EXTENDED INSIGHTS...

Horse Therapy Provides a Journey of Freedom

Contact:
Andy Sapp, Ph.D.
Founder and CEO
Cherry Gulch
Emmett, ID
208-365-3437 ext. 502
DrSapp@CherryGulch.org
www.CherryGulch.org

By: Sonja Rhodes, Equine Therapy Specialist

There are many ways that we can define freedom or confinement. Some may feel restricted by influences in their environment or by internal restraints built up around ideas and beliefs they hold about themselves, while others may feel held back by physical limitations.

I believe that horses offer nuggets of wisdom in self-awareness. Horse therapy wisdom helps move our mental, emotional and physical limitations to a place of balance, harmony and inner-truth. When we find our rhythm and balance, it's like an internal light radiates out of every pore in our skin and we shine like stars in the night.

When I began working at Cherry Gulch boarding school near Emmett, ID, we were coming into winter. I started working in late November with two days of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (Horse Therapy) each week and three days of riding over the weekend, starting on Friday.

Alex probably wouldn't have described himself as shining when he first started going out for horse activities, including horse therapy. Initially he didn't appear very interested in the horses. He had stated at different times that he didn't feel very safe around them.

Through the winter, the weather was sometimes damp, so in the beginning the boys would lead the horses on walks down the road or up in the hills with me. I wanted to get to know the ranch horses better so I would know which boys to match with each horse. Leading is good exercise for both the boys and the horses, and it is always fun to be out around the ranch on the trails or down the lane.

As time went on, I learned which boys were confident or experienced with horses and which horses would be safe for boys who had either not ridden before or had emotional triggers that might be upsetting to some horses. This is the basics of horse therapy.

We have one horse at Cherry Gulch that all boys ride first before I will allow them to ride the other horses. This horse is named Smokey. He is our little trooper! He is the smallest and oldest of the herd—an old barrel racing horse who will run with the experienced boys if they are persistent in asking and will stand stone still, eyes closed, waiting for the boys who are feeling intimidated and unconfident. Once they gain understanding and focus on what they need to do to communicate, then Smokey begins to travel. He gives the gift of awareness in attitude, focus and partnership. This translates as freedom from negative behavior, lack of focus and being self-absorbed.

Alex started on Smokey, and over the weeks he rode him in the round pen, the arena and down the Cherry Gulch lane.

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Look at the freedom a young boy gave to a horse! To be able to run like the wind, emotions controlled, safe to move forward in the gentle, steady hands of his rider. And the horse gave Alex the gift of turning loose and allowing speed and movement to be an experience he could take hold of and enjoy! Together they filled in the gaps for each other to share a freedom they hadn't yet felt alone. This is horse therapy.

Harmony, balance, inner truth—to know they are capable, safe and willing to step out beyond the boundaries they've placed around themselves to reach a little higher, to shine like a morning star in the darkest hour of night…that is a journey toward true freedom.

Cherry Gulch is a ranch-style, therapeutic boarding school designed specifically for 10 -14 year old boys. Cherry Gulch's supportive, encouraging and respect-based approach is designed to build students up—rather than tear them down. Cherry Gulch is passionate about providing early intervention and prevention to help boys reach their full potential and become well-rounded, pro-social young men. We are dedicated to providing outstanding therapeutic and academic services to students and their families. This is accomplished in the context of a safe environment working toward "Building Brighter Tomorrows for the Boys of Today."

> The reason we have two ears and only one mouth is so that we may listen the more and talk the less.
>
> – Zeno of Citium

SEEN N' HEARD

Turning Winds Students Plant Trees:

(June 22, 2009) Carl Baisden, VP Public Relations, Turning Winds Academic Institute, Troy, MT, 208-755-5688, announced several students from Turning Winds, along with the school director, Jake Francom, and horticulturist, Jill Francom, planted 60 trees as a community service project in the Old Troy Dump on the hill overlooking the Kootenai River.

Open Sky—A Company to Watch:

(June 22, 2009) According to Danny Frazer, Business Development and Marketing Director for Open Sky Wilderness Therapy, Durango, CO, 970-382-8181, Open Sky Wilderness Therapy has been selected as one of Colorado's Companies to Watch (CCW). This annual award will be given when CCW hosts its Gala Celebration at Denver's Warwick Hotel on June 25, 2009, and will be presented by the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade

Problems at National Deaf Academy:

(June 23, 2009) The Orlando Sentinel reports local police have responded to 369 calls in a 17 month period through May 27, 2009, to the privately owned National Deaf Academy in Mount Dora, FL. Police have had to break up fights between patients and staff, quell suicide attempts or search for missing residents. To view these articles in full visit the struggling teens website.

Benchmark and NWA Host Luncheon:

(June 23, 2009) Benchmark Transitions, Redlands, CA,

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