't quite found the horse, or didn't know what the horse quite meant. But then, when he said horse therapy, I immediately thought of that.

Lucinda was "quite into symbolism and signs" and, "the minute he [her referrer] said horses, I burst into tears," because, for her, the horses "represented something very deep in me, deep in my soul." She felt that the "symbolism of the horses penetrated the psyche; beyond the realm of thoughts." Yorke et al. (2008) spoke about the therapeutic process as a "corrective emotional experience . . . overcoming demoralization via the installation of hope" (p. 18). As horses, for Lucinda, represented hope themselves, one can see how this was such a powerful experience for her.

Lucinda, like Johansen et al. (2014), also described the horses as a representation of fear, and felt this had been helpful for her overcoming her anxieties and developing her confidence, because,

[H]orses are quite big and could be considered, one could be afraid of them, because they're big and strong, so to, it's almost like they could represent one's fears. So if one faces that, and gets friendly with that, maybe the fears evaporate.

Through this example she showed how the symbolic nature of the horses was useful through the course of the therapy, facilitating the therapeutic change she was seeking. She explained this idea further when she spoke of viewing the horses "as almost like spirit guides, and they were gonna help me. And they had a, a knowing. Just a being. A wisdom, which they shared through osmosis somehow." To Lucinda they represented a guiding force that was able to represent what she needed most at the time. She felt that they were like "real life, larger-than-

life, symbolism. Like a really, really powerful dream . . . and the symbolism of it, it's just, sort of, it's gone right into wherever it needs to be." For Lucinda, the horses symbolised,

[L]ife force, or energy, power, strength, but they're also... Their ability to just be, and be who they are, and not . . . There's no worry in a horse. They are, they're got a lot of attribute which are very, well, which one would want. Which, well, I would want.

This idea is reiterated by Symington (2012) with their comments that horses live in the present moment. They are unconcerned with past and future. This can be a powerful realisation for an individual struggling with anxiety, fearfulness, and self-doubt.

Further to these abstract representations, Lucinda also was able to utilise the horses in a practical sense as physical manifestations of issues with which she was grappling. At times, different horses represented different aspects of herself, and at times the same horses might represent herself and her partner – the relationship with whom was a source of distress for her. She described a situation of picking the horses to work with, and said,

[T]he first two, there was a white one . . . I had to pick a white one cos of my symbol. . . .

[A]nd then I picked another horse the first time, so the two horses, and at the end of the session, [the therapist] said that the two hoses I'd picked, the white one was the bottom of the pecking order, and the other one was at the top of the pecking order. And so I thought about that . . . I do often feel like I'm either at the bottom or the top, and never, seldom anywhere in between? Like totally lacking in confidence, or over confident.

In later situations, "the white horse, represented me, and the other one represented my partner." In an exercise where this was the case, the way in which Lucinda interacted with the horses gave insight into the way she treats the people the horses represented:

So this white horse that represented me, I got it over the obstacle [representing their relationship] very easily, then I tried to get the other horse over it and he utterly, he

refused. He would not budge, you know, came right up to it but would not get over it. And well, you can't pull a horse over an obstacle. And I didn't know how to make it get over it. So I ended up trying to woo it and, you know, groom it, gave it some grass, just generally paid it a lot of attention, and then would lead it back to the obstacle, hoping it would sort of like me enough to get over it? Didn't work! But [the therapist] pointed out afterwards, well, the white horse went over it immediately and you gave it nothing. You gave it no reward. The other horse *didn't* do what you wanted and you gave it all your attention. So that was kind of a very clear, you know I never reward myself for anything, but I was, you know, yeah.

In an exercise where Lucinda had to choose pieces of firewood to represent the members of her family, and then introduce horses to them, the way in which she went about this brought Lucinda to realisations about what those horses now represented to her, and what that meant:

[W]hen I introduced them, the white, I took the white horse to the family first, and just said here's, here's my family, but I didn't say to the family, here's Harry. I just said, here's my family. . . . But then with Pepper, I said, this is so and so, this is so and so, this is, I introduced them all individually, and I said, this is Pepper. So I thought, possibly, Pepper was a new aspect of me. . . . [T]he white one was. . . Represented me at the beginning, whereas the black one might have been the new pot [which she had changed into]. So I had to introduce it.

Lucinda felt that the ability to use the horses as metaphorical tools, to represent different "larger than life" aspects of one's life, and one's unconscious mind, was a powerful part of the therapy. She thought that because of this,

[I]t would be good for anyone, definitely. I think everyone would, it would mean something different, or, it's looking at a Ror- you know, those inkblot things? You know,

they just mean something to everybody, something different, but something. It's like a mirror. The horses were like mirrors.

Because of this, the horses could not only symbolise different things to different people, but different things to a particular person, as they changed over the course of therapy. Frame (2006) investigated the opinions and theories that practitioners held about the mechanisms behind their work with adolescents. She found that they believed the horses and interaction with them provided physical object representations of the youths' relationships in their lives. Despite not being adolescents, this was distinctly true of Lucinda also, and to a less definite explicit extent, Tom (as for him they represented more the relational styles he might aspire to). As Symington (2012) noted, they allow individuals to see, through metaphor, what is happening in their life, and lets them see themselves as they truly are, not merely how they wish to see themselves.

Like Lucinda, Symington (2012) felt that EAP is about fitting the approach to the client, and not the other way around. As Tom and Lucinda had quite different experiences, but with many of the same underlying themes, so too is EAP flexible for what different people need. This has been demonstrated earlier in this discussion, wherein it was shown that EAP can have the same effects, though the therapeutic processes, and participants involved might be very different. Because of the different 'personalities' and characteristics of the horses, they can mean different things to different people, or to the same people at different times – as they did for Lucinda (Symington, 2012).

Theme five: Convert and advocate. This theme represents the idea that equine-assisted therapy, as a non-traditional and non-mainstream therapy, is viewed with something close to derision by the general public, but if one can overcome these negative preconceptions it is, instead, a positive and useful experience. Only one of the participants, Tom, expressed these sentiments to any significant extent, but for him they were a

remarkable aspect of his experience of equine-assisted psychotherapy. He felt that his experience of the therapy was a very positive one, and that he would both recommend it to others, and if he were ever in such a situation, advocate its use on a community level. It is composed of three subthemes. The first, *overcoming negative preconceptions*, was something Tom tried to do from the very beginning, viewing it with an, “open-mind” but also something he had to grapple with from his peers. The second, *positive experience*, refers to the true experience Tom had with the therapy, and how it felt both during the therapy and considering it afterwards. The third, *advocate for its use*, refers to how Tom was so converted by his experiences in therapy that he felt that, aside from overcoming negative preconceptions, its use should be promoted as a positive and useful mental health intervention.

Subtheme: Overcoming negative preconceptions. Tom felt that the equine-assisted therapy and other non-traditional therapies similar to it suffered from “negative, non-science press,” causing prejudices that needed to be overcome. Tom spoke about how before he participated in the therapy he,

[M]ight just have gone, oh, that’s all voodoo, you know, give me a chemical, you know, it’s just the brain, it’s neurons, and you know there’s much more to . . . these complementary . . . Yeah, I dunno, complementary medicine, cos that’s all . . . There’s a lot of negative, non-science press about it, but they add a lot of value, some of these other techniques that . . . I think should be part of mainstream therapy.

Initially he began his therapy trying to be “open-minded . . . I tried not to judge it,” but in his initial session, despite having observed a session which his daughter participated in and being impressed by it enough to want to try it for himself, he felt there was “a soft, you know, what did that feel like? Describe it. And I wasn’t quite sure, you know, whether or not . . .” But while he thought it was,

[A] little bit weird! You know? I'm better off talking to a clinical psychologist, because I can talk about it. Whereas, you know, whether a horse doesn't let me touch it or not, well, how should I interpret that? Should I be offended? No, it's a horse!

He was still willing to give it a full chance, and see what it had to offer him. Tom had to overcome feelings of this type of therapy being "all voodoo," and keep in his mind that he was hiring a professional therapist, and not a "voodoo person." He spoke also of the stigma some people hold for such therapies and experiences, describing how people of his acquaintance reacted with,

'[W]hy would you go sit in a field with a horse?' and you learn, is it, I called it horse whispering for some people, because it made them think it was about me learning about horses, and well that was a good way of just, not, you know I never, I don't think I called it therapy to those people.

Roberts et al. (2004) showed the need to overcome these preconceptions with their description of the experiences of nursing students observing mounted EAP with children. The students realised, after having actually witnessed the therapy as opposed to merely hearing about it, that therapy doesn't have to be traditional in order to be effective. Though they may have originally thought it was a silly idea, once they had witnessed its power and effects, they realised that it was useful and worthwhile.

Subtheme: Positive experience. In spite of the negative preconceptions around the idea of therapy with horses, Tom felt the experience was a positive one (as did Lucinda). He called it, "a pleasure. . . . [A]ctually almost fun, in a sense, even though there was poignant and serious moments," while Lucinda referred to it as "enjoyable." Tom found it a memorable experience and said that he "bonded with [the therapist], you know, I enjoyed. . . . I won't forget *her* and I won't forget our experiences." This reflects what is shown clearly in

the literature, that for an effective therapeutic relationship, rapport between a client and therapist is not only important, it is necessary (Bachi et al., 2012; Schlote, 2009; Trotter et al., 2008; Symington, 2012). He felt it “exceeded” his expectations, especially for his daughter, and that he felt “this kind of stuff is unbelievably powerful!” He said, further, that his enjoyment of the therapy has affected his life beyond its boundaries, saying that he now likes horses, “[a]nd I didn’t like horses before.”

[N]ow I would go and, you know, hang out, and I would happily go into a field and, you know, go up and sort of say hello . . . I wonder what that horse is like? You know, can I build a relationship with that horse . . . or not? And I’ve done that a couple of times, you know, at stables and stuff since . . . My daughter goes to riding lessons, and I’m sort of just trying to, you know, see what they’re like?

He mentioned that it has allowed him to bond better with her daughter, and her obsessive love of horses, because,

I now get pleasure out of sitting around, standing at the side of a field with horses, and watching them do their shit, and then maybe one will come over, maybe not. And that’s her thing. I wouldn’t have done that before! I would have sat around and read a book. About some fascinating science! Which I still do.

Subtheme: Advocate for its use. Beyond his own enjoyment of the therapy and its effects upon him and his life, he felt he was “a convert . . . and I’m an advocate for . . . Although I haven’t had a chance to get involved in somewhere where I can have an influence.” He felt that,

[I]f I was, you know, on a board of . . . Making mental health be a more . . . Ah, the power of mental health support . . . I would advocate for both of these [equine-assisted

psychotherapy, and clinical therapy], but I would put this one on this list of things for chancing people's perspective.

He felt strongly that in New Zealand, we have a big problem with support for mental illness, and mental health services, saying,

[M]ost people have two... Both parents work. Go to work, you know, eight hours a day, and you get home and you've got three kids who are really, really tired . . . Do you have on board the tools and facilities, and are the children getting more anxiety and pressure than is... Than they know what to do with? Absolutely. It's not anyone's fault, but they end up then, in the next phase, without support, and then they end up in all sorts of situations, and . . . you only have to look at the teenage suicide rate in New Zealand to know it's a problem. Right? The statistics of the worst case scenario indicate that the problem must be bigger, because if that many people are ending up on the edge before they get to 21, then the number of people who are suffering must be an order of magnitude bigger. Right? . . . [Y]ou know therefore there isn't enough support in schools, there isn't enough support for families, there isn't enough support in communities, where people earn less money, there just simply isn't, and they're the most stressed... And so I think this kind of stuff is unbelievably powerful!

Specifically, he felt it was beneficial for his daughter, who is on the autistic spectrum: "you could see that it had follow on benefits for her. I think that she remembered those things that she'd done, sessions, you know, and then applied some of it." He described her sessions as,

[M]ore interactive, and it was about you know, learning skills as much as... It was less about discussing things with a view to resolution, versus learning skills in a different environment, and learning to assert yourself with something that generally doesn't like to be asserted with, unless you take control. And for a child who's very, very socially

anxious, you know, those skills are very... And that was more prescribed, it was very structured, do this with the horses, how, what are the consequences, what happens if you tense when the horse is tense.

His opportunity to observe the difference between his daughter's sessions and his own, and yet to see the benefits of both styles, offered him a unique position to be able to comment on the flexibility of the approach, and its ability to be used for different individuals with different sets of therapeutic needs. McCormick and McCormick (1997, as cited in Johansen et al., 2014) found, as did Tom regarding his daughter, that equine-assisted therapy may be especially helpful for adolescents with poor verbal skills. Tom commented that his daughter seemed to channel the nonverbal communication of the horses.

Judging from his own experiences in therapy, Tom thought that equine-assisted psychotherapy would be especially helpful for any individual who has suffered a traumatic experience, an opinion supported by the literature, as it was a therapy for "changing people's perspectives" (Earles et al., 2015).

[I]t doesn't make it go away. It doesn't mean it didn't happen. It does mean you can think about it differently. And therefore . . . it doesn't just drag you straight back into the... You know... The experience. In a negative way.

He felt that this was because it taught acceptance: "it's part of my life. It doesn't make it a bad part, if you will, even though it was negative, it's not a bad thing in its own right. I'm still here." The memories of his traumatic experiences are still there, also, but no longer "nagging there, it's a, 'Oh, there it is.'"

Because you can't make it go away. It has happened. You can't stop it. . . . When it's a real thing that's happened, a vehicle to come out of that from it, without making it...

Saying it didn't happen, and persuading, you know . . . this I think would be, for a lot of people, would be a very beneficial process.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that equine-assisted psychotherapy provides a positive and effective experience of therapy, in line with the current literature in the field. Participants were able to experience a process of transformation from an old self, to a new way of thinking and being. They showed, through their descriptions of their experiences and the meanings they ascribed to them that this therapy was distinct from other more traditional and clinical therapies, providing evidence that it is a useful and worthwhile therapy above and beyond the experiences available from more conventional offerings. They also showed that there is opportunity for the integration of equine-assisted therapy into the mainstream, as a complementary experience in a therapeutic journey.

These findings also offer some evidence that can inform current theories on the mechanisms of change, and which aspects of the therapy the participants found especially effective. The participants found significant therapeutic value in the therapy's grounding in real, multi-modal experiences, and a naturalistic setting. These qualities also served to make the therapy memorable, and gave participants lasting memories they were able to revisit in order to maintain the progress they had made during therapy. Mechanistically, the participants considered that it was the nonverbal communication of the horses, their authentic style of reflexive interaction, and their ability to represent whatever was most needed by the participants at that time that was behind the progress they made in therapy, and the changes they wrought in their lives. The horses also provided for the participants the opportunity to form deep and meaningful, spiritual connections with living beings beyond the need for words or speech. They were able to participate in profound experiences, the effects of which they could not explain and which they did not need to explain in words.

Both participants felt that the therapy was a positive experience, that they would go back if they needed to, and that they would (and had) recommended it to others. They received from it what they were seeking, but also therapeutic gains beyond what they had expected. In all, these findings show a therapeutic experience that has great value not just for these two individuals, but the potential to help many others.

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Appendix A

Transcript of Lucinda's Interview

Participant 1

00.00 C: Here we go. I've just got a bunch of questions, but they're only more, they're more like a guide as opposed to what we'll actually do. But the first, how did you find out about the therapy? This is like an idea of working with horses and stuff?

