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SELF-ESTEEM, RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING IN ADOLESCENCE: THE POTENTIAL OF HORSES AS AUTHENTIC AND THERAPEUTIC PARTNERS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of Northumbria University for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Northumbria University, Faculty of Health and
Life Sciences, Department of Social Work,
Education and Community Wellbeing

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*Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.*

Psalm 149, verse 14

*Our task must be to free ourselves
by widening our circle of compassion
to embrace all living creatures
and the whole of nature and its beauty.*

Albert Einstein

*The highest form of knowledge...
is empathy,
for it requires us to suspend our egos
and live in another's world.
It requires profound purpose-larger-than-the-self
kind of understanding.*

George Eliot

Abstract

The study involved two separate groups of young people aged between 16-19, all of whom had been excluded from mainstream education and identified as 'vulnerable' due to perceived behavioural, social or emotional difficulties. Ten participants engaged in a relationship-building programme involving horses, that had previously had a positive impact on similar groups of young people. Over a period of three months, the participants shared their experiences of achievement and purpose through their authentic, unique interactions and relationships with horses, and effective communication with others. They gained first-hand experience of the size, difference and potential power of the horse; an 'other' through which each participant could re-encounter their self (Levinas, 1961).

The data reveals that these experiences elicited feelings of wonder, elation, anxiety, fear, frustration and empowerment. Through learning to recognise horses' non-verbal clues, young people developed greater capacity to appreciate the ways in which horses communicate their emotions or intentions, and to respond sensitively. They learned how to coordinate their experiences, feelings and non-verbal language in order to form a partnership of kinaesthetic empathy, rather than a dynamic characterised only by dominance or submission. This was balanced with an awareness that they needed to be consistently attentive, or the balance of expectations and control might shift.

This mixed method ethnographic study gathered and examined data from focus groups and interviews. In addition, it employed statistics derived from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The data were collected at three points: before, during and after the programme. Field notes and photo elicitation (Rose, 2012) provided additional sources of information throughout the study.

Findings indicate that the transformational value of interacting with horses has social and psychological benefits. The self-reported increases in confidence, new coping strategies and personal insights that the young participants developed during the programme, along with improved self-esteem scores, suggest that such activity can channel young people's interest and motivation into a sense of eudaimonia, meaningful and rewarding outcomes, and the development of a range of transferable skills.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval was sought and granted by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Ethics committee for each aspect of the study.

The word count of the thesis is 77,176.

Name: Pamela Graham

Date: 30 May 2021

Dedication

I first met you by chance when I visited the premises of an (unscrupulous) horse dealer in 2011. You and I took an instant interest in one another but when I enquired about you, the dealer said that you ('Fat Lad' he called you) were too small and too inexperienced for the likes of me. A long story unfolded but later, in place of money owed to me, I took you home instead, with the intention of 'rescuing you', 'bringing you on', then finding a more suitable human for you.

In our first year together, we 'got by'. It took me almost two years to build up enough confidence to ride you without disaster. You were afraid of every sudden move. If I scratched my nose whilst in the saddle, you would panic, then I would panic. You were terrified of clippers and ladders and all manner of noises. If we lost a stirrup whilst jumping, it was a major incident from which you felt the need to gallop away. Do you remember the time when it took a good half a mile to stop again? Yet I was determined for us both to get these scary things in perspective, so we tried some 'desensitisation' activities. By the beginning of year three, you disdainfully ignored me when I sang and danced The Time Warp in your stable and I eventually figured out where your brakes were. It had become clear to both of us that this was your forever home. We agreed on a lifelong partnership and began to celebrate some very encouraging successes as we enjoyed ourselves, and eventually trained together for Show Jumping and amateur Eventing.

Tragically, one weekend in October 2015, everything suddenly changed. Your young life was stolen by the fatal illness 'Grass Sickness'. On Sunday afternoon we were galloping through our favourite country park, then three days later you were gone forever.

Finn, in the four short years we had together, you were a true inspiration. You taught me more than any other horse. About horses, about humans (especially this one). About relationships, about communicating and about partnership between species.



This work is dedicated to you, Sollaghan Breeze (aka Finn)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introducing Key Concepts and Contexts

This chapter gives background context for my research involving young people, self-esteem and horses, and explains my interest in these areas. I then move on to introducing the specific context in which the research developed; a programme called 'The Horse Course'. After that I outline my focus, aims and key concepts. However, I would like to start with some brief comments about how my thinking changed over the course of the research, something that is reflected in the title and throughout the thesis.

The most prominent key concept at the outset of the research was 'self-esteem' as a building block of 'resilience' (Gilligan, 1997). As the study progressed, however, the wider concept of 'wellbeing', became more central. This shift is traced in the Methodology and Literature Review chapters. Consequently, I have included all three concepts in the title to indicate their significance to the research and how it developed.

Wellbeing is a broader term than the other two. It encompasses and intertwines many aspects of human development. As a result, the thesis goes on to engage with the concepts of 'eudaimonic wellbeing', 'multi-species wellbeing' and 'kinaesthetic empathy' as aspects of wellbeing relevant to the research. These all form part of my academic journey as I reflect on and explore the interactions between young people and horses.

In addition, throughout this chapter, I indicate my thoughts about the study's potential contribution to existing knowledge. Finally, I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the study

My longstanding interests in children and young people's self-esteem, the value of person-centred practice (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) and authentic relationship building – whether between humans or between horses and humans – motivated me to undertake research in this area. My original assumption, based on my own experience working with young people and

horses, was that: authentic interactions and relationships with horses can be of particular value for young people for whom life may have been chaotic, or who have not experienced relationships characterised by respect, trust and problem solving. I had noticed the powerful positive effect that interactions with horses can have on people of all ages while working as a volunteer coach in a riding school. This made me reflect on the concepts of active learning and intrinsic motivation, both of which have been core elements of my practice and teaching for many years. My professional experience also meant that I was aware that authentic interactions and relationships were essential components of practice in the 'scaffolding' (Bruner, 1996) of children and young people's learning, development and wellbeing. I wanted to investigate this further in relation to understanding and communicating with children and young people as well as my growing academic interest in young people's self-esteem, and social and emotional wellbeing. Consequently, this thesis develops the argument for the place of horses as authentic and therapeutic partners in relational work with young people with low self-esteem. The following sections address some of the background issues that inform this research.

