

# THE POWER of Relationship

*Training for Health with  
Shared Hope for Healing*



**T**HERE IS A MOMENT for every horse person, perhaps so far back into youth that it can't be distinctly remembered, a moment when a relationship with a horse touches us with the magic of wholeness, a sense that we are safe, that we are trusted, that we are trustworthy, and that we are loved. But not everyone grows up around horses, and even those who do sometimes have other experiences in their lives that take away this sensation of safety and connection. The premise behind Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and Equine Assisted Personal Development (EAPD) is that broken relationships can be restored, and that horses are one way to recreate those damaged bonds.

## Not Just a Theory

As a therapist, Linda Shannon of Rickreall, Oregon, has seen her share of trauma survivors. She began incorporating horses into her practice in 1999, but with a background in the social sciences, she felt strongly not only about assisting her clients, but also documenting her methods and providing scientific evidence of the efficacy of EAP and EAPD.

In 2005, she became the executive director of Shared Hope for Healing, where she uses her own horses in a leading-edge program combining EAP and EAPD to aid people who are experiencing a variety of disorders. Shannon works closely with the North American Handicapped Riding Association (NAHRA) and has an ongoing relationship with Portland State University to document Shared Hope for Healing's programs and ensure that her clients receive professional treatment. Upholding the integrity of the trust clients place in them is crucial to the organization's staff.

## Training for Healing

As humans, we tend to want control over the world around us, and sometimes the people around us, too. Shared Hope for Healing uses the model set by Chris Irwin, creator of EAPD, to begin the healing process and show clients better ways to form relationships.

"Here, people learn how to have control *with*, not over. It starts on the ground, learning to work with an animal larger than themselves," says Shannon.

The process begins with the horses in hand, progressing from simple leading to lunge work. As prey animals, horses don't trust easily, and that means the human must be the one to set the tone and boundaries,

and to become worthy of the animal's trust. In building this bond with the horse, clients learn the give and take of relationship.

Once they are up in the saddle, the client learns to develop and maintain contact with the horse. They discover balance, how to be present in the moment, and how interconnected their own needs are with the horse's.

"It acts as a mirror: to keep themselves safe, they have to keep the horses safe," says Shannon.

The physical activity gets the endorphins flowing, letting the brain's own self-soothing chemicals do much of the healing work. The horses themselves are an incredible tool for allowing those who have been hurt or disappointed by the humans in their lives to build a healthy, balanced relationship with another living creature.

## Healing the Mind

The program at Shared Hope for Healing isn't solely horsemanship work. In the *Healing Trauma With Horses* program, adult survivors of abuse discuss past traumas with their therapist from a bio-psycho-social-spiritual perspective while integrating horses with the healing process.



In *Discovering Myself Through the Eyes of the Horse*, youth ages 12-16 discover their own answers to questions like "How do I communicate?" "How do I establish boundaries and what are they for?"

"What are group dynamics and group cohesion?"

The third program, called *Transitions: Growing up with Horse Wisdom*, is for 16- to 24-year-olds who have had troubled pasts or developmental disabilities and who need help with the transition into a healthy adulthood.

The goal of each Shared Hope for Healing program is a healthier, happier individual who is able to create successful, healthy relationships throughout their lives. The healing power of horses meets the science of the mind, allowing growth to take place and new connections to form. To learn more, visit [www.sharedhopeforhealing.com](http://www.sharedhopeforhealing.com) or call 503-779-4786.