00.19 1: Well... I was seeing my G.P, and had a few emotional issues at the time so she suggested a series of counselling, you can get, what's it called? [Organisation].

00.41 C: Yup.

00.43 1: And, the guy who coordinates that, called [Coordinator], he rang me up and had a chat with me, and suggested equine therapy.

00.54 C: Oh, cool.

00.55 1: And he said, we could go down a more traditional route, but I'd actually been down that route a year ago.

01.04 C: Okay... And it didn't really... Work for you?

01.08 1: Well it might have helped, I dunno, but he said let's do something different. So I said, 'Sure!'

01.16 C: Cool. Okay. So... What have I got here? Why did you sort of decide to do the non-traditional as opposed to the traditional like how, how did you come to that decision? Was it anything in particular about the therapy itself? Or just...

01.40 1: Well the minute he said horses I burst into tears. Because it just... Just because...

I'm quite into symbolism and signs and, and it well... I could tell a little story about what happened in [country], but I don't know if you want to hear it.

02.04 C: Yeah, if you, if you'd like to.

02.06 1: [laughs] I went to [country], with my boyfriend. And, there was quite an emotional reason for going, because my daughter was ill who lives over there, but I ended up getting into this dreadful emotional state over there and fighting with my boyfriend, and... And at the lowest point I, I saw this etched out horse from the train, down in [part of country]? There's a great big white horse etched out on the cliff.

02.52 C: Oh, I think I've heard of that, yeah.

02.54 1: So whether it's chalk underneath, or something. But, it's a big white horse, and I... I looked out the window of the train, and saw this, and just saw that as a symbol of hope that things would... Like the light at the end of the tunnel...

03.07 C: Yeah... Yeah, that's really cool.

03.10 1: And then the white horse became this symbol for me, but I hadn't found the horse, or didn't know what the horse quite meant. But then, when he said horse therapy, I immediately thought of that.

03.26 C: That's really cool. Had you heard about it before he suggested it to you? What did you think about the idea of it? Like did you sort of have any ideas of what it would be like, or how it would go, like, when he mentioned it?

03.47 1: I thought, yeah, fascinating, this could be really really interesting. Like, I wondered if it meant riding horses, but I thought, it probably wouldn't.

04.03 C: Okay, so what, what was the set up? Was it riding horses or was it..?

04.08 1: No, it was hanging out with horses. It was communing with horses.

04.16 C: Was it sort of based on activities, or was it...

04.22 1: We had little exercises.

04.25 C: Yeah. How, what sort of exercises did you do, or...

04.38 1: I mean, I could go through what we did in a chronological manner.

04.42 C: Just some sort of loose ideas I guess. Like, some of what I've read about it is sort of doing things where it's just regular therapy like you would do in an office with a therapist, but it's out with the horse, and some of it's more structured. What was [therapist]'s approach? Was it more structured? Or... Like, specific exercises that you did? Or..?

05.14 1: It was really just chilling out and hanging out with horses, but then she'd say, right I want to you get, like, she, I'd pick a certain number of horses to work with, and I'd go into the paddock which was and then *long pause* oh gosh, I've lost my train of thought here... *long pause*

05.58 C: Oh, that's cool. So, when did you go? Like, how long ago were your sessions?

06.07 1: They were an hour each.

06.09 C: And how often did you go? Was it sort of like, once a week?

06.16 1: Yeah, it was weekly.

06.18 C: Weekly, okay, cool, so you did a bunch of exercises and things, and what did you think or do you think...

06.28 1: Oh, sorry, I was gonna describe the exercises but for some reason I got distracted with my thoughts, but we, we picked a certain number of horses to work with, at the

beginning of each session like 2 or 3 or 4 and then she'd give me a little exercise like get all the horses moving in the same direction at the same time. That's probably the first one. And then another one was to get the horses over a little obstacle.

07.06 C: Okay, so what did you think were like the ideas or the reasons behind all these sort of abstract exercises with horses?

07.16 1: *laughs* I think she was looking at how I, at how I went about things. And through doing the horses I think I saw how I went about things. And... *long pause*

07.56 1: Sorry, did you want to say something else?

07.58 C: Yeah... What aspects of the whole like therapy process, the different exercises, and I guess just the presence of the horses and the presence of [therapist] as well, what did you find sort of helped you the most, with what specifically you went to see her for?

08.26 1: Yeah on that, I've had so many thoughts about this since I did it, I think, the exercises put me in the here and now, in a way that maybe regular therapy wouldn't? With regular therapy it might be like wandering off in your thoughts and with this it was just so hands-on and and there's something about that, it was pretty mysterious in a way and I think it worked on a very deep level and I haven't quite figured it out yet.

09.20 C: Right so, by that do you mean, it was the connection with the horse that made it sort of more here-and-now? Or just the whole situation?

09.30 1: Very hands on, you know, the exercises, get the horse to do this and then, observing, me seeing how they react and how I react to how they react and the whole exchange. I don't know why it was so powerful but it was, right from the first day, it

seemed to have an impact on me. You know I've had very little to do with horses, but I've always liked them.

10.03 C: Yeah, okay, what did you think about the exercises that you had to do, like how were they? Like, were they really difficult, or sort of more intuitive?

10.20 1: Well getting all the horses to move in one direction at the same time, you know, no halters and leads, I tried to get one to go in the direction, but of course I can't lead them all, so to me it was impossible. This is utterly impossible, why are you asking me to do this, when it's impossible? But then I thought, okay, I noticed they were eating grass as horses do *laughs* so, so I dashed off and got a great big handful of grass and just shook it in front of them, and they all came to me and I said right, done but *long pause* and then just how to apply that to me and my life is, if you want people to do something, you've got to know what they want.

11.35 C: Right. Was that sort of a similar theme like with the various different exercises that you did? Like it seemed sort of impossible but then you sort of had that moment of inspiration and figured it out? [Well, yeah, um, no] Like easier? Or...

11.53 1: No, it varied a bit.

11.56 C: Ok. What parts about the whole, I guess, the therapy process and I guess also different parts of the same session, you know, what parts did you like the best, or did you enjoy the most, was the most fun?

12.16 1: Well there was this session we had up at, 5 of the 6 were at [farm] in [area] and one of them was in [area] which is on a different farm with a different group of horses. And I went up there and it was – Every day was absolutely gorgeous! But the horses up there seemed to be more affectionate. And, and at the end of the exercises I was grooming one of them, and then another one came over and I was grooming it, and

then the two horses started grooming each other and it was kinda like a little horse... a horsey lovefest! [laughs] And then as I left they came over, they sort of accompanied me to the gate, just of their own free will, just like to say 'Hi!' and it was really sweet!

13.18 C: Cute! So was like grooming the horses after exercises, was that something you did a lot of the time, or..?

13.26 I: Oh, a little.

13.28 C: Yeah? So was that sort of part of the therapy, or just something that you did when it was over, or..?

13.38 I: No, it was part of it. It was just sort of part of the hanging out. In a sense it was very unstructured. I mean, it felt unstructured. And [therapist] and [handler], they just sat back at the distance and just watched. They didn't seem to give much input or feedback. Just a little. Minimum.

14.12 C: And was it through the whole of the sessions? Or like would they give the feedback at the end or just not really any feedback?

14.21 I: Oh, a little feedback. A little. Just enough to... [long pause] Just enough. [laughs] Barely enough. I mean you're sorta looking for these people to give you the answers but they were clearly not going to do that. I was barking up the wrong tree if I thought they were gonna do that.

14.55 C: It sounds like it was quite, what's the word, like quite exploratory, I guess?

15.05 I: Yeah, and whether she has a different approach for different people, I have no idea, it could have been an approach she took with me.

15.18 C: So what parts did you like the least?

15.23 1: Well I liked it when she gave me exercises. When she said right, do this, do that, even if it seemed impossible. The first session and the last session she just kinda said, just hang out with the horses. And I probably liked that the least, because I wanted a bit of structure, and a bit of direction. But it was still okay, it had a purpose... [pause] It definitely... Something was happening. I just didn't know what was happening.

15.59 C: Thinking back to it, what do you think the purpose of it was?

16.04 1: The hanging out? [pause] Well I know I went through a variety of feelings about it. Initially I felt incredibly awkward and self-conscious. Cos I didn't know how to hang out with horses, didn't know... And to have these two women watching me I felt even more, well I just felt awkward. But I guess that awkwardness slowly evaporated. So maybe that was the purpose of it.

16.41 C: Okay, how did you feel following your first session that you did with her? Like I guess you found out about the therapy, turned up for the first, quite strange situation I guess and how did you feel at the end of it all?

17.06 1: The first day? Well it seemed to have quite an immediate impact on me. Anxiety and fearfulness have often plagued me, and I just felt a bit freer, and a bit more confident. I think after that first session I went and organised an exhibition, like that very day, like an art exhibition, rather than going hmmm, should I? Should I? Hmmm, doubt, self-doubt, you know? I just seemed but I don't know why? Whether its just doing something different, or that sort of odd, out of the box challenge, dunno!

18.17 C: What about after later sessions? Did you... The way you felt after them did it continue in the same vein? Like you just felt more like, I guess, relaxed? Or did sort of as the sessions went on, did you get different things from them?

- 18.37 1: No, it was definitely a theme of feeling less anxious, fearful, and feeling more at ease with myself. And confident. [laughs] And [pause] ...I had a thought before... I mean, horses are quite big and could be considered, one could be afraid of them, because they're big and strong, so to, it's almost like they could represent one's fears. So if one faces that, and gets friendly with that, maybe the fears evaporate. Maybe. Not that I felt I was fearful of horses, ever, but, maybe I was. [long pause] I probably am quite... I'm very cautious by nature, so...
- 19.48 C: So was it difficult to sort of go into that first session? Like when you first met with the horses were they unaltered like you said they were in that exercise?
- 20.01 1: On the first day they were tethered up, there were about 10 of them, all tethered up, and I had to just go around and introduce myself to them and I felt like a right idiot. [laughs] they all seemed very gentle and none reacted horribly and reared up [laughs] then I was to pick two or three horses that I wanted to work with after that.
- 20.50 C: And did you work with those ones for like the whole of the sessions? Except for that one when you went to the other farm, or did you have different ones?
- 20.56 1: I think a couple of them... Yeah, the first two, there was a white one, of course, cos I had to pick a white one cos of my symbol. There was one white horse, so I gravitated towards that, and then I picked another horse the first time, so the two horses, and at the end of the session, [therapist] said that the two horses I'd picked, the white one was the bottom of the pecking order, and the other one was at the top of the pecking order. And so I thought about that, and we all thought about that, that was very interesting. I do often feel like I'm either at the bottom or the top, and never, seldom anywhere in between? Like, totally lacking in confidence, or over confident. But, yeah. Interesting, I dunno.

- 22.09 C: It seems like they were quite representative of a lot of different things. Like quite easily relatable to different aspects of, well, your life and I guess the problems that you had, and why you sought therapy. That's cool.
- 22.30 1: Yeah, and one, the white horse, represented me, and the other one represented my partner... Or... My... Troublesome sometimes partner [laugh] Not really a partner, an individual that causes me huge stress regularly.
- 22.59 C: And what about the therapy as a whole? Like when you'd finished all of your sessions and then, sort of, I guess looking back to before you started, or how you felt at the end of the earlier sessions, how did you feel when like you'd finished the whole program?
- 23.21 1: Well it's weird, I came down with this awful awful headache, like on my way home? And I actually couldn't drive, I had to stop, and lie down in the back of the car and I felt like I was going to throw up [laughs] and I thought, why is this happening? And I thought, it could be because I'm dehydrated, but I went to the doctor a few days later because I was still feeling exhausted from it, and she said it's unlikely I was dehydrated in the middle of winter. But I was talking to this other friend of mine who said they've experienced severe headaches at the end of a life-changing event? I thought it might be, like when you've got a pot, and you're shaping a pot on a wheel, [pause] and I felt like the pot had maybe been squashed [hits the table twice] and reformed. And the reforming... But then, it's gotta go in the kiln, to keep its new shape, and that kiln is like the headache. And the pot, the pot was a new way of thinking, a new way of being.
- 24.49 C: Cool, well, that's really cool. So did you learn anything from the process of the therapy?

25.06 1: Yeah, I learnt that whole thing of the grass... Shaking the grass to get the horses to come, and I had this whole thing about... [pause] well [laughs] getting the obstacle, getting the horses over the obstacle, like there was a little jump, about that high and I had to get two horses over, one represented me and one represented my... [pause] partner. And this, she, [therapist] said this obstacle represents your relationship, and I want you to get the horses over it. So getting a horse over something that represents a relationship, well I wasn't quite sure what that meant. Does it mean, I'm over it? See, cos I have often wanted to be over it, done with it, but this other person never wants to let go. And they keep coming back and dragging me back in. Which has been the pattern for the last five years. And I've tried to break free... Probably a dozen times, but always get brought back. And... [long pause, sighs] So this white horses that represented me, I got it over the obstacle very easily, then I tried to get the other horse over it and he utterly, he refused. He would not budge, you know, came right up to it but would not get over it. And well, you can't pull a horse over an obstacle. And I didn't know how to make it get over it. So I ended up trying to woo it and, you know, groom it, gave it some grass, just generally paid it a lot of attention, and then would lead it back to the obstacle, hoping it would sort of like me enough to get over it? [laughs] Didn't work! But [therapist] pointed out afterwards, the horse, the white horse went over it immediately and you gave it nothing. You gave it no reward. The other horse didn't do what you wanted and you gave it all your attention. So that was kind of a very clear, you know I never reward myself for anything, but I was, you know, [pause] yeah. Interesting.

28.13 C: Okay, was there anything else that sort of stood out? Any, I guess, other moments of clarity, or anything in particular that you remember being like, oh that's something new, or..?

28.36 1: Yeah well, I did mention sex for favours, in relation to the grass, shaking the grass?

Yeah, you do this, I'll give you that type of thing, which um, I've done [pause] have done in the past with this person, and it's ... hmm... Not the greatest, yeah [laughs] Not the greatest way to go about things! Not at all. So that kind of brought that clear. And then, when I had to make a structure to put one of the horses in, and move around it three times? So I made a structure, just out of jump stuff, got the horse in there, but [therapist] said you can make the structure out of anything you like, it doesn't have to be... It could just be a mark in the ground. Anyway, I made quite an elaborate structure like, like I was really trying to keep this horse in and [laughs] walked around it, so I was really making sure I did it properly with, you know, minimised the possibility of failing. And then, [therapist] asked me what the structure represented. If you see the horse as being the person, like the structure [pause] possibly represented the rules of your relationship, or how you control them, or just how you kept them in, doing what you want to do, or in the place you want them. So it, and I don't think she said you've got to walk around the outside of the structure, she just said walk around the horse, but I walked around the outside of the structure, not on the inside. Which like, means I've got this person in this structure, but I'm free to do what I want. And I didn't think that was very fair. So [laughs] so I decided maybe the structure wasn't necessary, or shouldn't be there at all. People should be completely free. So then she said to get the horses to stand in one place with no structure.