1.2.1 Introduction to young people and self-worth

From the beginning of life, humans evaluate their own worth based on how other people react to them. As Patrick J Casement (1990, p. 93) states, "The infant needs to be able to discover his/her capacity to light up the mother's face – for here is to be found the fundamental basis of... self-esteem". This complex process continues as they grow, develop and look to significant others in their lives for love and approval.

By adolescence, young people have reached important conclusions about their own abilities and self-worth (Donaldson et al., 1983). The way they think and the choices they make are influenced by their self-belief and by the messages that have been reflected back to them by people significant to them over the years. These beliefs can be evident in their behaviour, which, during this period of development, given that their conduct may challenge some adults, can be

easily misunderstood. For the adolescent it is a period of “heightened self-consciousness and susceptibility to peer pressure” (Sebastian et al., 2008, p. 445), during which negative social experiences can negatively influence self-concept (how young people think about themselves) and self-esteem (how young people feel about themselves). This is reflected in David Elkind’s (1967) recognition of the high level of egocentrism during adolescence, which relates to the idea of an ‘imaginary audience’, the belief that other people are watching and judging how they look and what they do and say.

Social inequality also has particular salience here, especially when young people are located in situations that are not of their making; where disadvantage and discrimination are commonly experienced; where they have little power or influence over their circumstances; and where they may be defined in particular ways by those with more power (Smith, 2008). For instance, the Children’s Society’s annual *Good Childhood Report* (2019) identified that almost one in five children were worried about their mental wellbeing and that those living in poverty were likely to be the most worried. The 2020 edition of the same report highlighted that more than a third of 15-year-olds were experiencing low mental wellbeing. Further, as Steph Lawler (2014) argues, young people who have been identified as ‘vulnerable’, ‘in need’, ‘marginalised’ or as having ‘additional needs’, although these labels are well-intentioned, could be at risk of developing their own narratives of worthlessness and powerlessness.

Different paradigms of care and control in different agencies and organisations influence professional perceptions of, and responses to, young people’s behaviour (Graham, 2007), particularly behaviour that is perceived as ‘anti-social or ‘challenging’. This frequently – and arguably understandably – leads to unfair and inaccurate labels being applied to young people and contributes to negative profiles that stay with them over time. These profiles are amplified across other transitions, attracting further negative attention and often becoming self-fulfilling. Contemporary labelling theory, emerging from the pioneering work of Frank Tannenbaum (1938), supports the view that negative labels can become part of a young person’s personal identity, which in turn can reinforce

or legitimise negative behaviour. Within each paradigm, there is often a desirable outcome but if this is in contradiction to the desirable outcomes of others (and young people's lives are typically influenced by more than one paradigm), it can create confusion, especially where there is a lack of understanding across disciplinary boundaries (Graham and Machin, 2009). This is also reflected in Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 1984), which suggests that different stakeholders offer differing and often competitive representations of the same reality as they attempt to assert authority and advance their interpretation of reality over that of others. For a young person, this means that, depending upon which professional or agency is the first point of contact, their presenting behaviour may be interpreted in very different ways. For example, an educational psychologist will assess and respond to the behaviour significantly differently to a youth worker, social worker, psychiatrist or police officer.

Furthermore, behaviour management policies in many organisations compound this confusion and potential negativity. Behaviourist methods of reward and punishment in the mainstream education system, for example, are reflective of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975). They attempt to manipulate or control behaviour and condition young people to seek approval for meeting externally imposed criteria, rather than allowing them to develop a sense of shared control in the learning experience (Deci and Ryan, 2012; Hohmann and Weikart, 1995). This culture additionally defines failure to achieve as a personal and individual quality which, when repeated, can be easily internalised, becoming a negative feature of a young person's identity. There is evidence that some behaviourist approaches to working with young people facilitate them to 'perform', but they nonetheless rely on extrinsic motivators (Martin and Pear, 2019).

Gilligan (1997, p. 15) states that in order to develop a clear sense of self-efficacy, or "a sense of mastery and control along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations", young people need to be intrinsically motivated (Bandura, 1997; Jensen, 2005). As I argue in this thesis, young people need opportunities to learn to take responsibility for their own actions and to share power, rather than be conditioned to depend on adults to

'fix' things or to blame others when things go wrong. Further, as Sheila and Celia Kitzinger (1990) suggested, for young people's self-esteem to develop, adults have to surrender some of their power, allowing the young people "to choose between alternatives, to experience some self-direction in their daily lives and not be under the control of adults" (p. 95).

1.2.2 Introducing young people and horses

My experience of working with humans has highlighted that all too often, well-meaning adults, including professionals, can become distracted by the most striking aspects of a child or young person, such as a particular behaviour trait or aspect of their personality, their communication style, their appearance, or perhaps a diagnosis or other label attached to them. In contrast, horses have no such issues with human behaviour and appearance, nor do they attach labels to humans. Instead, they instinctively recognise authenticity and tune into what Martine Hausberger et al. (2008, p. 4) identify as emotional "cues ... transmitted by humans through different channels: voice, posture, expression and pheromones". Further, horses' natural, primal sensitivity means that all interaction between horses and humans requires humans to recognise the horse's perspective from the start of the relationship. This shift in understanding, as Eugenio Quiroz Rothe et al. (2005, p. 375) argue, "can facilitate the exploration of feelings and intuition" and enhance the understanding of "self, nature, relationships and communication". All this exploration and understanding can potentially influence self-esteem. Given this, I became interested academically, as well as in practice, in the power dynamics in human-horse relationships, recognising many similarities between the motivating factors in humans and those in horses.

As previously mentioned, this research was inspired in the first instance by my longstanding professional interest in the development of self-esteem in childhood and adolescence. However, it was equally inspired by my lifelong equine interests, during which I have built relationships with a number of horses, including those that I have had the privilege of sharing my life with as

well as caring for, riding and competing with. This means that I have directly experienced the need to recognise the horse's perspective, which I feel had an impact on my own self-esteem as a younger person. This engagement with horses led me to reconsider power in relationships and its potential influence on self-esteem. In turn, this enabled the opportunity to make connections between related aspects of my previous and current practice and research.

Prior to this research, building on my experiences as a volunteer coach with horses and young people, I led on the design, delivery and development of a bespoke equine programme for children and young people who could be broadly identified as 'excluded', due to a variety of social and educational factors. In this role, I noticed, and noted in comments from others, the perceived positive influence of supported interactions with horses on the self-esteem of young people. This anecdotal evidence began to engage me in thinking through the significance of the activities and these reflections impacted upon later iterations of the programme.

While the programme was not intended as a therapeutic intervention, the evidence suggested that it had been broadly therapeutic and had contributed to the development of many rewarding authentic interactions between young people and horses. Consequently, it was identified as an ideal context in which to capture and record data about these experiences. One iteration of the programme had been named 'The Horse Course' by young participants and the name was adopted for later iterations (not to be confused with the equine assisted charity, 'TheHorseCourse' (2021)). The participants' naming of the course indicated both interest and a sense of ownership, another suggestion of the programme's potential.

Further, I had a feeling that being involved in previous iterations had been 'a resilient move' (Hart, 2011) for many young participants. There was evidence that it enabled young people to change their self-perception, allowing them to reframe their previous perceived limitations and self-doubt. Anecdotes from parents, carers and key workers in the referring organisations attested to the young people's increased confidence through their newly discovered interests

and skills, and the positive and clearly nurturing relationships they had developed with horses. This research, then, became my way of testing out my hunch through taking an in-depth look at *how* 'The Horse Course' worked.

1.3 Specific context for the study: 'The Horse Course'

There is an established body of research in relation to anthrozoology and animal-human relationships, and a smaller but developing body of research, knowledge and practice guidance in relation to equine-assisted education and therapy (see Literature Review). This thesis draws on both in the design of the research and analysis of the data that emerged. The focus of the research was two separate but identically designed studies that were embedded into 'The Horse Course' programme. Designed by experienced professionals from social work, education and the equine industry, the programme had been trialled, revised and refined over several years, and had shown favourable outcomes for the young people involved. It was originally designed to provide respite activity for groups of young carers, looked-after young people and those excluded from mainstream education. Its evolution was predominantly informed by anecdotal evidence from previous participants, their parents, carers and key workers, and the observations of the professionals and volunteers involved.




'The Horse Course' is essentially a positive relationship-building programme based in a British Horse Society (BHS) approved riding school. It is partially mapped against the well-established BHS (Auty, 2003) Progressive Riding Test Syllabus, which allows for differentiation in the practical elements of caring for, riding, and staying safe around horses. Yet it is much more than that, in that the humans involved recognised that it also incorporated person-centred core therapeutic principles of authenticity, congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy (Rogers, 1957), as expressed naturally by horses in their behaviour. 'The Horse Course' is facilitated by a professionally qualified riding instructor and two social work practitioners who are qualified to work with children and young people. They are supported by experienced and trained volunteers. The format for the programme is of six consecutive sessions that combine selected elements of the BHS syllabus (Auty, 2003) with opportunities

to have fun, share experiences with other participants and bond with horses (see Appendix 1: 'The Horse Course' Programme Design and Information). An explanation of how the research was embedded into 'The Horse Course' programme is provided in the Methodology chapter (Table 2).

During the research study, the horses became both educational and therapeutic partners, as the young people had opportunities to become active participants in a stimulating process through which they could reframe some of their self-perceived limitations and personal capabilities. The activities involving horses allowed young people to develop their sense of responsibility and to become more confident and independent as they learned, developed and applied a range of skills. They learned to express themselves in a novel environment with people who had no associations with any other aspect of their lives and who could therefore provide a boundary to the experience. The horses involved in the studies were trusted riding school veterans, selected on personality, and well-known to the adult team involved. This team included me, a research assistant, a riding instructor, three experienced volunteers and the riding school staff, who were on stand-by to assist. The research assistant, who was involved with the collection and transcription of data, was also very familiar with the equestrian world. The horses had previously demonstrated that they enjoyed human contact and had established individual reputations for being positive influences in the lives of the young people they interacted with.

The young people involved in the programme are introduced in later chapters. This section introduces some of the horses, since they too offered significant contributions. Alongside images of the horses and their names are some of the comments made by the young people about them in interviews, which I return to in the Findings and Discussion chapter. However, even these brief comments indicate the young people's growing understanding of the horses as the course progressed, and their heightened empathy in responding to them as another kind of person, rather than an alien 'other'.

Table 1. Introducing the horses and some of the young people's responses to them.

Horses	Comments from young people (field notes)
	<p>Tilly: <i>Patient</i> <i>Amazing</i> <i>Keeps stopping to look around</i> <i>Beautiful</i> <i>Experienced</i> <i>Knows things</i> <i>Feels lazy sometimes</i> <i>Great for nervous riders</i> <i>Loves people and treats</i> <i>Gives me a lot of confidence</i></p>
	<p>Bobby: <i>Really responsive</i> <i>Gets excited</i> <i>Feels relaxed</i> <i>Concentrates</i> <i>This was my first time on a horse – Bobby made me feel brave and proud</i></p>
	<p>Charlie: <i>Stubborn</i> <i>So big!</i> <i>Lush</i> <i>Calm</i> <i>Looks proud</i> <i>Proper nosy</i></p>



Barney:
Always looks thoughtful
My favourite
Massive!
Friendly
I felt like he was quite intimidating but when I got like to groom him and stuff he was like a gentle giant.
I like him because he is a big horse. I like big horses.



Dandy:
Helpful
Really cute
Good
Funny
So canny
Can't believe how old he is, he acts so young
Titchy



Boo:
Really kind
Good
A bit naughty but not as naughty as Storm
Loves to eat
Really good to ride
Listens to me
Hogs the hay a bit



Storm:
Energetic
Great fun
Very hairy
Not stormy but sometimes strop
Curious about what everyone is doing
Loves people



Angel:
Cute, but not like an angel!
Grumpy
Comfy
Very comfortable
Makes faces
Loves flatwork
Great to learn to canter on
First horse I ever rode
Loves a good ear scratch



Teddy:
A little pocket rocket
Handsome
Friendly
Can be quite fast
Likes being pampered
Pulls some funny faces
Lovely colour

**Molly:**

*A sweetheart
Very pretty
Sweet
Loves lots of fuss
Friendly
Lovely long mane
Nice to ride
Loves to be groomed and pampered
Great to ride*

**Chunky:**

*This horse is super comfy
Mischievous
Handsome
Has the best canter ever
Nice and steady
Love his tail and mane and feathers
Nice to hack out
Falls asleep when you pamper him*

In the six sessions, each lasting three hours, taking place over eight weeks, the young participants worked individually or in pairs. They teamed up with a horse and an experienced volunteer, who could attend to each individual's preferred style and pace of learning (Gardner, 1983), and their ability to engage with the broad aims of each session. Large group work, teamwork, creative games, challenges and time for reflection were also built into the programme. The activities were designed to be enjoyable and satisfying in themselves but also served as an additional medium through which young people could access supportive relationships. This ties with Deborah Plummer's (2005) assertion that achievement and performance (without great pressure) in activities that young people enjoy are key ways of building self-esteem.