31.40 C: And were you able to?

31.42 1: Ah, yeah, but I decided I'd just position it near a pole, and yeah, that was easy. No structure at all. And I was surprised at how easy that was. So that made me think, yeah maybe the person wants to be with me just because they like being with me,

or... And I don't need to try and keep them in place. I don't know, I don't know! It was interesting!

32.20 C: Yeah, no, it sounds really interesting! Did... Did you have any sort of expectations about what would happen, what you would learn, how the therapy would go, when you went into it?

32.41 I: No... I just was hoping it would be... [long pause] I was hoping it would be very effective [laughs]

32.56 C: Was it? Was it effective?

32.57 I: Well yeah, you always wonder have the benefits lasted? Cos this is a couple of months ago now, I can't remember when we ended it... But, there's always the fear you're going to lose anything you've gained. But, being fearful of losing it doesn't help keep it.

33.33 C: So by that do you mean that, sort of as distance between when you did the therapy and now, I guess, increases you're sort of finding yourself losing the benefits of it, or..?

33.50 I: No, I'm just wondering if I am or not. Which isn't helpful. [laughs]

33.05 C: Did you find yourself sort of doing anything or thinking or feeling any differently after the sessions and after you finished the therapy, compared to how you would have before?

34.23 I: Yeah, I just seemed far more relaxed. At ease with myself. It's almost like I don't care what other people... I didn't care about the reactions of other people. [long pause] Hmm. I've had a tendency to be way too mindful of what other people think, but I was like [pause] just me, my path, and my life. And everyone else is just doing

what, whatever they're doing. It's like, that feeling that I didn't have the right to pursue my own path, prior to it, and then feeling like, yes, I have as much right as anyone else, of course.

35.35 C: What do you think it was about the therapy that caused that, or helped you realise that?

35.43 I: Well that's the mystery. That is the mystery. Maybe it's because it was like real life, larger than life, symbolism. Like a really, really powerful dream. You know, dreams are often really symbolic, the ones that you remember, and it was like a larger than life, hands-on dream and the symbolism of it, it's just, sort of, it's gone right into wherever it needs to be.

36.38 C: Right, so the horses were sort of symbols, or symbolising different people or different aspects of your life... What about, did the, did [therapist] and, was it [handler]? Who helped her? Did they come into that at all? Or was it just the horses that were symbols? Were they symbols of anything..?

36.58 I: I don't think so, no. No, they were very much in the background.

37.13 C: And how did you take, I guess what you learned and what you realised from the process of it, and I guess all the different experiences through the different sessions, how did you take that into, just, everyday life? If you did?

37.33 I: [after pause] Well, it's like, how do you take your whack on the side of the head into everyday life? [long pause, laughs]

37.59 C: So you mentioned that you'd other, more traditional therapy before you tried this, is that right?

38.09 1: Yeah, I think I've had one, well roughly a year prior to that, I had a six week course with a traditional counsellor. Yeah, it was the same thing with [organisation] and it was just weekly, one-hour, session. And it was, feels like it was longer ago than a year. But it was for the exact same reasons. Problems with this person causing anxiety and stress in my life [laughs]

38.55 C: How did that therapy go? Like was it just sort of talk therapy, in an office, or?

39.02 1: What did she do? She... [pause] she got me to do a few drawings. But I dunno. I can't, I don't have a clear memory of it. I didn't seem... Oh I dunno, maybe it was effective at the time.

39.30 C: Do you remember any like, I guess, aside from the fact that one was with horses and one wasn't, like any sort of big differences about maybe the process, or how you felt afterwards, or were you like...

39.45 1: Yeah, I didn't take any notes, I didn't really... My memory's not great... [long pause] No, I think I felt pretty good after those sessions, but how much it had to do with the sessions, I'm not sure. I mean after the course of sessions... Yeah... Sorry, I'm not, I can't make a helpful comparison. But I do remember thinking that I wasn't enjoying those sessions much, and I didn't feel I was getting much out of them.

40.36 C: But did you feel differently about the... Like, at the time, as they were taking place, did you feel that the equine assisted therapy, those sessions, were being beneficial as they went on? Or..?

40.51 1: Well... They appeared to be. [pause, laughs] I didn't know why.

41.03 C: So just like a feeling that they seemed to be working, or?

41.05 1: Well only in the sense that I was behaving differently and feeling different.

41.14 C: Right, ok, that's cool. I guess that's kind of the point of therapy! Um, having spoken about a bunch of stuff about it, and thinking back, what were your main thoughts or memories about the whole experience of the therapy with the horses?

41.40 I: [long pause] My main what? [laughs]

41.41 C: Like, just thoughts, or um I guess like, what it meant to you as a whole, or I guess any sort of ideas that really stand out to you about how the therapy was, or..?

42.06 I: [long pause] Well I thought it was really cool, and well I guess the mystery stood out, how it worked, why it worked [long pause] hmm, maybe it was just doing something different, and out of my normal sphere. I dunno... Like maybe if I went off and did a kayaking course, you know, totally out of my normal realm, that might have had a similar feeling. Like, doing something challenging. Not that, well it wasn't really challenging. But, I dunno! Taking me out of myself. [long pause] I don't know.... I don't know. This friend of mine said, it sounds like it could have been, when I was relating what happened, he said, it could have been bricks [laughs] it might have worked, even if they were bricks! I don't know... I doubt it.

43.54 C: So was there anything specific about the fact that there were horses there that sort of you think changed anything? Or...? Cos I mean, there is a lot of therapy with like cats, and dogs, and dolphins and stuff, like every animal it seems. Like, do you feel like there was something about the horses in particular that made it helpful, or worthwhile?

44.20 I: Yeah, well, I think the fact that they were big and possibly something that's fearful. I mean they can do what they want, and not do what they want, so I guess the satisfaction of getting it to come with you, without a lead and halter, and just do something, maybe that was quite satisfy-, gave me a sense of power. Maybe.

44.50 C: I can imagine that being a quite strong feeling, them being so big and us being so small [laughs]

45.04 I: But yeah, they did represent different things at different times and the one, the most powerful exercise was when [therapist] said to... We had three horses in a paddock, and she said, find objects in the paddock to represent your family, as in family you were born into. All that was available was some firewood. So I got a piece of firewood for each member of the family, and put it down on the ground. And then, I had to introduce the horses to my family. And I thought, that's ridiculous. I so don't want to do that. And just the exercise of finding the sticks and putting them down, I found very emotional. And then the thought of introducing the horses to them, that was very emotional too. I didn't want to. But... So the horses in that instance represented something... Something else.

46.41 C: Yeah, I guess, was there anything else? Like I remember you said that when you were in [country] you sort of had the horse as a symbol of hope. Did that come into it? Like into the therapy itself? I guess the idea of the original symbol that sort of stood out, of horses, for you, was there anything that sort of, I dunno, continued on with like, I guess your own, the ideas you already had about horses and their symbolism? Or was it all... Did you get like new ideas from the process, or..?

47.24 I: Hmm, I guess I just saw the horses as almost like spirit guides, and they were gonna help me. And they had a, a knowing. Just a being. A wisdom, which they shared through osmosis somehow.

48.08 C: And like things like that, was that sort of... Was that like a sort of a strong part of the therapy? Like sort of, what the horses gave to you, what you got from the horses, as opposed to um the more structured things that [therapist] directed you to do, or any

feedback she gave you, was there like any difference I guess in like stuff you, whatever you got from the horses being there, and what you got from her being there? – I guess is what I'm trying to ask [laughs]

48.52 1: Well, I think she was just very good at doing what she did... I mean, I don't think it would have been the same with bricks at all. [laughs] Or dogs, or cats.

49.12 C: Ok, did it help the difficulties that you went there with? The therapy?

49.19 1: Ah, yes. But, [pause] ah, hmm, yeah, battling against this, yeah, yes. [laughs]

50.01 C: What kind of people, or what kind of problems, or difficulties, having done the therapy, like, did you get any ideas of who you thought it would be most suited to? Like, was it, did you feel it was really effective for the particular problem that you had, that you...

50.24 1: No, I thought it would be good for anyone, definitely. I think everyone would, it would mean something different, or, it's looking at a Ror- you know, those inkblot things? You know, they just mean something to everybody, something different, but something. It's like, it's like a mirror. The horses were like mirrors. Well, as [therapist] said, they do, apparently they reflect the way we are.

51.12 C: How do you mean by that?

51.14 1: Well, they all seemed very peaceful around me, and quite gentle, and she reckoned they were just reflecting the way I was with them. And if they'd get stubborn, that's because they're feeling that in the person. [pause] Or maybe she was just trying to make me feel good. [both laugh] Good liar... Or, maybe they are. I'm sure they are.

51.58 C: I have heard that from like, a bit of the research I've done, that's, sort of, a theme that comes up in different articles and different types of the horse therapies, how they

can reflect body language like, subtly... Is there anything else you wanna mention about how the therapy was, or what you got out of it, or... [pause] just, maybe, is there anything that you didn't get out of it, that you would have wanted to? Or something like that?

52.42 1: I wanted more fun exercises... I mean, the one with the firewood and the sticks I found very powerful. So, that was session 5. Session 6 I was wanting something equally powerful, but they said hang out with the horses, and I thought, aww... But, presumably they had their reasons for saying that.

53.14 C: Did you say that your sessions were an hour? ... Ok. And did you do one exercise in most of the sessions? Or more than one? Or..?

53.26 1: It was usually just one, I think.

53.30 C: Ok, and then the rest of the time would have been just..?

53.33 1: Chilling out, hanging out, trying to push, trying to, on one occasion they said to halter up the horses and lead in the ones that I wanna work with, and the first horse I wanted wasn't wanting the halter on... And, so I guess, doing that was like an exercise.

54.04 C: Right, ok [long pause] So was there anything else I guess about it that really stood out to you as good or bad or...

54.24 1: The funny thing was, on the first day, I felt, when I picked those horses, I thought Rocky was a big, quite a scary, horse. And then when I, then I went after the [area] one, with the other horses, and then coming back to these other ones again, I didn't even recognise Rocky cos he seemed too small. So, they'd... they'd shrunk down. And [laughs] I found that interesting. And one of the horses I thought was just way

too big for me to approach, Pepper, but then on the last couple of sessions I used Pepper quite happily, like he wasn't too big and scary.

55.29 C: Cool, how did that feel?

55.35 1: Well, it was quite surprising. [laughs] but there were other horses that I just didn't want to... I felt no affinity with? I don't know why... I mean, it was a little pony, and there was a big Clydesdale. Neither of them I wanted to work with. Don't know why. So why I was attracted to these certain horses, I don't know.

56.09 C: Do you feel like, when you said that you feel it's been effective, for your problems that you sought the therapy for, and you kind of, you said you kind of had been worrying that worrying about it might decrease its effectiveness over time, do you, can you see it continuing to be effective? Or..?

56.40 1: Yeah well, I did take notes, and I can read over them, it's, it's, I dunno. I dunno if just remembering it is helpful? Possibly it is.

56.53 C: Right, can you see yourself maybe going back to [therapist] if you needed to in the future? Or would you seek I dunno, some other type of therapy if you needed to, or..?

57.04 1: No, no, I would definitely want to go back and do that again.

57.14 C: Cool [pause] anything else you want to say?

57.15 1: Yeah, I want them to give me some cool exercises [both laugh]

57.23 C: Cool, it sounds like it was a really powerful experience, like, just, yeah. Did you enjoy it? Was it something that was enjoyable? Or was it sort of a different feeling?

57.37 1: Oh, it was enjoyable! Sometimes I felt just hanging out with the horses was interesting – I mean, it was, I mean, the part of me that wants activity and wants

stimulation wasn't being satisfied when I was told to just hang out with the horses.

But maybe that was a good thing... I don't know. Maybe that had its own power!

58.12 C: Cool! Well, that's all my questions, really. Um, do you have anything else you'd like to say about it? About the experience, about what different things meant to you, or..?

58.27 1: Yeah, with the three horses that I had to introduce to my family, there was the white horses, then the brown horse, then the black horse which was kinda bigger and stronger, and the one I was scared of initially. But I was quite pleased that I got to the point where I was comfortable with Pepper. [laughs] but when I introduced them, the white, I took the white horse to the family first, and just said here's, here's my family, but I didn't say to the family, here's Harry. I just said, here's my family. And then with brown horse, I just said, here's my family... But then with Pepper, I said, this is so and so, this is so and so, this is, I introduced them all individually, and I said, this is Pepper. So I thought, possibly, Pepper was a new aspect of me.

59.43 C: Right, um, how do you mean by that? Like, you originally said that you sort of felt the white one represented you.

59.54 1: Yeah, well, the white one was... Represented me at the beginning, whereas the black one might have been the new pot. So I had to introduce it. Whereas the brown one, I'm not sure, that was possibly an aspect of me that the family already knew, therefore they didn't have to be introduced.

1.00.20 C: Okay, um, yeah, you said that that was the most... powerful? Of all the exercises, or like, most emotional. What was it about it that was so powerful?

1.00.35 1: Hmm, I dunno, the horses represented something very deep in me [long pause] deep in my soul.

1.00.59 C: What do you think was the difference between the old you/the white horse, and the new you/the big Pepper horse?

1.01.09 1: Well the white horse was quite timid, and set itself apart from the others... I dunno about timid, but I didn't notice it being timid, but [therapist] did say it was at the bottom of the pecking order, and it kept itself apart, like, aloof [pause] I dunno, maybe a bit of a downtrodden feel to it. [pause] But, on the last day when I was hanging out with four horses – Pepper, Bonnie, Rocky, and Harry, the white horse – and Harry, the white horse, kept rejecting me, didn't want me to pat it, whereas the other three did, so... And every time I went back to it, it just sort of... So whether it was in a bad mood, or whether it was [pause] I don't know! Whether... Cos on the first day, the reason I picked it was because the rapport seemed...

1.02.36 C: Right, and what about the other, the Pepper one, the new you..?

1.02.46 1: [laughs] He was lovely, they were all quite happy to be interacting with me.

1.02.56 C: Did you feel that [pause] Yeah, I dunno... It sounds sorta like through the course of the therapy, and interacting with the horses, you went from feeling, I dunno, maybe less confident, to more confident, like maybe empowered could be the word? And, yeah, what you were saying about like the, smaller white horse, and the bigger, sort of more powerful, black horse?

1.03. 34 1: No, the white horse wasn't smaller, no it was big [both laugh] No, I wasn't working with any small horses, but the black horse, Pepper, did seem the bigger of the horses... No, well, the Clydesdale must have been bigger, but I wasn't interested in him for some reason... I think it was the great big feet.

1.04.11 C: I guess what I'm wanting to ask is [pause] yeah, it sounds like you felt from the beginning of the therapy, to the end of the therapy, that you had kinda become a

new person. It seems like a theme of some of the different analogies and exercises you've said.

1.04.35 1: Yeah, well, maybe that's what I'm looking for. I'm really looking for shedding the old skin, transformation seems to be a bit of a theme in my life. Just this idea of transforming, the butterfly coming out of a cocoon type thing is always what I'm looking for, what I'm wanting... Which is interesting. [pause]

1.05.10 C: Did you feel that you got that out of the therapy at all?

1.05.14 1: Yeah, poor little butterfly, I don't want it to go back into the cocoon! [pause] Like, typical, like when I came in today, and I said, 'Right, I need coffee and chocolate!' You know, that was quite confident behaviour, wasn't it? Before this therapy, I wouldn't have done that. I would have come in and said, 'Oh, yes, whatever you want.' We'll sit down and have our water and possibly a sandwich, and I won't insist on doing what I want. I'll bow down to whatever you want. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have done what I did prior to that therapy. It's like, my rights, and what I need, and what I want, are actually just as relevant, or actually, the most relevant! And yeah! So if my so-called boyfriend does anything I don't like, I tell him immediately.