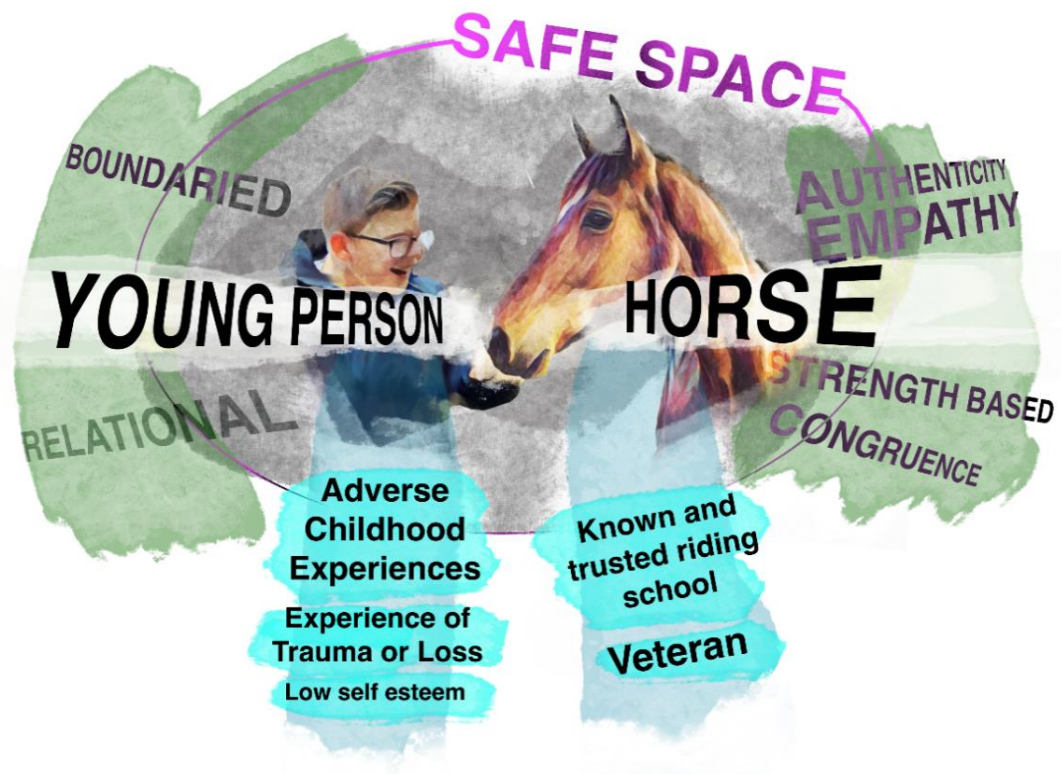


Figure 1. The context for 'The Horse Course' v.1 (Artwork by Dr Ian Robson).

Aspects of the programme that could be seen as 'ingredients for success', as determined through the data analysis, confirmed that 'The Horse Course' approach is entirely compatible and congruent with the factors of active learning and intrinsic motivation (Hohmann et al., 2008), the core conditions of the person-centred approach (Rogers, 1942), and relational approaches to working with children and young people (Konrad, 2013). These theoretical frameworks are discussed and explored in the Literature Review and revisited in the Findings and Discussion chapter.

1.4 Focus, Aims and Objectives, Key Concepts.

1.4.1 Focus

The overall focus of the research, as indicated above, was on the potential benefits of human-horse interactions and relationships on the self-esteem of young people. This section offers an overview of my aims and objectives, further delineating the focus of the study. It also provides an initial discussion and definitions of the key concepts involved, indicating how I employ these in the thesis. This helps to set the scene for the rest of the study, in particular the relevant literature from the various disciplines that inform this research.

1.4.2 Aims and objectives

Through critical analysis of qualitative data, alongside a smaller amount of quantitative data, the research set out to explore young people's experiences of interactions and relationships with horses as they took part in 'The Horse Course'. In particular, the research aimed to develop an understanding of:

- The impact of 'The Horse Course' experience on young people
- What can be learned from horses about communication
- The ingredients for authentic interactions and relationships between young people and horses
- How the approach can be developed as both a theoretical framework and as practical guidance
- The potential for rolling out 'The Horse Course' beyond this project in terms of aiding the development of young people's self-esteem and wellbeing.

The objectives of the research were:

- To elicit young people's perspectives about their experiences and expectations at three stages: before, during and after the programme
- To use the resulting qualitative data and an element of quantitative data to identify significant aspects of young people's experiences of interacting with horses

- To produce high quality research in a community-based voluntary project, with the potential to develop further research capacity in the longer term, with a wider range of participants.

1.4.3 Key Concepts

The key concepts – self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing in adolescence – and the potential of horses as therapeutic partners, are discussed in more depth in the Literature Review. There, I explore their complexity and the many varied approaches that have been taken to these concepts. I also reflect on the changes in my thinking that led to an interest in concepts such as ‘eudaimonic wellbeing’, which comes from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, his philosophical work on what can be thought of as the ‘science’ of happiness (Irwin, 2012). However, the most significant elements that contributed to the initial Aims and Objectives are noted here.

1.4.3.1 Resilience, self-esteem and wellbeing in adolescence

Resilience is commonly agreed to be the ability to ‘bounce back’ from adverse experiences. Yet it is so much more than this. Also defined as ‘the capacity to transcend adversity’ (Gilligan, 1997, p. 14), resilience is a significant protective factor that can positively influence adolescent wellbeing (Masten, 2001). Gilligan (1997) suggested that good self-esteem, along with a sense of self-efficacy and a secure base, were the three fundamental building blocks to resilience in childhood. These ‘building blocks’ are clearly interrelated and therefore of significant importance to this study. However, it is ‘self-esteem’, described by Rosenberg (1965) as “an attitude toward the self” (p.15) and more specifically, ‘good self-esteem’, defined as “an internal sense of worth and competence” (Gilligan, 1997, p. 14) that was a core focus of this research. This in turn enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the wider concept of ‘wellbeing’, defined for the purposes of this research as:

a state of being or condition of existence that characterises an individual realising their full potential through their own prosperity, welfare, life satisfaction, health, eudemonia (human flourishing) and happiness (Sutherland and Mukadam, 2018, p. 25).

1.4.3.2 The potential of horses as authentic and therapeutic partners

Equine-human interactions and activities take various forms and encompass a range of specialist and non-specialist psychological, psychotherapeutic, educational, physical and social approaches. These may employ horses as guides, learning mediums or therapeutic tools in the work of human development. Such activities and interventions may or may not include horses being ridden. There are, on the one hand, examples of approaches where riding is inherently part of the intervention, such as Hippotherapy (also called therapeutic horse riding), which through intimate physical and social connection can offer therapeutic benefits, particularly for disabled people (NAHRA, 2000; Masini, 2010; Trotter, 2012). However, other approaches are concentrated on proximity to horses and interaction on the ground. In this wide range of forms, prefixes such as 'Equine-Assisted' and 'Equine-Facilitated' are used to describe 'Learning', 'Therapy', 'Social Work' and 'Counselling' activities and approaches (Kohanov, 2001, 2016). Overall, Equine Facilitated Learning appears to be a widely accepted term for the growing number of activities that propose to teach personal and professional development skills in non-therapeutic settings.

In contrast, some approaches are categorised as 'natural horsemanship'. These are dedicated to promoting the fair treatment of horses through teaching humans to understand them better. Examples include 'Join Up' (Roberts, 1997, 1999), 'Intelligent Horsemanship' (Marks, 2002) and the 'Parelli Method' (Parelli, 2004). Alongside this, some approaches have been developed as educational programmes by organisations such as the British Horse Society, British Eventing and the Riding for the Disabled Association. In these cases, the aim is for coaches or instructors to gain experience, knowledge and qualifications in facilitating humans and horses to work together in partnership in the equine industry. Other approaches have been developed with more specific aims, for example, 'The Horse Boy Method™' (2021), which is specific to Autism and neuro-psychiatric conditions. In addition, some approaches combine elements from two or more sources. For example, Monty Roberts (1997) incorporated his method of 'Join Up' with therapy for war veterans experiencing Post Traumatic Stress.

It is important to note that the majority of these approaches are predominantly practice-based. Consequently, my research may be considered distinctive in offering an academic perspective on horses as authentic therapeutic partners. In doing this, it builds on and joins the relatively small but growing number of academic studies on the subject. Finally, I propose that this research is situated within the psychosocial domain as its design acknowledges that, and explores how, the physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and cultural elements of life are interconnected.

1.5 Overview of the thesis structure

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the development of self-esteem in young people and on the potential benefits of horse-human interaction. I also focus on literature about the core person-centred relational principles used in this study. In doing so, I determine where this research project sits in relation to established theory and begin to indicate the unique contribution it makes to knowledge. The chapter covers theoretical perspectives, empirical studies and known examples where practitioners are using or have used similar methods with young people and horses, both generally and in relation to issues around self-esteem and wellbeing.

Chapter 3, Methodology, describes the design of the research study and includes an account of my own relationship to the topic in line with contemporary notions of positionality and what Amanda Coffey (1999) would describe as my 'ethnographic self'. I discuss the methods used and the rationale for their employment. The chapter ends with some reflections on the validity and reliability of the study and its interdisciplinary nature.

Chapter 4, which focuses on the Findings and Discussion, begins by presenting Single Case Analyses (SCA) of the young participants in 'The Horse Course' to give an overview of the entire experience. These incorporate statistical data (Rosenberg scores) and qualitative data generated through interviews, focus groups, photo elicitation (Rose, 2012) and field notes. This is followed by an analysis of interviews with two of the volunteers who supported the delivery of

'The Horse Course'. This adds their insights about the impact of the project on the young people and the volunteers themselves. I then go on to analyse the emergent themes from the qualitative data and offer a critical commentary that sets the material in a theoretical and professional practice context. Finally, I revisit the context for 'The Horse Course', as shown in Figure 1, and show a revision of that image (Figure 63) that distils and identifies the five core ingredients, which form the 'pocket universe' that the programme inhabits. This is described in detail on page 37.

Chapter 5, the Conclusion, summarises the key findings, explores the implications and considers the potential application of this research, and the possibility of further similar research.

1.6 Conclusion

This introduction has provided a backdrop to the study through a reflexive account of my previous learning and experience of working with young people and horses. I have provided my initial working definitions of self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing, and offered an overview of the emerging field of equine-related learning and therapeutic activity. I have explained how these aspects of my own experiences and interests come together in this study. I have introduced key concepts and explained the context for the development of this study. Finally, I have identified some fascinating practice-based studies. These will also be explored in the next chapter, in which I also suggest that while the field is developing, there remains only a limited amount of academic research in this area, which this study is intended to partially address.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the literature review

This chapter looks at both the academic and professional literature in this area. Here, I discuss the practice that creates the context for the development of work involving young people and horses, relating to the cultivation of self-esteem in adolescence. By doing this, I also demonstrate how the thesis and its underpinning research make a valuable contribution to the extant academic literature, which remains fragmentary.

The limited amount of literature that currently exists is very much interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in nature, and crosses over into practice-based interventions, necessitating the need to acknowledge and incorporate both practice and theory in this chapter. Much of the work done in this area is entirely practice-based, which makes the approach taken in this project distinctive – as noted earlier – given that it combines practice with theoretical underpinnings. The chapter consequently incorporates different theoretical perspectives on self-esteem in adolescence and on the potential of horses as authentic and therapeutic partners in work with socially disadvantaged young people. It then considers how the principles or core conditions of a person-centred approach (Rogers, 1951) may be useful in this kind of relational work with young people and horses.

It took some time to envisage the ways in which the various disciplines and areas of practice linked together and overlapped. Mapping the links and boundaries between the interconnected elements of the study can be expressed as shown in Figure 2, below. In doing this mapping, it became apparent that there are parallel gaps in academic literature and professional practice in this area. This research offers academic insight whilst also offering practical applications, showing the collective significance of everyone's work in this area and initiating a conversation between distinct groups of academics and practitioners. The central dark blue segment, where all three come together, is where this research is located, as well as simultaneously being the location of the practice of what I eventually came to formally call the 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'.