1.06.36 C: Is that, the new you would do that? And you wouldn't have done that before?

1.06.41 1: And I don't care what he thinks about it! And go take a flying leap! [long pause] You could say I've become more selfish! Which, for some people is not good, but for others is really good. For people who are already incredibly selfish it's, they might learn how to be unselfish. But for someone who's incredibly... Not unselfish, but denies their own... I dunno... Subservient... Makes themselves submissive... It's

probably really good to become the other... I dunno... I hate that middle ground.

[laughs] Outrageous is better than the middle ground.

1.08.08 C: It sounds like it was really helpful for... it was sort of mostly focussed on things to do with relationships? Do you think that was because of why you went to see [therapist]? Because you were having... Presumably having... Problems with your boyfriend? Or do you think that's sort of a theme of the therapy itself? Or..?

1.08.33 1: No, no, it was just specific to my needs. Oh, she asked me, after the first session she asked me to list a set of objectives, and what I wanted out of the sessions. Yeah, it was like homework, you know, go home and write down your objectives. So I did that, wrote them down, I had this great list of objectives, and came back, and was about to present them to her, and say, 'Here they are.' [laughs] But she didn't want to read them, she didn't want to look at them, so I just decided I didn't want to look at them either... Oh, I can't remember how that went. It was for me to look at and understand, myself, but wasn't... [pause] It didn't seem to come into it.

1.09.34 C: Was it something that you thought about through the course of the therapy? Those objectives? Or was it just that one session and then you kind of forgot about it?

1.09.42 1: Well, it was interesting, looking, I mean, what I wanted was to lose anxiety and fear, and be more confident, so it was like a self-fulfilling thing. Whatever it was on there, it happened. Well. [pause] I mean, not yet. There were some more long term things, but...

1.10.11 C: So did you get what you, I guess, wanted out of it?

1.10.18 1: Yeee- Well, I'm still [pause] grappling with this relationship... [pause] And I'm gonna keep grappling with it until I stop.

1.10.38 C: Did anything from the therapy, sort of, help you with that?

1.10.44 1: Yeah, yeah. I think I was far clearer on what I want and have me centre-stage instead of him.

1.11.02 C: And through the course of it, did your ideas of it, like your objectives, what you wanted out of it, did they change at all? Did you get new ideas? Did you sort of...

1.11.19 1: No... I don't think so. I kept wondering if I was going to end up riding the horses at any point. But then I decided, no, that probably wasn't going to happen, why should it? And what would it mean to ride a horse?

1.11.41 C: Was that something that you would have wanted to happen as part of it?

1.11.45 1: Well to me it's just an act of domination. That wasn't the role of the horses. If I'd come along and said, 'Right, I want to ride these horses today.' I don't know what [therapist] would have said. She might have said, 'Sure.', She might have said, 'No, that's not going to happen.' I don't know. [laughs] But yes, one normally associates horses with getting on them and riding them, and having them submissive. But they were equal partners in this thing. Which doesn't involve getting on them and riding them. I don't think.

1.12.45 C: Cool. I think that's all my questions. I think we're good. Unless you want to say anything more about anything? I mean... [long pause]

1.13.05 1: Hmm [long pause] well these horses, they were living beings, living, breathing beings, hanging out there, just eating grass, interesting. Very simple life.

1.13.42 C: Was that sort of the first time you'd really been around horses?

1.13.50 1: Well, I mean I've taken my kids riding, but no great exposure, but any exposure I've had, I've always enjoyed. [long pause] So it's not the black horse, it's

not the white horse now, it's the black horse. [laughs] Yes, he was very attractive.

Very shiny and gleaming. Handsome. The white horse was, seemed quite old and a bit haggard.

1.15.33 1: It really was quite a spiritual experience, but that's possibly because I view life in that way.

1.15.40 C: Yeah, no, um, my second question was, I didn't ask it because you'd already talked about it, about the sort of spiritual and cultural idea of a horse, like as an archetype.

1.16.00 1: Yeah, well, they sort of represent like the life force, or energy, power, strength, but they're also... Their ability to just be, and be who they are, and not... You know. There's no worry in a horse. They are, they've got a lot of attributes which are very, well, which one would want. Which, well, I would want.

1.16.23 C: So well, do you feel like you learnt some of those things from being around the horses?

1.16.50 1: Well hopefully. Who knows. I spend way too much time in my head. In fact, what did she say on one occasion? I think on the second occasion she said, what would you like us to do today? And I said, 'I think too much. I want you to tell me what to do. Which she was quite happy with. Hmm. Thinking too much is a huge problem.

1.17.28 C: Yeah, that sort of seems to go together with what you were saying before, about how one of the big things you took away from it, or one of the things you really

liked about it was the here and now aspect of it. Yeah, sounds like it was really good.

Would you recommend it to people?

1.18.00 1: Oh yeah, definitely. I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone. All of my friends heard all about it, you know, after each session, and they were quite envious. But especially I think anyone who's a bit fearful and anxious. But who knows. I mean it could work the other way as well.

1.18.32 C: It's really nice being able to listen to you, to all of your experiences with it and what you took away from it, as opposed to just reading things from journal articles and things that have been written by the practitioners themselves sort of talking it all up, it's really good to be able to hear what actually happened.

1.18.59 1: I think [therapist] must have read me pretty well. And I think she's very wise. I immediately knew she was someone who was both very smart but also had good intuition. And feeling...

1.19.28 C: Would you say that she herself and I guess her approach, the horses aside from it, was any different to what you can remember from when you had therapy about a year ago?

1.19.42 1: Um, oh God, oh I can't remember enough about it. But I certainly don't have any feelings of gee, that was good. In fact I thought, during it, you get offered, they gave me brochures on several different counsellors, like a little promo brochure, and said, pick one! So you'd read through and go, ugh, how can you know? Which would be right? But this person, they were pretty hands off, and let me figure it out for myself, but I didn't have the power of the horses there. [long pause] I dunno, I'm just trying to think of a comparison. They're a pretty big tool to have in your toolbox, as a counsellor. Like, they how they do it. I'd say doing the first lot was like going to

a restaurant for a meal but just looking at the menu and not actually getting the food.

You can only do so much looking at the menu.

1.21.42 C: So, what do you mean by that. Sort of you could see what you could get from it, but you never actually got there? Or..?

1.21.53 1: Well, you're just dealing with what's up here, and you're not going outside of it. You can think about what's on the menu, but the horses actually provided something real.

Post-script: The symbolism of the horses penetrated the psyche; beyond the realm of thoughts. (I'm not with him anymore!!) That was fun reading that!

Transcript of Tom's Interview

00.00 C: Okay, so how did you find out about equine-assisted psychotherapy?

00.06 2: My wife heard about it through a friend... So... I can't remember how her friend found out about it, however. But it was a sort of a word of mouth thing for people.

00.21 C: Okay, and what led to you going?

00.26 2: My eldest daughter has a strong interest in horses and she'd been having riding lessons, and things, and it, you know, having a child who is mildly obsessive about horses, and I thought that we might do it together, because she is, ah, my eldest daughter has Asperger's and sort of, well amongst a whole bunch of different things, and we thought it might be a beneficial thing for her. And as it turned out, I'd been suffering some, you know, of my own adult issues, and so we decided to do it together. You know, not together-together, but her first, me second. So initially it was driven by her need, rather than mine, but I decided to go along and try it as well.

01.19 C: So I've got this question here, that's... Was there anything sort of spiritual, or cultural about the idea of a horse that drew you to the therapy?

01.30 2: Spiritual... Cultural... I was looking for something non-, I'd had a psychologist, and I'd had a psychiatrist, and I was looking for something that would take me beyond both of those, which would be more a personal journey than a clinical journey. So in a sense, yes, because I'd had some treatment for some stuff, and then another more medically focused approach, and I was looking for, not necessarily a replacement, but a complimentary set of experiences to balance the whole thing out. So yes, in a sense, but I don't know that I approached it spiritually, or culturally to start with, but I was led by the fact that I thought it would be very, ah, a nice way to

balance out what had been a purely clinical approach, which while I think it has value, I don't think it's the only answer.

02.35 C: What had you heard about it before you went?

02.38 2: I'd read the EAGALA website, so when we heard about it, a friend posted us the URL, so I read the website, and then I did a little bit more reading around, and found out that it had been used successfully in children, ah, for kids who are in criminal, or just from difficult family backgrounds, and that there'd been some success. And my, it then turns out that my wife's cousin who breeds horses had bred a horse that had only got one eye, which she couldn't sell, and she'd given it to her neighbour who runs a, not an EAGALA one, but a similar sort of... Not Riding for the Disabled, but for troubled kids from [city]. And I then, by accident, heard of a story about a kid who had been, who got to know her horse with one eye that she had given to this guy, and it had been quite a transformational experience for him.

03.39 C: That's really cool. What did you think about it before you went?

03.45 2: Ah, what did I think about it before I went? I dunno, I thought it would be interesting. I was open-minded actually. I didn't have a view as to what it would be like. I just went in with an open mind and thought that it would be, yeah, I dunno. I don't think I tried, I tried not to judge it. You know what I mean? I don't think I had any sort of preconceptions per say, it just sounded like a good idea. Especially for my daughter. And after her first session, it definitely looked like it would appeal to me too.

04.19 C: Cool, what was the set-up of like, your particular sessions, with [therapist]?

04.25 2: Outdoors, in an arena. In a fenced arena, with some, so it's a fenced arena with some grass around it, so it's not just an arena, so there's a little bit of space. Two

horses, sometimes one. And, sort of a short conversation at the start, and then quite a long engagement with the horses, and then a conversation, and then another sort of follow on engagement with the horses again. Um, 7 out of the 8 sessions were like that, and one was much more, one was much more conversation-based, we didn't actually engage with the horses that much, it was just sort of a debrief type session, even though it wasn't the last one.

05.14 C: When did you go? Like, how long ago were your sessions?

05.17 2: So that was in [month], [year], through to about [month] this year. 8 times over 6 months.

05.28 C: Right, okay, and how long were your sessions?

05.30 2: An hour each.

05.33 C: And what types of things did you do?

05.36 2: What types of things did I do? So, the basic structure was talking to [therapist], then going and, going and doing, then trying to deliberately engage with the horses in some way, not necessarily with a lot of particular intent, but a general approach. You know, going and saying well, I think you, well, you go over to the horses and the first time it was, well, whatever you think is, you wanna do, and the next time it was no, don't physically touch them, try to stroke or pat them, and just try and be with them and we then did some exercises where, in the ring where the, with leading the horse without holding it, trying to get the horse to follow, and then in a field, where there was a male horse who had a history of not being willing to work with male humans. And I spent the entire hour in the field trying to get as close to the horse until, in my mind I wanted to put the reins on the horse at the end, which [therapist] had said was very, very unlikely, because he never lets anybody do that, and as it turned out the

horse did let me do it, and I spent an hour patiently just trying to think of, just working through, just trying not being invasive in any way, or threatening, and at the end he trusted me enough to let me put the reins on him, which [therapist] was quite stunned by actually. And then we explored quite a, so, the horses did things that reflected, the most amazing part of it was when we were discussing something that was very negative, or sad, or difficult, then the horses were generally far away. If we were anxious in our conversation, then you could see that the horses were staying further away, whereas if we were discussing something hard, but we were in a more accepting, or safer conversation, we were on the other side of the fence from the difficult part, back to the easy part, then the horses would come in. It was remarkable how they seemed to know the difference between us being, well, me being tense about something, or me being more accepting and dealing with the thing being discussed... watching the horses' behaviour. I didn't really have a lot of direct interaction with horses, but they interacted with me in a very very close way, and they would come in, or go away, and there was one time that two horses kind of, you know, locked me in a corner of the field, but not in a threatening way, in a protective way. They sort of, you know, wanted to bring me into the herd with a protective kind of behaviour. So it was very, it wasn't deliberate for the most part, it was just kind of things happened as a result of conversation, and through experience. And I wasn't deliberating trying to make them do anything, actually.

08.47 C: Okay, so it was quite like, unstructured.

08.49 2: Very unstructured, very fluid, depending upon, you know, I didn't show up... If I showed up with a plan to talk about something, I didn't necessarily end up talking about it? Not because it didn't, she didn't, let me do that, but the nature of the process is, it's not supposed to, if you try to make it too formulaic, and too structured, then it's

sort of unnatural, the horses detect that there's a thing going on, and they behave as if they're being... That's my description of it, not necessarily [therapist]'s, but they behave as if they're in a, you know, horses-being-trained kinda mode. But if you approach it in a more we're sitting in a field, well, I just call it sitting in a field with a horse, cos, well, in order to approach the horses, I might go sit near them, but not actually go sit right near them. If they were at that end of the field, I might go sit at that end of the field, and sit on the grass, and you know, look at them, or not, and wait to see what happens. And if they come closer to me, I might make a response and go closer to them, and if they moved further away I might follow them to show them that I wanted to be part of it, or not, depending on how I was feeling. But, it was unstructured in the sense that you didn't know what was going to happen, but the structure of the session was roughly, you know, brief sort of awareness minute or two, just getting into the environment so you're not bringing the car you just drove in, or your work or whatever, and then a short conversation at the start, a conversation in the middle, and then a conversation at the end. So it's sort of structured into three parts, but what happened with the horses was entirely unpredictable. It was really up to you, or me as it were, to decide. And some interesting things happened that we then talked about. You know, it was, it was kind of, it was spooky in the sense that when I was talking about my mum, the horse that was female – there was a male and a female – she had lost a foal very early after she had given birth, so this horse was very motherly, she had mum issues, as a horse, and clearly demonstrated that when she was around other female horses that had foals around, she would get very anxious and upset and stuff, and when I was talking about that, this horse, she came right over, and, you know, just sort of joined in the conversation – just sort of came over, and then, as if it was part of her world, and then, we'd resolved the conversation, because

it wasn't a negative conversation, she was relaxed, and she rolled, and you know, that's the sign of a horse being very unthreatened, to roll in the presence of a predator, such as what is really what we are, and every time I then had her in the ring, she rolled every time. So there was sort this, it was kinda, actually [therapist] had never seen that before in any horse, let alone a... So there was a really interesting... For me, the reason why it's... that made it real for me, because it's those... Talking to anybody who cares and is a professional, has value. When you have a third, non-, when you have another party that isn't human, as part of that experience, for me, I didn't know what to expect, but it really made it real and I was able to, sort of, associate the conversations with how the horses or the horse behaved, and that sort of grounded it, and later you'd see how that conversation yielded this, and go, okay, so that was a purpose for the conversation. So, you know, cos you'd speak to people... And the difference between that and a psychologist was, yeah, I mean it was a good conversation, but once you left there was no lasting memory, other than a conversation. Which wasn't invaluable, um, I valued it at the time, but it didn't have the restorative effect that doing the work with [therapist] did.