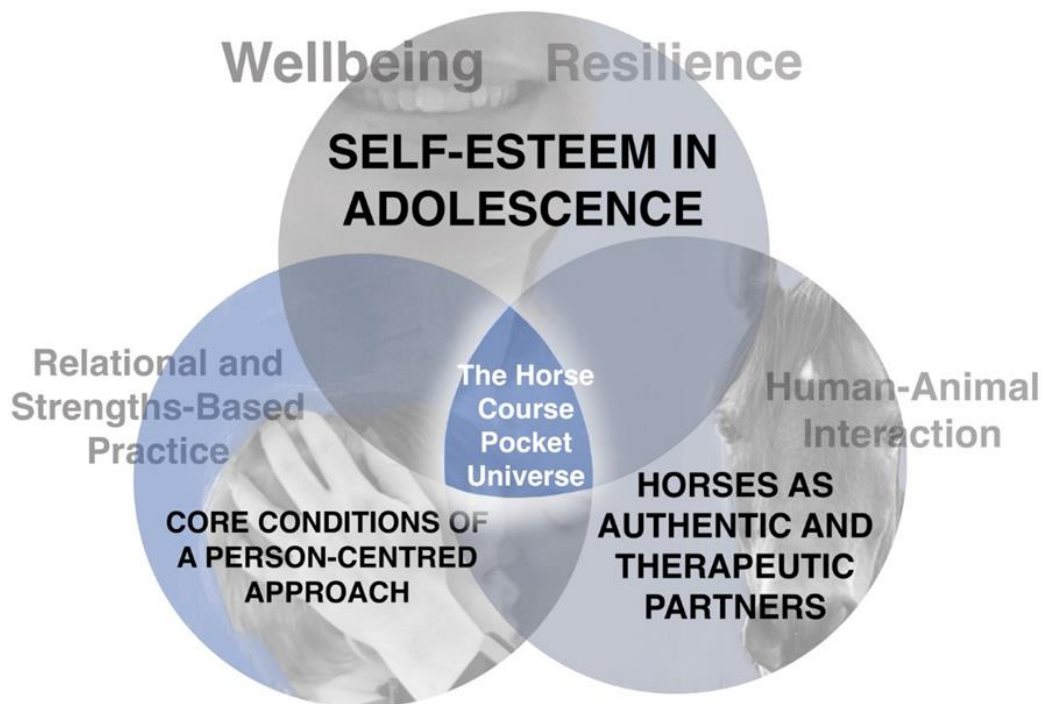


Figure 2. The intersecting literatures/professional practices relevant to the research.

Prior to the research being carried out, I had observed that something powerful appeared to occur when a young person reported to have low self-esteem was paired up with a horse, in a 'safe' space, and supported by the core conditions of a person-centred approach. In relation to Figure 2, what was created as these three areas met could be described as a 'pocket universe'. This is a concept from astrophysics that refers to conditions and ways of being that are observable only within a small area of the universe (Jean-Luc Lehnars, 2012). It has also been adopted by writers in the genres of science fiction and fantasy in some relevant ways, for example, in Diana Wynne Jones' (1992) novel, *A Sudden Wild Magic*. This novel focuses on a 'pocket universe' that contains a unique combination of scientific and magical developments first observed on Earth. In doing so, it combines science and magic in ways indicative of what may be observed in the 'pocket universe' of 'The Horse Course', where

academic rigour is used to explore both the 'everyday magic' of human resources (Masten, 2001, p.235) and the magic of the horse-human connection.

In this research, finding terminology to help explain the experience was important. Here the 'pocket universe', following the definition offered above, describes a space and conditions that do not represent, or even remotely compare to the everyday lives of the young people. For example, their school, service, home or care setting. In effect, Figure 2 has two potential readings; the first in relation to the theoretical literature identified in this chapter, and the second about areas of practice in which the darker blue centre of the diagram is the 'pocket universe' of 'The Horse Course' in practice. In this regard, the practical and theoretical are mapped onto each other. In the practice sense, being within this space freed the young people from the 'macro stuff' and enabled them to focus on interactions and relationships, as depicted in Figure 1, which can be seen as representing the activity within the 'pocket universe'. This is why Figure 1 is filled with colour and movement, as it represents the dynamism and engagement of both humans and horses. It was also at the intersection of the three areas of Figure 2 that connections and entanglements happened, and power shifts occurred. This way of thinking has some similarities to Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, in which the process of human development is shaped by the interaction between an individual and his or her environment, something I return to later in this chapter and in chapters 4 and 5.

To return to the theoretical reading of Figure 2, the three overlapping circles represent the three key sets of literature relevant to this research. In this chapter, in relation to these areas, I begin with a section reviewing existing literature on the development of self-esteem (as a building block to resilience) in adolescence, particularly in the context of social disadvantage, which has been a topic of great personal and professional interest for many years. My practice experience of interprofessional work, especially in advocacy roles with children and families who have been problematically labelled as disadvantaged, excluded, marginalised, or as having challenging behaviour or social and

emotional difficulties, has had an inevitable impact upon my thinking, and inculcated within me a strong empathy with developing adolescents who have to live with these labels. The section consequently derives from a range of sources including social work, health, education and developmental psychology.

In the second section, the selected literature comes from the fields of Animal Studies and Anthrozoology, both of which explore Human-Animal Interactions (HAI) and work that looks at relationships between human and non-human animals. This is also an expanding interdisciplinary field that derives from the humanities and social, behavioural and biomedical sciences (Herzog, 2016). The section also incorporates material on horse communication as experienced and understood by humans. Initially, I focused on the broader literature and practice guidance relating to horse-human educational and therapeutic activities. However, whilst this remains important in terms of positioning this research, as the study progressed, it became increasingly clear that horses have the potential to be therapeutic partners in relational work with young people with low self-esteem. Consequently, locating literature on this specific topic became a central concern. The relative paucity of this literature further confirmed the relevance of the research.

The third section is a review of relevant literature on the core conditions for person-centred, strengths-based and relationship-based approaches to practice, as applied to both humans and horses. The search terms and selected literature for this section sit comfortably within the relational view of young people as distinctive, unique human beings (Konrad, 2013). Initially this was also inspired by my previous interest in work with young people, but as the research progressed it became clear that many of the Rogerian humanistic concepts also apply to mindful interactions, and relationships between young people and horses in 'The Horse Course'. As I read and reviewed further on this topic, I came across similar person-centred ideas, which enhanced my thinking on the possibilities in the horse-human relationship, including eudaimonic wellbeing and kinaesthetic empathy, which are both explored later in the review.

By exploring the intersections depicted in Figure 2, this chapter will highlight published knowledge about young people's self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing, and the potential of horses as therapeutic partners across both academic and practitioner sectors. Additionally, it will further outline how this study may be able to contribute to knowledge and understanding in this field. While some studies and practices sit comfortably alongside aspects of this work, no currently existing research encompasses all of the elements in the same way as depicted in the central element of Figure 2. This means that the research findings and discussion have the potential to be developed into a theoretical framework and/or practical guidance, which could be used to communicate this approach to the much bigger interdisciplinary picture that this literature review reveals. The research could therefore potentially contribute to fields including, among others, equine facilitated psychotherapy, therapeutic horse riding and equine assisted/facilitated learning and therapy.

2.2 Self-esteem in adolescence

2.2.1 *What is adolescence?*

In this research, adolescence is regarded as unique period of development and a unique opportunity for change and growth. This section begins by exploring the definition of 'adolescence' as the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. According to Sarah Jayne Blakemore (2018), Stanley Hall was the first psychologist to study adolescence as a period of development. He suggested that it begins at the onset of puberty and ends between 22-25 years. In contrast, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines adolescence as the second decade of life (10 - 20 years). Another definition, offered during a TED Talk by Blakemore (2012) suggests that is, "the period of life that starts with the biological, hormonal and physical changes of puberty and ends at the age at which an individual attains a stable, independent role in society". These interpretations suggest, in their insistence on adolescence being transitional, the often liminal position that adolescents have in many cultures. That an entire period of life might be considered transitional, rather than an actual distinct period is telling, as is the lack of consistency regarding when adulthood begins.

However, even given this blurring around definition, which is also impacted by geography, class and other factors, many theorists agree that adolescence is a unique period of cognitive, biological and social development, and a time when young people experience huge personal and interpersonal shifts, which define them as individuals as they grow away from their childhood and family contexts and towards wider society (Konrad, 2013). This is reflected in Eric Erikson's (1950) eight stages of psychosocial development, where adolescence is defined as the stage of 'Identity vs. Role confusion'. Erikson argues that at this point, the young person is under pressure to make important decisions about their future. Simultaneously, the adolescent's sense of self is in question and it can be said to become, as Rayner (1993) argued, their preoccupation.

There are also other approaches to defining this period in life. For instance, adolescence is described by Patricia Crittenden (2008) as the "period when the potential of childhood is fulfilled" or for those less fortunate in that respect, "possibly the best opportunity in life for change" (p. 69). This is in line with what family therapist Virginia Satir (1991) suggests, which is that it is never too late for someone to start to feel better about themselves. Satir states that,

Since the feeling of worth has been learned, it can be unlearned, and something new can be learned in its place. The possibility for this learning lasts from birth to death, so it is never too late. At any point in a person's life he can begin to feel better about himself (p. 27).

There is, then, reassurance in the healing power of therapeutic interactions for children and young people who have experienced trauma. For example, Bruce Perry (2013) suggests that the brain's cortex can be re-wired through relationship-based therapy, in order to enable individuals to manage stressful events differently.

Moreover, a final element in defining adolescence emerges from recent developments in brain imaging technology, particularly MRI Scanning. This has highlighted the increase in neuroplasticity during the period of adolescence, which in turn facilitates the development of social cognitive skills (Blakemore,

2012). A number of studies offer neurobehavioral, morphological, neurochemical, and pharmacological evidence suggesting that the brain remains 'under construction' during adolescence (Sylwester, 2007, Blakemore, 2012, Arain et al., 2013). It is a period that, as Iroise Dumontheil states (2015, p. 122), sees the development of "social cognition and the understanding and awareness of the potentially different perspective of others" and is therefore a significantly formative period in relation to the development of self-esteem.

2.2.2 Resilience and self-esteem in adolescence

For the purpose of this study, resilience is considered significant for self-esteem and a major protective factor that can positively influence adolescent self-esteem and wellbeing (Masten, 2001), so improving the life chances of young people.

According to David Walker (2014, p. 2), "the concept of resilience came to prominence over 20 years ago as an alternative to risk-focused health and social work, mostly relating to children". Walker further argued that, "It was a promising line of study because some children appeared to thrive despite the harshest of conditions (Condly, 2006, p. 212)". Since then, research on resilience has come to span many disciplines internationally and there is much evidence to support the view that resilience is key to the promotion and protection of wellbeing. In the context of my own multi-professional practice with young people and families, the key writers on the topic were considered to be Gilligan (1997, 2000) and Brigid Daniel and Sally Wassell (1999, 2002). They were the champions of resilience theory in England in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Their work had (and continues to have) a direct impact on practice and guidance. Daniel and Wassell developed a resilience matrix (Figure 3), providing practitioners with a way to assess risks to children and young people against protective factors and, more specifically, to consider resilience and vulnerability factors. At the time, this was used alongside the Common Assessment Framework for Children in Need and Their Families (CAF). Early Help Assessment (EHA) has now replaced the CAF but it is based on the same

principles. The concept of resilience consequently became very influential in interventions with families and in the assessment of children’s needs.

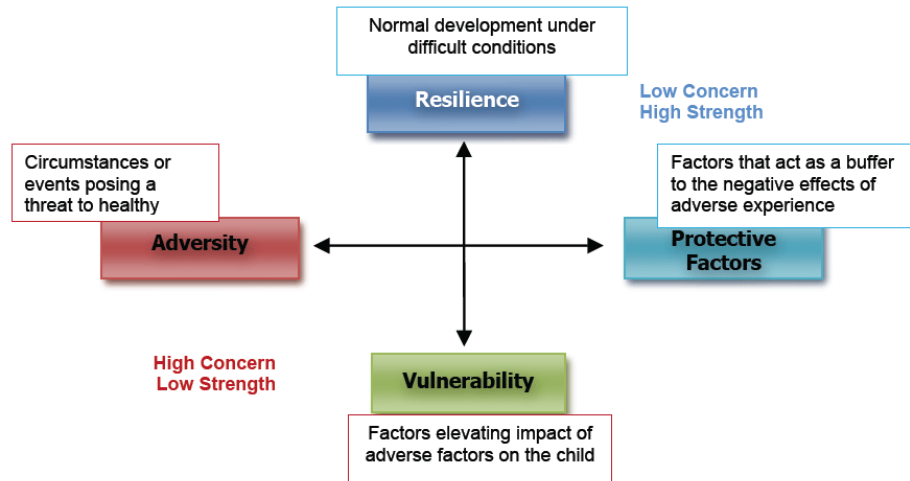


Figure 3. Resilience-Vulnerability Matrix (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 2010).