12.56 C: Sounds like it sort of left like... It was quite meaningful, in that it sort of stayed...

13.01 2: There were some experiences in there that I think that I will never forget. Whereas there were conversations that I had with my psychologist, most of which I have forgotten. Right, but they were experiences that I had that were very, that were fundamentally meaningful, and I can't pin on, you know, I can't explain using a scientific, you know, I can't explain. And I'm happy to not explain them. Whereas in general, that's just not me, you know, I'm normally one of those people who go, if you don't have an answer, you're not a happy camper. But I'm okay with that quotes,

unquotes, spiritual nature, whatever it means, and it did expand my horizons from a universal awareness kinda point of view

13.48 C: So what do you think was, I guess, from the point of view of [therapist] maybe, or from the way that she was approaching it all, what do you think was her purpose behind having the horses there, and the way that she sort of, I don't know what she would have asked you to do, when you've turned up, after you've had the conversation, but it seems like it was just sort of hanging out with the horses maybe?

14.14 I: Yep, well, we'd go and get the horse from the stables, generally, and walk them into the ring, so it was a, I was part of taking them into the ring, but then, it was, well I've described it to people as going and sitting in a field with a horse. And different people have different experiences. Some people, for my daughter, her experience was much more interactive, and it was about you know, learning skills, as much as... It was less about discussing things with a view to resolution, versus learning skills in a different environment, and learning to assert yourself with something that generally doesn't like to be asserted with, unless you take control. And for a child who's very very socially anxious, you know, those skills are very... And that was more prescribed, it was very structured, do this with the horse, how, what are the consequences, what happens if you tense when the horse is tense... For me, it was very much, I made it what I wanted it but I didn't know what was going to happen, so the experience I had, I think, would be very different to somebody else. Somebody else might choose to make more of it, and engage more with the horses, or less, as the case may be. Her purpose... What was her purpose..? Well, obviously she's an equine-assisted therapist, so her purpose was to provide an environment where I could go through some pretty deep stuff, this wasn't a midlife crisis kind of, you know, what to do with my life after 40 blah blah blah. This was going right back to childhood kind

of stuff, so it was a very retrospective and, you know, going right to the shit... You know, to the core of my shit *laughs*. So, her purpose was to facilitate me dealing with that, I suppose, and when we had our first session, she said, well what do you want out of it? And I said, well I've got some stuff that I've not really come to terms with and I'd like to come to terms with it, beyond other means that I've been through that tell me why I am like I am, because of that, first is actually going and dealing with it through a different channel, more than accepting it, kind of, but for a purpose, as opposed to somebody saying: well that happened so this happened, and another person saying: well so that means this, there's a label for that, and we can give you a term, and you're like this and that and some of those behaviours are related to this... That was useful from an explanatory purpose, but it wasn't useful from a, you know, I didn't, there wasn't a transition in any way. It was just a function-solution versus a personal solution. So I don't know whether [therapist] knew, you know, what was going to happen, or... But I think she approached it like she did any other session. For me I think the model is... It is a... See what happens in the moment, but don't... It's not totally unguided, because she does have very, ah, she asks questions to bring it to a set of feelings or thoughts or experiences or... what's, you know, what's the word that describes that, right now, and then exploring that... But what it does is it takes the barriers away. You're not, you're not threatened by somebody writing notes on a piece of paper, or, you know they're using it to make a clinical decisions. This was an experiential review... which, um, I suppose her purpose was to make that possible, recognising you know, there's nothing wrong with a clinical setting necessarily, but it has its limitations because it's got a more formal boundary. And whilst this is a professional qualification and a professional service, the approach is less bounded in note-taking and report-writing. You know, I didn't get a report from [therapist]

saying: you're cured! Or, you have this! Or, you're like that! It was an, um, I bonded with [therapist], you know, I enjoyed... I won't forget her and I won't forget our experiences, and I don't think, I think for her there were experiences that she hasn't had either, you know, seeing the horse doing this and getting this male horse to accept that I could put the rein on and you know, those were sort of interesting for her as well.

18.30 C: Yeah, cool... It sounds like it was sort of an environment for you to just sort of... I dunno, if you, I assume, having gone through other forms of therapy, know about catharsis? Sort of like, the moment of understanding, or release, or acceptance.

18.50 1: Ah, yeah. Acceptance, more than release. A little bit more understanding... it is what it is. My life experiences are what they are. There is an acceptance that it's not... I'm not alone (A), B, ah, it's not great but it's not catastrophic, C, that I can go beyond it, those experiences, there are ways of growing through it and this is one of them. I got a bunch of... I came away from it with some awareness of myself and the world that I didn't have before. Um, my own self-imposed view of myself might not have matched what the rest of the world might have thought, versus, being more aware of the fact that, you know, my self-imposed view of myself isn't necessarily how the rest of the world experiences me, just because of who I am, what's happened, and stuff. And that was very diff- that was a very important transition. Um, it wasn't... it wasn't... it's always been the same since I finished talking to [therapist] because, but I can go back and remember, I can go back to her, there's a very strong experience I can go back to and go, oh yeah, that's how I got that thought and the reason why I was sort of able to move beyond that was because of that experience, and I can go back to it, and reengage with it, and use it again, because it's a very very real thing, versus a, you know, 'can you go back to page 3 of the notes', and you

know, because each of the sessions ended up being more about one thing, than ten, you know, and each one sort of had a flavour... And there was a journey-ish nature to it, without there being a plan? And there was the one session where I... People talk about their, having a – quotes – safe place, or a happy place, or wherever is in your mind where you can go when the walls are closing in... I didn't really know what people meant by that, but I have one, now. Because my experience of being herded, and protected by the horses is a memory that I can go to where there's just this, it feels like the ultimate safety. There's no, you know, if anything had come that was a threat to me in that moment, which of course you know what not even likely, I know that they would have defended me. And that's a place, that's a memory or an experience that you can't build another way, I don't think. Or at least, if you can build it another way, this is a very good way of building it. And, um, I can't guarantee that everybody's going to have that sort of experience, but when you can't talk to... When you can't use words to explain to an animal why you want to build a relationship with it, you have to go deeper, and you may or may not find the resources to do it, but I did find the resources to, sort of, you know, it involved crawling around on all fours, and sitting there, trying to mimic the horses, and all sorts of strange things *laughing* that if anyone was filming it they would think that you were kinda going out there, but, you know, trying to just sort of to let the horses know that I needed them and that I wasn't threat, I had to let them know that I was accepting of their ways, whatever that means. And there's not... That's sort of what I got into. But that wasn't prescribed by [therapist] in any way, you know, and she just said go and interact, and do whatever you think you should do. I don't know what that is. You might want to touch the horses, or not, she didn't even say that, she just said, go and interact, and that was the first session. I'm like, going, this is weird! What do I do? Do I just walk up to the

horses and go... You know, what do you do? You know, go into a room of aliens, interact! You know, and it was sort of like that! What do you do when you... you know, you go up to horses, and you go, well, do they want me to say hi? What do they care? And you start asking yourself questions about their world and saying, why am I here? What if I did go up and touch the horse? What's going to happen? Is it going to let me? Is it going to not? Is it gonna run away? Is it gonna turn around and kick me? Very unlikely, cos they're, you know, trained horses, but... What will happen? And that first session was very much, what will happen? And then others sort of, you, sometimes you weren't very confident, and some other times, it was almost just the opposite.

23.26 C: What's, sort of, what about the whole process of the therapy, like, over all of the sessions, did you sort of get, feel like it helped you the most, or did you get the most out of it?

23.50 1: The same, I told the same story in all three environments, so the same story that's relevant came up in both the session... Sessions... Which were 8 or 9 with a psychologist, and 1 or 2 with a psychiatrist, and then the 8 or 9 with [therapist], the main theme was this one thing. And for me, the ability to have, you know, when you're talking to someone who has a quotes, unquotes, medical label associated with them, you behave as if you're talking to someone with a medical label. You tell a story in a way, and I don't think you can help it, I think you sort of, you tell it in a way that helps them. You don't intentionally do it, but you, you're almost trying to give them signals about symptoms, or things that they can use to make a diagnosis. The difference between that and this was there was no diagnosis and they knew there was never going to be one, and so telling the same story, I didn't find myself making a formula out of it, whereas going through the sessions with the others, I found

myself, you know, deciding to tell it a certain way. Even though I didn't want to, necessarily, you do. And in this, I didn't, I found myself going and exploring it, and coming to some conclusions about it from a... A different... I dunno, it's hard to explain. But it wasn't as, I wasn't expecting a diagnosis, so I could more, you know, describe, not describe it in ugly detail for what it was, but... I dunno, it's sort of hard to explain. But I didn't need to say everything, in order to get to the point? If you know what I mean? Whereas in a clinical session you're sort of, yes, and now I have to go through the stages of the trauma and this there wasn't the need to sort of pick the trauma apart and describe it in steps, it was, you know... Where there was relevant to discuss it, an emotion that might have come from a traumatic experience, it wasn't formulaic. It just kind of came out, or it didn't. And yet you still... Well, I did. I found myself able to accept that as part of my life, rather than saying, oh well, what does that mean? You know, looking to someone for an answer. I didn't, wasn't going to get an answer from [therapist]. The answer is more in the fact that you've explored it in a non-clinical setting, and there is no judgement, and there is no answer, and there's no prescription, or whatever it is. You know, you just go back, and come back next week, or not! And after eight weeks, I hadn't planned on eight weeks, but it was ironic... When I did sort of get to the end of, the last one, it was naturally a sort of conclusion. We ended up having a wrap-up and she said, this seems like a wrap-up, doesn't it? And I went, yeah, kinda does! And she goes, well that probably means we're done. And you know, it wasn't like, you've paid for eight! We've gotta wrap it up on this one! Because I would have paid for more, it wouldn't have crossed my mind not to do so, but there it was! At the end of the eighth session it was like I found myself going, yeah, oh, that was good, and I understand this, and I can take that away, and you know, I dunno, I might go back for a follow up. Not because, ah, not in the

way you'd go back to a doctor for a follow up, as a check up, you know, is my liver still working ok? Yeah, it's ok! You know you had that problem, well it's this, it's that. This would be more like going and saying, well six months on, or nearly nine months on from the start of it, you know, going back in and probably going in and seeing Mo, the male horse again, and going, and actually, probably, the female horse who was... I'd probably go and ask for those two horses again and go and just sit and, ah, see what happens. *laughs* I know they'd remember me for sure, they're like that. So that's... I dunno whether you're going to come to a question of what it meant for me, from a broader perspective, but if now's the right time, I'm not a spiritual guy. I'm a hardcore atheist. I'm a scientist, I'm a rationalist. You know, the world, not everything can be explained, but that which can be explained is, you know, can be explained to, we can determine how well we know something. And whilst I know that there's hundreds and millions and billions of unknown things, I don't need faith in a God to accept that they're unknown and live in the world. The word spiritual, for me, would have always been a word that would have not entered my description of myself because it has... it's a loaded term. Everybody thinks it means God, you know, religion, organised religion, or, you know, a bunch of well-established belief systems that I don't subscribe to. But I would say that interacting with the horses without using language, I don't really... You can't talk to them. You can tell them things, but you know they don't understand what you're saying. They can interpret from the tone, or whatever, but having gone into a field and literally followed a horse around for an hour, with the sole purpose of letting it near me, and letting me come near it, and proving to it that I'm not a threat, and it knowing that it's got issues, and I've got issues, and we're both, we both, you know, push things away and for that to happen, was... That was a spiritual experience. Because I can't, you know, put, I thought

about what I was doing, while I was doing it, but it wasn't a... experiment. *laughs* Right? And there's no right or wrong at the end of it. If they horse had not let me put the reins on, well I wouldn't have been upset because it didn't have to happen. But the fact that it did, and the fact that I was protected by the herd, you know, that experience of being looked after by a herd, you know, oh, it was just... It's beyond... I don't need to... I don't need to use my standard M.O. to explain it. I'm happy to accept it as being something that was a more natural thing. And I understand more about my daughter as a result. Because her affinity with horses, which is obsessional, but it's obsessional in a fact-based sense, but I think it's natural in the sense that she has that in her, it's an affinity, she feels something as a child, in a more innocent sort of way, before she puts layers and layers of, you know, being grown up, and, you know, things that, you know, you shouldn't believe, and aren't real, and her innocent approach to the animal world, I kinda, ah, yeah, you know, maybe there's just a deeper part of your brain that's just more, you know, the ancient evolutionary brain that's more present in you than the social brain that we've, you know, brought forwards. So, it makes, I understand her a lot better now, and I can understand her behaviours, and she's been behaviourally very difficult for most of her life, much less so in the last two years, but as her parents, having an autistic child with anxiety issues, and ADHD, and undiagnosed this, and pills for this, and therapy for that, you know, you kinda become quite, ah, you want an answer. And the horse stuff for her was a, it wasn't as, I don't think it was as transformational as it was for me, which I would say it was, but that spiritual connection that she appeared, or that non-describable connection that she has with horses, for no good reason, she likes horses. It's not like we brought her up and we put her in a field with horses, she grew up in a city in America, where she was born there were no horses! And yet, when she finds a book

about horses she's like, I've got to be with horses. It's kinda weird! You know, why's that? And when she does have, when she is around horses, she's a much happier person. It's like she is channelling some communication. Or the not-need-to-speak thing. And I can associate more with that now, so I can... And I now get pleasure out of sitting around, standing at the side of a field with horses, and watching them do their shit, and then maybe one will come over, maybe not. And that's her thing. I wouldn't have done that before! I would have sat around and read a book! About some fascinating science! Which I still do.

32.30 C: Cool! Yeah, it sounds like it was just whatever you needed, or wanted, and how long you needed it for. And really sort of you-focussed, as opposed to like, problem-focussed.

32.44 1: Yeah, it wasn't prescriptive, in the way that, you know, there are techniques that different psychologists use to do certain things. There's the school of this, and the school of that, and the school of the other, and whilst I got a lot of value out of talking to Sue Martin, who had been recommended to me, who was a clinical psychologist and she had an approach that she uses, it was like being in a world I know. I'm a talker... I can... I don't have to think, I can say the right thing, whenever I open my mouth the right stuff comes out. I don't babble. I know exactly what's going to happen, I know exactly what to say. Being in a room with a talk therapist was like perfect for me. It was like, ask a question, and I get to talk! You know, it was very rewarding for me, to do that, and that wasn't getting me to the... it wasn't getting me beyond myself. You know, that was just like an environment in which I excel, in a sense. You know, I'm a talker. That's what I do for a living *laughs* So going and doing, so I didn't, it didn't present me with... I think the horse therapy, and I think the reason why lots of people talk about it as an interesting path is because words are a

very... *quietly* It's hard to describe the experience using one, but they're a... Poor excuse for an experience. An experience that is nonverbal, given that we have lots of senses, not just our ears, experiences that are visual, physical, multi-modal, as they say in, you know, some schools of thought, are deeper than, you can get more into what we as humans can experience. The verbal experience, in a clinical setting, is valuable, but is limited. It's really... it's like this exercise, you know, is more relaxing than an office which has got the word psychologist, Dr So-and-so on the door, you know, that's a very artificial environment. Sitting in a field, with the sun shining, with someone who's had her own life experience that have brought her to this journey, as opposed to an education through a... And [indistinct] Her journey of learning what she needs to be an excellent partner in a process like equine-assisted therapy wasn't an academic journey at all. It was an experiential journey for her that led her to this personal transformation to go off and guide people like me from my darkness to, you know, a little bit less of that. And that's, that's what that is. So what sounds like a very woolly 'go sit in a field' is more, is you know, it's easier to get people to sort of, when I've told people that I've done this, people that I trust and know them well and stuff, some of them go, 'Oh, I don't get that!' Even though they know me as well as they could know me, and other people go, 'Yeah, I can sort of see that!' and none of these people know the real story. They don't need to know the real story, because I, there's some stuff there that's too shit, and, [indistinct] But, 'why would you go sit in a field with a horse?' and, you learn, is it, I called it horse whispering for some people, because it made them think it was about me learning about horses, and well that was a good way of just, not, you know I never, I don't think I called it therapy to those people.

- 36.22 C: Yeah, okay. It seems like there's a lot of, sort of, judgemental connotations of it, just from what I've talked, when I've talked about it, to other people. But it's cool. Um... Hmm... I've got this question... How were the activities for you? Like, how was your experience of them? But you didn't really do activities, as such..?
- 36.50 1: Well, not in the, you know... Well, I think I can answer the question, because the word activity is whatever happens in the therapy session, right? As opposed to it being from a prescribed list of, 'did you do step, task 4?' Um, one of the activities that was, well, that was more of an activity was... We were discussing just, there was one session where I found myself, you know, being very angry about what I'd brought... This stuff... And it was very clear that this was the 'anger session' if you will, even though that wasn't the plan? And so you could, you know, one minute when I was talking, you know, we were over this side of the fence, the horses were right over there, you know, 'let's hide behind the tree!' You know, 'this guy's having issues today!' And so one of the activities that we did was, so, she said, well there's different ways we can approach this, but here's a suggestion. You know, here's some things, you know, some poles, some stands, and some buckets, and some other horse paraphernalia that's in the right. Why don't you see if you can do something with that, to construct something that represents how you feel about the anger side of things? So I built a structure and I didn't, I just grabbed some stuff, and put it all together, and she said, well what, well don't think about it! Do something! And then when you're done, let me know, and we'll sit and... And we kinda looked at this thing, which was a pile of horse equipment structured, somehow, in the middle of the ring, which sounds ridiculous, but... it was an unstable structure. And you could see that if you pulled one piece out, the whole thing would collapse. So I hadn't built a nice, little strong castle that I could take the top piece off, or you know, that I could of... it

wasn't a stable thing. If you pushed or kicked any part of it, the whole thing would have fallen over. And in a sense, that's what anger's like, right, when you're on... when you're really frustrated, or you know, you can't deal with, ah... that, in a particular circumstance, then, you know, everything is unstable, and somebody touches your toe and all of a sudden you light up like a, you know, a bonfire. And so this, the activity in that sense was, I built something that was very interesting and bizarrely accurate description of something that was unstable, and did we impose, you know, people impose an idea on it and stuff, but for me, the experience, the activity was taking a conversation, a... You know, when I tried to go in and go to the horses, they were having none of it, didn't matter even if I was feeling calmer. And so then we had to, then we did this thing, and she said, 'well you can leave it here, if it makes you feel better to leave it, and you can sort of, say you built it, or you can take it apart if it helps for you to have built it and take it apart' and she says, well you know, do what you think you should do and let me know when you're done. So I took it apart. Actually, as it turns out I put all the pieces back so that the next person that was using the ring... And I thought to myself, ah it's alright, I'm organising the world for the next person. And we talked about how that activity was about you go and create a mess, and then you undo it, and then, you know, you want to recover from it, you don't want to leave the next person aware of the fact that you had a whirlwind moment. And that was relevant to a previous conversation we'd had, and away we went. You know, we're back onto another thing. So from an activity point of view, that was a very, that was a way of, you know, and I'm sure that was an activity or an experience or a thing which she knew how to do from her training, as a vehicle for another conversation, or something. It felt like it, I dunno, if it was spontaneous, then it was brilliant!

40.50 C: Cool it seems like it was really sort of like free flowing, like you just found your topic and...

40.56 2: Yeah, every time, yeah. There was one time, and I came up in the car, determined to talk about something, and we didn't. I was in the car going, I'm going to say that, and I'm going to say that, and I'm going to talk about this and talk about that, and you know, blah blah blah, and I sort of structured it as if I was going into a session with a, you know, 'what are you gonna talk about this week?' and I'd had all these thoughts structured in my mind, and we got there, and we didn't at all. We just, somehow, without even, and I don't think she knew I needed to, had an idea in mind. We sat down and said, well, here we are today, and then we ended up going on a totally different track, and we didn't talk about that thing. So it was sort of... But every session was purposeful. There was none of them... I didn't come away from any of them going, hang on a minute, why did I drive an hour north and sit in a field? Right? There was always the process, there is a process to the therapy, which is, there is a start point, and there is an end point. And we never let it drift into a two hour session. It was always an hour, and when we approached the hour, you know, 5 minutes beforehand, she would come over and say right, well, we're now getting towards the end of this session, so we'll stop here. So it wasn't unstructured in the sense that it would have drifted on and, you know, we were having a nice chat in a field, and go and have a cup of tea, you know. It was professional. It was an hour long session. The environment was different, but it was a structure in that sense.

42.20 C: What parts about, I guess, maybe each session, or the therapy as a whole did you like the most, or enjoy the most? If enjoy is the right word?

42.37 2: It was enjoyable because we were outside. And it was summer, so it was sunny, and it was warmer this last summer, so it was stunning. So it was very nice to be outside in the beautiful environment, you know, streams, babbling brooks, and birds, and you know, nature, and other stuff. Even though there was a stable here with cars, and other things going on, it was very, very peaceful. So it was very nice to be outside. If it had been a colder day, I don't think it would have mattered. But it was, of course, very beautiful. The... I feel like I'm repeating stuff a lot... It just wasn't a clinical office, with a door. Stunning, how much of a difference that makes. I, in my mind, because I was hiring a professional, I didn't, it wasn't like I was just, you know, somebody said 'hey, if you talk to this person, she's like a, you know, a voodoo person' and you go and talk to her. You know, she's like a professional therapist. So I knew I was going to a professional session, and you know, it wasn't cheap either *laughs* so, but it was, the reason why I would a) recommend it, b) reflect on it is, it was... It was complimentary. I wonder if, on its own, you know, having been through the formal process of... stuff, you know, you've got this, and you do that, and that's this, and blah blah blah... The back end, there's a, there's a... it was a vehicle back into the world, if you will. You know, cos if you, when you end up at the psychiatrist, and they say, you know, look, 1 hour, look at the notes I've made! And here, you can have some of these, and do that, and this, you know. And if you stayed there, would you ever really blend back in, if you will? You're now a case, a number, you know, case [number], [name], came in and talked about this, and this, and that, and she's a brilliant psychiatrist. I had a, it was very productive and positive session, but, this was a much, this was a way of going from, you know, not wanting to deal with it, to dealing with it, being freaked out by the psychiatrist's view of the world, which was really quite uncannily accurate from a, you know, predicting how and what I'm like,

kinda approach. You know, you go and see these people because they, that's their job, it's to sort of go, and be able to be precise. If you're just left with that level of a precise description of yourself in an abstract, clinical way, you go oh, right, where's the bridge back? And for me, as it turns out, although that wasn't the plan, it was a, it was sort of almost a bridge to come back, you know, into the world having dealt with that, right? Rather than just being, say, left with the clinical answer, you know, you then go off and explore it so it's sort of like a, you know, a way of going from not having dealt with it, to saying, right, ok, that's a journey I've just been on and it's very nonthreatening and very positive. And [therapist] was great. I'm sure other people could do the job too. But I like horses now! And I didn't like horses before. I always had a judgement before that horses were just icky, unpredictable things and you'd best leave them alone, unless you know, you wanted to get booted and thrown off, you're better off for ignoring them. And now I would go and, you know, hang out, and I would happily go into a field and, you know, go up and sort of say hello, even if I didn't know if the horse was a lunatic or not... I would be aware of the horse was going, oh, dude, I'm like one of those really highly strung, fucked up horses, don't come near me! And I'd be like, yeah, ok. And now, I wouldn't not go in for the sake of it, I'd be more like, oh, I wonder what that horse is like? You know, can I build a relationship with that horse, for no other reason than I can, or not? And I've done that a couple of times, you know, at stables and stuff since... My daughter goes to riding lessons, and I'm sort of just trying to, you know, see what are they like? And not having to, saying anything. It's kind of interesting. Because when I talk...

46.50 C: Its sounds like it's been quite transformative...

46.54 2: Yeah, I've described it that way, certainly to myself, in my mind, I think it was a... You know... I won't... I will never forget it. And it was good to go through, it was

definitely... I definitely needed to get this, go through it. And everyone has something... Not everyone, some people just have perfect lives I suppose, but if you've had an experience that is dark, and is unpleasant, then it's really nice to come out the other side. And, you know, depending on the level of darkness and unpleasantness associated with it, that level of benefit is going to be relative to your personal experience. But transformational for me is, you know, I can go, from 40 onwards I can go forwards rather than hang- You know, it wasn't holding me back, but it was definitely there, and unpleasant. And so from that point of view, the whole process, and I give complement to all the aspects of it, not just the one. I wouldn't say that the horse therapy was the only one I should do. For me, it just happened that it was the third one, so I can't say that the others weren't relevant, cos I might not have been able to go through that conversation in my equine-assisted therapy had I not gone through it in clinical- I don't know! Maybe, maybe not.

48.16 C: Was there any parts of it that you didn't really like, that that you didn't feel were useful, possibly, or..?

48.29 2: There was one session where I didn't really know whether... Ah... Every other session there was something special happened. Either, something special in a... You know, not special as in worthy from an outsider's point of view, but special as in relevant. Special. And there was one session where that didn't happen, but I didn't judge it. It was like, I didn't, there didn't have to be a... a-ha moment every time, it just was what it was. And there was one session where we just didn't do much with the horses and that wasn't an issue, but I remember it for not being like the others. Out of the eight, there was one where it was more... I showed up, talked about some stuff, and then I went home again. And I didn't come away going, great, yes, no, or otherwise. I don't remember the details of what I talked about particularly, so it could

be that... But you know, I don't think that's a judgement in any way, I think that's just a, just one of the... One of the eight.

49.26 C: Was there anything that you didn't enjoy, or..?

49.30 2: Ah, no! Not really! *laughs* I mean I enjoy new experiences anyway so... But I didn't... No, there wasn't anything. It was... I think potentially, as I say, it was a third step in a journey. It might not have been as... I might not have been able to debrief in that way as easily if I hadn't been on stage three, if you will. So I don't know. And I might not have enjoyed that first conversation if it had been the first time I'd gotten round to sort of discussing stuff. So, hard to say, but no! It was a pleasure. But I thought to myself, this is actually almost fun, in a sense, even though there was poignant, and serious moments. But then when she said... The thing that convinced me that it wasn't just a... soft... thing, she said well, this is kinda a wrap, isn't it? I think we're done! And she read the situation to say, I think we might be done here. You know, we could carry on, but I'm just getting the feeling that you sort of, you know, we talked like this, and we put that together, and sat there and there it was! It was over all of a sudden! And I was like, oh, well it's a process... it's a, it's not just a random, go and sit in a field for eight weeks. You know, there is a structure and a concept behind it. So it wasn't... Ah, I would have actually liked to have gone back for more, and I've actually thought about it, and I haven't – doesn't mean I won't – and so no, I don't think so. I was a very positive experience, and I just can't, you know, yeah. I needed it.

51.11 C: After the first time you went to your first session, was there any sort of outstanding feeling that you remember, like... How did you feel following your first session?

51.31 2: Following from the first session? I knew I was gonna go back, which I didn't know before I went. I probably was going to, but I didn't know that. The first session was sort of un... It left me sort of... I was unsatisfied in a way. Not with the quality of it but I didn't know... You know, why... What do you do when somebody says, you know, go and get [indistinct] with horses. And then you do, and you know, great! So I went over, and that horse let me stroke it, and that one didn't, and then when I sat down with them over there they got a bit bored and went over there... Were they bored? I dunno. The first one was a little bit unsettling, because you're sort of, you know, there's no criteria. There is no success criteria, and because you're engaging with horses you feel like you should achieve something, okay, especially being my personality, you know, so I'm here for a purpose, there has to be an outcome. And there wasn't an outcome in the first one, other than I sort of was in a field with horses, and we talked about it for a bit... There was a soft, you know, what did that feel like? Describe it. And I wasn't quite sure, you know, whether or not... This first session was less beneficial in a way, because I didn't get... But it wasn't in any way negative, to make me not want to go back, but I, but at the same point in time I was like... Oh... What is this all about? I made up my mind to go back but... I didn't, it wasn't a hard decision in any way... but it was a, I didn't... You know, your first one is ... It was a totally new experience! I'm not into horses, A. B, standing around in a field for an hour, trying to use them as a vehicle for exploring feelings and emotions and stuff, which isn't my forte anyway, you know, you're gonna come out going... This is a little bit weird! You know? I'm better off talking to a clinical psychologist, because I can talk about it. Whereas, you know, whether a horse doesn't let me touch it or not, well, how should I interpret that? Should I be offended? No, it's a horse! *laughs* Right? But, so there was an uncertainty! There was an uncertainty about it.

53.58 C: Okay, what about later sessions?

54.01 2: No, all of the others were much more... Second session... Well, second session, something very special happened, which was that the female horse rolled, and [therapist] and I were sitting, and she came over, we were sitting over here on a tree stump talking, and we'd been over here in a field by the trees and we'd started talking, we'd sort of gone into a more positive, relaxed conversation, and as soon as that happened, you know, as soon as that happened, they started to come across, you know, slowly make their way over. And then they came and joined in our little group - this was a nice herd to be a part of - and then William kinda hung out, and came up really close, and he sort of walked around us, and came round the back, and stuck his nose in my face and stuff, and snorted right in my face like this, you know, and left his drool on my nose, which was interesting, and not unpleasant, but curious, when a horse comes in and goes *snorting noise* But, you know, it's just saying hello! Right? This is what horses do to each other. And the female horse came over, and she kinda did a drive-by. And then, she came over and, as if from here to that computer over there, just decided to go and roll, and aw yeah, scratch her back, and all this other stuff, which a) she hadn't done in any of [therapist]'s previous sessions, and b) horses don't do unless they know that they're safe. And, you know, to see, for it to happen in a therapy session, if you will, is sort of well, I suppose anything's possible, but from... That experience was... Well a) being one of them just coming up, and sitting there- And in the second session, I wasn't allowed to touch the horses. That was an activity, if you will, but William decided he needed to get closer, and came right up, and I'm sitting there, [indistinct] and she goes, he's going to come up close! And I'm going, really? And she's going, yeah, I can see it *laughs* And, you know, put his snout right here! As close as he could possibly go, nose touching nose! And

goes *snorting noise* like that, right in my face, and I'm like going... I guess that's a hello. And then immediately after that, then the female rolled, and then I was like... The rest of the sessions from that moment in... That was a, like... that was an experience. Even if you liked horses, a lot, if you've um, for somebody who's never even been around them, or worked with them in any way, that was just... it wasn't... you know, why would a horse do that to me? *laughs* you know? Strange human being! Sitting there with sunglasses on! I think I'll come up and snort at you! You seem like a good horse-type-thing. Anyway, that was kinda cool. And then after that I was sorta into it, because I was like, if there's gonna be more experiences like that, then I just won't ever... I won't have any other place. And if I went now to artificially get more experiences like that, just go and have a therapy session for the sake of it, it wouldn't happen... Because you would just be arbitrarily looking for these experiences, as opposed to it just happening and going, oh wow! And then the next one, oh wow! And it wasn't wow-spectacular, it was like, so relevant and poignant a conversation, that's why it was important, not just snorting in my face, which would be... You know... Interesting.

57.17 C: *laughs* Yup, okay, and what about the therapy as a whole, like the culmination of it, at the end of the last session?

57.25 2: Very natural, you know, naturally came to an end. It just so happened, that we'd run out of sessions, from a... I bought eight, you know, but we were fairly loose with, you know, I used some for my daughter, and then the last one, it just so happened to be! So it came to a very natural conclusion. And then I kept in touch with [therapist] over email for a few weeks, just in a natural sort of way. No... Formal way. And... And then, this! So, you know, it was just a very... it was a... But then, the same's true of psychologists, right? Sue, the psychologist, she said, 'I think we're kinda done.'

We talked about some stuff, and it's good, and we've been here, and we've been there and I don't think you're in a crisis position, I don't think you're gonna, you know, I don't think it's all gonna come tumbling down, but you need to be aware of this, and that, and again it was... She would have happily taken more money, I'm sure, but she didn't. It was a natural conclusion with that session, and same with this. Both of them had a therapeutic end, as a process, rather than being drawn out, you know, don't forget to come back next week! You know? So it was good in a sense.

58.45 C: Cool, did you learn anything from the process?

58.48 2: Oh gosh, ah, yep. It's hard to know where to start, really. More in touch with feelings, and all of that sort of emotional side of myself. More aware that, I don't know, whatever... I know, I have experiences now that I can say are sort of spiritual experiences, if you will, that I'm comfortable with, that are meaningful, that kinda of have a purpose, rather than being people's sort of arbitrary going and looking for a spiritual experience. You know, I experimented with drugs in my 20s, and was looking for the other side of the, you know, opening the door of perception and all that good stuff, but none of those were spiritual experiences in a sense? You know, they were... I was manufacturing, and looking beyond the normal state of the neurons, and that was fascinating and an interesting experiment. This wasn't an experiment. That's it. So I had some experiences that were genuinely – quotes unquotes – my own definition of spiritual, which is a... Which I'm glad about. I'm pleased I've had them, and I'm a softer person as a result. It's easier to, sort of, be. And that was a... And if that, and, if nothing else, actually... That, and acceptance, actually! Just acceptance that, yeah... What my experiences... Uh... They are, they have happened, that doesn't mean that they are anything other than that they've happened, in a sense. In our world, they are what they are and you judge them and

associate horse and things with them, but they are just experiences that have happened to a... You know, my instance a life form, and you know, that was a good way of stepping outside of it as well, and going: no, it's not my fault, and blah blah blah blah. But then, we didn't deal... I think what was interesting about it was you sort of expect to go off and deal with faults, but we didn't deal with them in those, you know, ten step process. You know, I'm gonna start with acceptance, and then we're gonna go to, you know, denial, you know, I'm not gonna go through that. And yet, in some ways those steps of what other therapies might take you through a structured process, I can relate to some of those things, but through a more, you know, holistic way I suppose. And I don't need to describe it any other way than that. Which is unusual for me. Usually I've got to have everything worked out, and have a good answer for everything.

1.01.13 C: Did the therapy... Well, did you have any expectations of it? Did it meet your expectations?

1.01.23 2: It exceeded... Well, ah, I tried not to. Like I said, I was open minded. I was in it for two reasons, so I guess I was biased because I was looking for an answer, for my daughter, I was looking for something that would give her a bridge in skill set actually... Skills she might have learnt through it, and a little bit of self-awareness, and a bunch of other things. So I came into it with that purpose. For me it turned out to be a side-benefit because I ended up saying, oh yeah, I might give that a go too, and then it being very positive. So my expectations were more that it would be beneficial for my daughter, she had about 6 or 7 sessions and it was beneficial, if not transformational. It was feeding her horse addiction *laughs* so why wouldn't she enjoy it? Do you wanna go and hang out with a lady and talk about and do stuff with horses? Oh yeah, I'm right there! So for her it wasn't ah, you know, in her mind it

was horse-whispering classes, and in our mind it was ‘that’s going to be good for you.’ So it served that... I had expectations of that. And they were more than met. [name] enjoyed it, and you could see that it had follow on benefits for her. I think that she remembered those things that she’d done, sessions, you know, and then applied some of it. So it exceeded my expectations as a parents. For me, I, having seen the first session with [name] that was amazing I kinda went in going, well I can’t see why this wouldn’t be good for me too. So I kinda had a pre-loaded entry criteria because of [name] had such a, the first session she had was, I was like, oh yeah, this is gonna be really powerful. I could just see it, you know? And as well as being [therapist], I mean I’m sure other people could do her job too, but I could see that there was a... That it was a good thing. So it exceeded in a sense, but at the same point in time I sorta had the bar set because I’d seen my daughter have what was an interesting first session.

1.03.25 C: Did your expectations about what you’d get out of it, or how it would go, did they change over the course of it, or...?

1.03.33 2: Ah, I guess it wasn’t until session five that we actually got to the point and I didn’t know until session five, whether or not we would go there. Did I need to care? And did I need to go there? Could we go there without going there? So in a sense, when we went there, it kinda got grounded in... If we hadn’t, it might have just been a set of experiences that would have been relevant to my life in general. But because they ended up gravitating towards, you know, closing out and this sort of thing, it kinda gave it that purpose. So after that occurred, then yes, there was a... The remaining sessions were then quite purposeful in the sense that they picked up the threads of the other conversation. Whereas the ones that led up to that were, you know, quite wide-ranging, they were sort of on who, when, where, you know, a whole bunch of different paths of conversation, some more about me, some more about other

people. You know, all sorts of things. But once we got there, then it became quite purposeful because then it was a, because then it was a process of going from there, to that being a dealt-with thing. Even though, [therapist] didn't make it feel like that, it was, because I knew that she, she didn't, she couldn't have known that I needed to go somewhere, though I think I told her... She did ask me, right at the first session, she said, 'why are you here?' And you can't, you know, because obviously it's not just a... Just gonna hang with horses, because you could do that, and they'd be able to teach you to ride or whatever, you can go and learn how to do that, so why are you here? So at the first session, I hinted at that, second session it kinda came up as a concrete thing... We then dealt with it a bit later on... And, you know, so it had a purpose, once we'd got to that point, as it was.

1.05.39 C: Did you find yourself doing, thinking, feeling, anything different after the sessions?

1.05.47 2: Oh yeah, definitely. The first few sessions were, well, not deliberately, but they ended up being about my relationship with my work environment. I guess that's where you spend most of your time. There's nothing particularly profound in my home environment that I wanted to talk about, per say, [indistinct] So I had some work-related conversations, and I was able to apply some of those first sessions to, well how do you approach, well, I'm a big, tall, loud, pretty powerful (quotes unquotes) guy, and I work with a lot of other people who also think of themselves as pretty, you know, blah blah blah, and we're all at the top end of our game. So we're all alpha males, all competing for space, and, you know, I'm a... I'm possibly a little more reserved than I used to be, and in some ways less confident, but then I get into less situations. And, you know, if I was to go back actually, to see [therapist], I would go back. Because I've sort of, in some ways, stepped out of the cut-and-thrust of that,

there's nothing wrong with it, but at the same time I've sort of lost a bit of confidence, in a way, because this is a different me in lots of ways. You know, I'm a little bit more like, 'oh! That's okay, I don't have to be involved in all this stuff.' Whereas, I'm in the centre of everything!' *laughs* Right? And that's different for me, because now I'm like, Oh, I'm quite involved in this, and I don't know if I should be? And there's this new little neurosis if you will, and it's like the new, you know, sort of the benefits of it, I've got to get used to the benefits, right? Because I've... It's, it was transformational. It has taken the edge off life, you know? While my need to be in a particular mode was... whatever, well it's not there now. I have a different set of emotional needs, if you will. Maybe emotional needs where before I didn't have any. But yes is the answer. It's different, and some of it I've got to get used to, but that's a... That's also, I suppose, if it's transformational and you're not getting used to being different, have you transformed? Probably not, you know. So in some ways I'm actually a little bit, you know, a little on tenterhooks, because it's... Certain circumstances where I go, 'this is the opposite of what I'd normally do: wade in, take over, you know, make sure I got what I thought was the right answer, perhaps at great cost.'

1.08.27 C: What do you think caused that difference, or that change?

1.08.33 2: Better awareness of, you know, nonverbal communication primarily. Right?

When you have to build a relationship with an animal that can't speak, that is willing to have a relationship with you, if you understand... horse... land... You know, so can you? And that's true of other groups of people, you know, groups of other people who are into a... You know... Pilots, people who fly planes, they're into flying. So if you're showing up and you go for a social, and you don't know much about flying, and you want to talk about non-flying things, you're gonna find yourself on the

outside of the group, right? Seems obvious. But if you accept that you can have enough of an interest, because you happen to have been invited along for a random reason, there might be something you can learn about flying. Not necessarily because you want to be a pilot, but because yeah, sure, these people must do it, so it must have some interest. If you're going to go and join a group of horses, you've got to kind of accept that... What is it you have to do to get... Give... To put less of yourself in, into the... To learn, to get something out of it. And so the ability to be less of myself, rather than imposing my... Well, I can do whatever I want! It's just been the way I've grown up. I'm now less inclined to... I'm more of a... Allow things to happen, rather than force things to happen. And now I'm more inclined to sort of let things happen. And, actually, you know, generally, I still sort of get my way *laughs* But, not what I want! But still sort of what I hoped would happen. Whereas before I was sort of like, what do I want? And how do I get it? Now I'm like... It would be good if we could get this. Let's see if it can happen. Softer... A softer version of the world versus, yeah, I can get what, you know, I'm intelligent enough to talk my, to talk anyone round to my way of thinking, if they're prepared to stick around long enough. They'll eventually give in, right? And, whether it be a customer, or whatever it is, now it's more about allowing things to happen, and influencing at the right points, which, you know, if you go into a field with horses and you say, right, I'm coming in, I'm gonna say hello, you're going to make me feel welcome, you're gonna get fuck all. They're gonna be standing on the other side of the field and go, you don't understand horse theory, do you? Right? Come back when you do. And that was a stunning piece of learning for me, in terms of, yeah I was aware of it, but I wasn't... I knew that I could be more graceful, but I didn't see any point. What was the point? When it wasn't inhibiting, you know, or at least when it was inhibiting me, and I had

to accept that the other way would actually have a, you know, bigger benefit rather than just an immediate gain and, yeah, and then it's, I think I'm more relaxed at home. I've got three children, one of them's really complicated, so being a parent with that was pretty stressful, and, you know, I think I've... Some of my learnings have rubbed off on my wife, you know? Not that I think there was anything wrong with her, but we are both more able. I find myself using some of those experiences to say... Oof! Didn't really need to let this situation become a big deal, when it's always been a big deal because of habit. And being able to actually step out of that, rather than going and saying, 'Right!' You know, 'Fix it!' which is what I always did, I'd need to always fix it, and, I don't know if you're a parent, but when you're in that situation you want to always fix it because you want them, you want the bullshit to stop, but now you can say, well, the bullshit will stop if I let it stop, instead of forcing it to stop, that may be an avenue to bringing everything back down to, you know, three children all competing for air. And how do we not make them compete for air? Right? And you know, there's another way versus I'm the parent, I'm in charge, here's the outcome. You're in your rooms. Right, off you go. We... We can, there are bridges... There are more bridges available to cross, rather than, you know, Right! See! See that rule on the fridge that says you can't do that! Which is an answer to a parenting... It's a perfectly acceptable way to parent, right? We've got some rules, and you've disobeyed them, so you're in your room! And they are relevant... But when that's your main source of control, you know, it loses its power because it's the only tool that you have. And I've definitely come away with some other tools for like steering situations. You know, by, how do I get into the herd? How do I become part of the child herd in my house? Because it's totally out of control! And there's a war going on! And I show up, and then I become a centre of attention, not by words and things,

but I... And so yeah, in a sense there's some subtleties that I didn't have before, you know, otherwise it's, you know [makes squishing/fighting noises] proverbially, of course.

1.13.23 C: Yeah, so my next question was how did you take this experience into everyday life, if you did? And you've sort of answered that quite a lot, already.

1.13.31 2: Actually, yes and no, in the sense that I don't think about how might what I do every day... Relative to it. Reflecting on it now I can see that I've changed, but I don't walk around going oh, wonder what I'd do if I was in a field with horses. But on occasion, I do. When I go into a circumstance where I know... I'm now aware that certain people just don't like me. I would have... Before, I'd have just said, well, that I just haven't convinced them yet! And it's okay. I don't, you know, why would I be getting on with everybody? I'm not going to, and that's okay. Now that's a very different perspective, and people would then perceive me in the past as saying, God, this guy would do anything to be, quotes, right or, you know, come in, and some people would then say, oh he's actually making an effort, and some people would perceive it as forced, you know, I want to actually get this thing done at work, or whatever, which is the most... But now it's like [indistinct] but I don't necessarily think about it every day. But I now accept that there's a couple of people around the place who think I'm a cock, you know, and that's okay. I can't make those people like me, by going in my old style. They may or may not come around to the fact that, you know, they want to like me or not, and that's okay, and I'm less precious about that. Whereas I always wanted to be liked by everybody, that's was like my default MO, and there was a reason for that, and now I'm more... You know, it's okay, well, we can have a professional relationship but it doesn't have to be that we really really get on. You know, I'll just do this project, or whatever it is, and... And now I can see

when people are thinking, *whispers* I need to tell Richard to shut up! And now I can read that, I never used to be able to read that. So yeah, but it's... And I would say that the horse therapy's had the most impact, if I was to define it, in two places, the clinical therapy was... It needed just to happen, because there is a, there are some facts about my situation that are facts, and that are, you know, there's a reason why these things do work, and why they do... blah blah blah. So there were some facts that were established, but they didn't provide a cohesive world view at the end of it, and so for me, [indistinct] that was putting it all together, and going back into the world with a new framework. And if I was to, if I was, you know, on a board of... Making mental health be a more... Ah, the power of mental health support... I would advocate for both of these, but I would put this one of this list of things for changing people's perspective. Meditation would be up there too, in terms of doing a transformative... Some meditative techniques where you try and, you know, turn the brain off, dial it back a bit, both of those are in effect very powerful things that, you know, before I might just have gone, oh, that's all voodoo, you know, give me a chemical, you know, it's just the brain, it's neurons, and you know there's much more to that, this other, these complimentary... Yeah, I dunno, complimentary medicine, cos that's all... There's a lot of negative, non-science press about it, but they add a lot of value, some of these other techniques that are... That I think should be part of mainstream therapy. And, I wasn't really fucked up, either. I wasn't, you know, on the edge of suicide, or an alcoholic, or a drug addict, or, you know, lost my job, or you know, I was just a confused 41 year old who was sick of finding certain, you know, patterns kept on coming back that were holding me back both personally and professionally. I was like, I'm done with that now. I'm sick of it. So, that journey... But it was a mental health issue, you know, it's an experience. And that's a... And a

lot of people don't, aren't... And would I have ended up more self-destructive? Who knows? You know? Yeah. I've been... I've never been to the edge, but, you know, I've been on the journey. You know? I've never, never deliberately stopped short, but never deliberately not tried to... You know, but there is a... The mental health support is a gap in society, as an insight. There is a huge gap, you know, and especially in kids, under 10, right? A lot of... My experience, with my own children, of course a very narrow subset, is there's a lot more anxieties, pressures, unexplained negative experiences where they don't know how to process it. Shit happens to them in the world and some kids just let it roll off their back, others take it on board. And it's one experience in one minute, in one classroom, and it's there for three years. And, I'm going, you're really still focused on that thing that happened three years ago? Ah, yeah. And I'm going, wow, well, that's because it was a very deep experience, right? It was a very, you know, emotionally powerful experience, and those memories are strong, you know? So, there's lots of kids running around with, you know, [pause] without enough support. And, you know, being a parent in the modern world you just don't have this... My wife doesn't work [indistinct] so she's available and hopefully less stressed than if she had a job. But, you know, most people have two... Both parents work. Go to work, you know, eight hours a day, and you get home and you've got three kids who are really really tired at the end of their big day. Do you have on board the tools and facilities, and are children getting more anxiety and pressure than is... than they know what to do with? Absolutely. It's not anyone's fault, but they end up then, in the next phase, without support, and then they end up in all sorts of situations, and you know, different, you know, you only have to look at the teenage suicide rate in New Zealand to know it's a problem. Right? The statistics of the worst case scenario indicate that the problem must be bigger, because

if that many people are ending up on the edge before they get to 21, then the number of people who are suffering must be an order of magnitude bigger. Right? Because statistically if this many are getting to this, then they've filtered out of the, they're the worst of the worst, which means the population is much much bigger, and if you look at the stats, it's just a... You know, you know therefore there isn't enough support in schools, there isn't enough support for families, there isn't enough support in communities, where people earn less money, there just simply isn't, and they're the most stressed... And so I think this kind of stuff is unbelievably powerful! It's just a... I'm a convert in that sense, and I'm an advocate for... Although I haven't had a chance to get involved in somewhere where I can have an influence, but it is a... It was transformational. And that's what... Yeah. You know?

1.20:50 C: Yeah cool, well my next questions you've kinda already answered... Was it your first experience with therapy? What other types have you tried? And what was different?

1:21:01 2: I'll answer the last one again. I think that I probably... I have answered it already, but... it's... [long pause] I think that the similarities are that you might not get on with your equine-assisted therapist. You may not connect, in the same way that you might not connect with your psychologist, right, you go along and, you know, you're just [indistinct] and she's going, you know, this is the right advice, and you know, you're speaking Spanish and I'm talking in English here. That could happen in both situations, so I... That aside, the biggest difference is the environment in which it occurs. You know? There's a huge different between a field, fresh air; strip lights, and a desk. Even with a nice chair, and a very softly spoken, friendly, smiley, well-experienced, well-trained, highly professional therapist, Lambton Quay is not a field *laughs* right? And it never will be. And so there's... And so context is everything.

Humans are very very contextual... Well, all of us, living things are very contextual... Contextually driven. So, if you were to take a psychologist and go and sit on a park bench, you'd have a very different conversation. It would be... Yeah. So that's the biggest difference from a context point-of-view, and I think that facilitates a whole different type of conversation. Of course, the training is different. Very big differences. [therapist]'s obviously a trained professional. And so was the psychologist, and also, obviously, the doctor, the psychiatrist. And there's no doubt that she was in control of the process, but her training was very different to this training. Knowing where she was gonna, what her environment would be for working with, you know, that's just very different. It's the context and, you know, using a third party. Right? You know, if you go, if you're in an arbitration in law, you get a third neutral party to decide who's arguing the worst, and who's being unreasonable, and in a sense, when you go into a field and you take a horse – which is just a third party, you know, that can't speak – you're delegating a whole bunch of... You have to turn off a whole bunch of normal modes of operation and let the horses tell you whether or not, you know, what's going on, and... So that's a big difference. But it is... It's context, and the nonverbal nature of communication – with horses, you can't go, you know, 'Oi! Get over here!' If you put a rope on, and hit me hard enough, I'll come. But yeah, when you can get a horse to let you put on the reins with no... no English, no language, no previous relationship, you've got... That's a whole different set of things that just wouldn't come out of a, you know, psychiatrist's couch.

1.24.32 C: So having talked about this, for the last hour and a quarter, and a bit, looking... Thinking back, and looking back, what are sort of the main thoughts that you have about the whole experience?

1.24.47 2: I'd recommend it. I'm glad I did it. [long pause] Maybe, well, I'm not just glad, it was... If I hadn't done it, it wouldn't be... I wouldn't... I'd still be, there'd still be something left to process. It doesn't mean... what your experiences, what your intentions are, things don't go away, they only take on a new meaning. And it wouldn't have taken on a new meaning, in terms of going through the knot... If you don't like going into small spaces, go caving! You'll get over it. Right? If you don't like dealing with your dark thoughts, go deal with them! Cos you'll get over it. Getting to the other side, by however... If you go through caving, and you cave through a very very narrow hole, and all of a sudden you've got to jump off a waterfall... Phewph, you know? It's a bit of a stretch. And leaving the psychiatrist's office, unless you go off and have a whole bunch of, you know, debrief, in a sense, when you go to the... When you go off then, you know, you don't have a... it just doesn't make sense. You're sort of left still going phewph! Okay well, is that... Is that what is it? Is that dealt with? It's not. It's gotta have a... You've gotta have a transition sort of thing. That's the other thought which is... Don't go and process your darkest hour, if you can't, if you're gonna end up on a waterfall, a hundred feet above the water, with no other way out. That's not a good situation. And you could feel like that, and it felt like that. You know? So, it is a... I wouldn't go into the process of processing without knowing what the journey... You know, how to get back to the real world again. And I think the process... It's not... You go and see your psychologist, they don't say, right, what we're going to do is take you on a journey. We're gonna go up, and then we're gonna go back down again. They don't do that. They just talk to you until they say it's done, and you're like, hang on a minute! You know? And so I guess if I did an analysis of it is that there's a debrief, even though the debrief had its own peak [indistinct].

1.27.03 C: Cool. Did it help you? With... What you came...

1.27.10 2: Yup. It did. Like I say, it doesn't make it go away. It doesn't mean it didn't happen. It does mean you can think about it differently. And therefore it's not a... it doesn't take... it doesn't just drag you straight back into the... You know... The experience. In a negative way. The psychologist called it compartmentalising. I would say now I just... I just accept it now, accept that, you know, accept that it is... it's part of my life. It doesn't make it a bad part, if you will, even though it was negative, it's not a bad thing in its own right. I'm still here, you know. It could be, if I let it, and it wasn't so bad that ... But it was there, all the time. And now, you know, it's there all the time, in a different way, because, you know, you don't forget, but it's not a nagging there, it's a 'Oh, there it is.' And that's a bit of a difference... You know, it's a... If you were PTSD, someone who's had post-traumatic stress, then this is a, this is a very... This makes a lot of sense from a... Because you can't make it go away. It has happened. You can't stop it. It's not like you have a... Let's say you are paranoid. You can make those thoughts stop. You know, enough chemicals and they will stop, and you won't have those thoughts anymore. You might have some other side effects, but they're not real in the physical sense of the world. Whereas post-trauma where you've been in war or, you know, whatever your situation, the real... When it's a real thing that's happened, a vehicle to come out of that from it, without making it... Saying it didn't happen, and persuading, you know, hypnosis, and saying 'ooooh, you've forgotten all of the bad things' it's like, really? You know, my brain's a bit more complicated than that. So this is a, this is definitely a PTS... I would say, you know, technical terms, post-traumatic stress in its broadest definition, this is a, this I think would be, for a lot of people, would be a very beneficial process.

1.29.35 C: What was actually my next question. What type of people, or problems, or difficulties would it be most suitable to?

1.29.40 2: You don't need to be, like I say, I wasn't a disaster. [long pause] like, walking on the streets begging because I's lost everything through... Because, you know, the whole world came crashing down. But mild... severe... Mild trauma? Just even something that you... You know, a bad car accident. There's no reason why something like this couldn't be a vehicle for going through and resolving that, all the way through to, you know, whatever else you want to put on the list at the other end of the scale. They're all relevant. I now meditate as well, which is something I'd taken up three years ago, but it's a part. I meditate morning, and twice a day if I get round to it. That's a good thing too. I'd say, 20 minutes of... You know, 20 minutes of brain peace. Which is good for everybody. I think that would be a good thing. But that's not a... That's another thing, rather than... Something that could directly be... Helped me... Reframe my world. I took a friend, actually, I took a friend from work along to one of the sessions. Not because I wanted him there during my session, but I said, you should go and give it a, you should go, just go and do it for the sake of it, you know, why not? And you know, because we're friends, he said yes. And... and he could have chosen to, I don't know if he's got anything serious that he's got to deal with or anything, so it wasn't an element like that, but I was just curious to see whether he would open up or not, because he didn't need... He didn't perceive a need to go, so does the, is the process gonna engage everybody? And, well, you gotta be, you've gotta have a, you've got to want to change something. And so he went along. And I think he enjoyed the conversation with [therapist], but he definitely wasn't ever gonna go back. Even though, in an actual fact, you know, there's enough of a trauma, if you will, in his parents' circumstances, that I think he would actually get a benefit. You

know, it's not traumatic in the... You know, define trauma. But there is, there's real stress in his life that's really really obvious, and he knows it, and blah blah blah, and I thought it might have made a... It was a sort of a, Huh, it's a nice day, let's drive up the coast, you know, and we'll have a pint when we get home [laughs] But, you know, and he was like, I asked him, I was like, what did ya... and he was like, naaaah. And he didn't get into the horse thing... So, is it for everybody? I don't know.

1.32.34 C: Is there anything else you want to add to the...?

1.32.38 2: Not really! I could go on and on [laughs] I think... I just think it's a good thing. I think it's a positive process, and it's probably not for everybody, but it does have that unique nonverbal part. I don't think it would work with pigs. Or cows. You know? There's a whole bunch of other animals I don't think it would work with. You know, this is why horses, I think, are unique in that regard. I don't think there's many other, you know... Probably dolphins! I think, you know, there's been that dolphin... The dolphins, horse, is there another, you know, mammal that has that same set of characteristics? Probably not. But that is unique... That is the unique part of such an odd relationship between humans and horses that, you know, that's... And they are, you know, sensitive, in the same way that dolphins and stuff are. Maybe a blue whale [laughs] But thank you! I enjoyed talking about it actually. In some senses this is actually another part of the process, if you will. It's like, why go through it? It's like, oh, it's kinda useful talking about it from a kinda abstract point of view, now.

Appendix B

Preliminary Thematic Analysis for Each Participant

Lucinda

Theme	Subtheme
Transforming into a better self	New way of thinking and being
	Does not want to go back
	New insight into self
	Less fearful and anxious
	More confident
	Putting self first
	Something outside the normal sphere
Different to traditional therapy	Traditional therapy had not worked
	Traditional therapy is too abstract
	Horses were a necessary tool
	Provided something real
A natural, physical connection	Here and now
	Hands on
	Connecting with the horses
	Real life
Mystery and symbolism	Power and mystery
	Symbolic representation
	Flexible representations

Tom

Theme	Subtheme
Convert and advocate	Overcoming negative ideas
	Positive experience
	Advocate for its use
Spiritual experience beyond explanation	Genuinely spiritual and fundamentally meaningful
	Beyond explanation
Learning new mode of communication	Without words you need deeper understanding
	Greater awareness of nonverbal communication
	Need to turn off normal modes of operation and let things happen more naturally
Intuitive, fluid structure	Horses reflexive, unpredictable, and spontaneous
	Fluid and unstructured
	Professional therapeutic structure
Grounded in the real world and real experience	Natural environment facilitates different type of conversation
	Experiences with horses made the therapy real and meaningful
Different from and complementary to traditional, or mainstream, therapy	Different to traditional therapies
	Complementary to traditional therapies
A journey to a new self	A therapeutic journey
	Transformational
	A way back into the world with a new framework
	Acceptance of old and new selves

Appendix C

Letter to Psychologists



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April 9th, 2013

Dear [name of psychologist/therapist],

Thank you for agreeing to help me with my research. Without your assistance I wouldn't be able to do this study, so many thanks!

I have included here the information pack that I would like you to distribute, on my behalf, to clients of yours who are aged 17 and older, and who have completed their course of equine-assisted psychotherapy with you. Please distribute this only to those who you would consider to be high functioning, with mild to moderate presentations of whatever problem with which they came to you for help, and for whom you feel participating in the study would be appropriate.

Though it is mentioned in the information pack, please ask your clients to whom you pass this, to please get in touch with me by June 30th, after which date I will select four participants and begin to make appointments for interviews with these individuals.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you, or your clients, may have. I endeavour to complete this study with full transparency, and so will happily provide any information you may need.

Charlotte Augusta Lawson 11113478

Many thanks for all your help,

Kind regards,

Charlotte Lawson.

02102939881; satsutekh@gmail.com

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

School of Psychology – Te Kura Hinengaro Tangata

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Information Sheet



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TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

Equine-assisted psychotherapy in New Zealand:

A phenomenological investigation

INFORMATION SHEET

Hello! My name is Charlotte Lawson, and I am a Masters student in psychology at Massey University, undertaking a study which looks at documenting and understanding the experiences of people who have recently gone through equine-assisted psychotherapy. My supervisor for this project is Dr. Clifford van Ommen, of the Centre for Psychology, at Massey University in Albany.

I would like to invite you to consider participating in my research. I am seeking four individuals (two male, two female) who are over the age of 17, are proficient in English, and who have recently completed a program of equine-assisted psychotherapy. Your therapist will have given this information sheet to you confidentially, so if you are interested in helping me with my research, I would be very grateful if you could please contact me via my details provided below.

Should you be interested in participating, your input into the project would be in the form of an audio-taped interview of approximately one to two hours, at a suitable time and place in



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July 2013, and will cover your experiences taking part in equine-assisted psychotherapy. If you wish, I can provide you a list of the types of questions I will be asking you. Please note that selection for participation is based only upon the order in which I receive responses, and a desire for a mix of participants from around the country.

Following final grading of my thesis, I will provide you with a summary of the findings of this study and, should you wish it, I can return a copy of your audio-taped interview to you for your personal use.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me by email or phone, by 30th June, 2013. Please also feel free to contact myself, or my supervisor, should you have any



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questions regarding this project. Please note that should you decide to participate, but later change your mind for any reason, you will have within the two weeks following your interview to withdraw from the study. I look forward to hearing from you!

My contact details are:

Charlotte Lawson

02102939881

satsutekh@gmail.com

My supervisor for this project is:

Dr. Clifford van Ommen

(09) 414-0800 ext 41241

c.vanommen@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 12/097. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43404, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Participant Consent Form



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Equine-assisted psychotherapy in New Zealand: A phenomenological investigation

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Transcript Release Authority



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AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....