Gilligan identified six domains (depicted by Jo Fox in Figure 4) that contribute to the three building blocks mentioned previously, which could be utilized to understand the ‘risk and resilience factors’ that can have an impact on an individual child’s resilience.

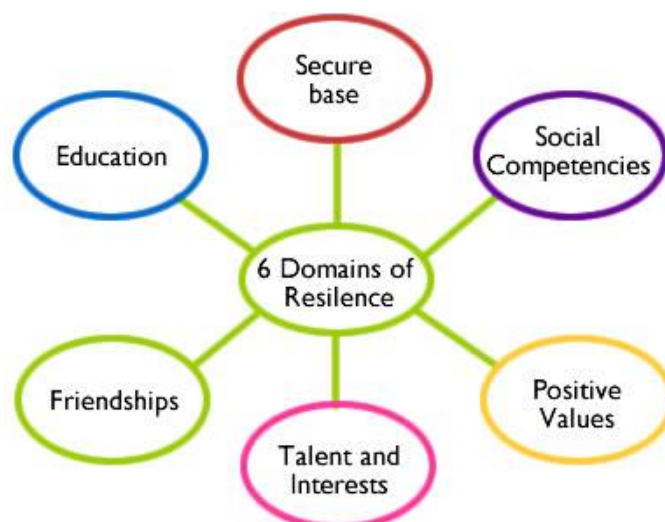


Figure 4. Domains of Resilience (Fox, 2014).

These ideas influenced my initial thinking in developing this research, particularly the definition of ‘resilience’ as “a set of qualities that helps a person to withstand many of the negative effects of adversity” (Gilligan, 2000, p. 37), with the three fundamental building blocks of:

1. A secure base, whereby a child feels a sense of belonging and security;
2. Good self-esteem, that is, an internal sense of worth and competence;
3. A sense of self-efficacy, that is, a sense of mastery and control, along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations.

(Gilligan, 1997)

Daniel and Wassell (2002) further categorised the factors influencing resilience as either intrinsic or extrinsic. The intrinsic factors are the building blocks identified above. The extrinsic factors are at least one secure attachment relationship, access to the wider support of friends or extended family, and positive community experiences. Other theorists concur that resilience relates to an *individual’s* personality, disposition, ‘hardiness’ or capacity to find meaning in life (Wadsworth, 2010, p.550); that it involves collective *familial* responses to difficult events based on shared beliefs and values (Walsh, 2007); and that it involves *community* level responses to traumatic events (Hobfoll et al., 2007).

However, as I read further in this field, I began to question some of my most cherished assumptions about resilience and started to think about it in different ways. It occurred to me that the term ‘resilience’, like many other popular psychological theories, including ‘attachment’, may have become too simplified through overuse. This shift in my thinking mirrored the shift I had recognised in my philosophical journey development as a realist and an ethnographer, as explained in the next chapter. Now I was not just exploring concepts; I was challenging myself to explain them.

Key to this change were elements of the *International Research Project in Resilience* (2021). Michael Ungar, who leads the work of the Resilience Research Centre, defines resilience as a social construct, rather than a concept specific to an individual:

*In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to **navigate** their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing, and their capacity individually and collectively to **negotiate** for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).*

This suggests that resilience will incorporate genetic make-up and external circumstances, including access to relevant resources. Resilience theory, as it has developed, seeks to explore and explain the factors that pose perceived risks to an individual's quality of security, and those that not only protect an individual, but promote an adaptive, creative outcome that enriches their capacity to cope with subsequent risks. As my reading and research moved on, I realised that I was most comfortable with, and found most useful, Ann Masten's view of resilience:

Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities (2001, p. 235).

In short, Masten argues that resilience is not only about 'bouncing back from adversity' but that it is reliant on, and interactive with a range of protective factors and relationships. These protective factors, it is broadly agreed, are essentially the opposite of risk factors (Fox, 2014; Public Health England, 2016). This interpretation came to seem a better 'fit' for my research, as it chimed more with the data that was emerging from the everyday magic of interactions between the horses and the young people.

2.2.3 Protective factors for adolescents

The protective factors mentioned above are those elements associated with the promotion or maintenance of healthy development. They can reduce the power or salience of risk and vulnerability factors. For example, much has been written on the benefits of secure primary attachments in early childhood and

their beneficial impact on brain development (Music, 2011), their contribution to developing a healthy self-concept (Plummer, 2014) and how they can embolden children to develop self-assurance and confidence “to venture forth in the world” (Konrad, 2013, p. 191). Early secure attachments can positively influence all other relationships children go on to develop in their lives. Further, organisational anthropologist Judith E. Glaser (2013) suggests that the brain is designed to be social and to make connections with others.

In adolescence, it is argued, there is also great potential to intervene, given the way that young people’s brains are rapidly growing and developing (Blakemore, 2018). Consequently, timely, supportive and responsive relationships with trusted others can generate valuable growth. Studies on adolescent resilience by Erik K. Laursen and Scott M. Birmingham (2003) and Spencer et al. (2004) also suggest that adolescents seek out authentic connections with reliable and available adults. Shelley Cohen Konrad (2013, p. 56) reported that such connections “enhanced their resilience and restored their faith in themselves and others”. Indeed, Bessel Van der Kolk (2015) goes so far as to argue that the only thing that heals trauma is supportive relationships. Even if not considered in such dramatic terms, it is clearly important for children and young people to have a range of different relationships, from trusted close friends to acquaintances, in order to have a range of experiences of self.

This is particularly significant given that the work of Albert Bandura (1971) showed that children internalize the standards of those adults who are important to them. He also suggested that these standards then become self-imposed and so negative relationships could be very destructive. In particular, he argued that occasionally these self-controlled consequences of behaviour may become more powerful than consequences from the external environment stating that, “there is no more devastating punishment than self-contempt” (p. 28). Canadian psychiatrist Eric Berne’s (1961) theory of Transactional Analysis (TA), which was based on his clinical practice experiences, concurs that in the early years of life, children’s brains absorb and record the often contradictory verbal and

non-verbal messages given by parents, which they do not have the ability to censor or filter.

Plummer (2014) further highlights the importance of feeling love, warmth and approval from others, as well as self-approval and self-compassion, as protective. Notably, she highlights the links between healthy self-esteem and physical, social and emotional wellbeing, and between low self-esteem and school failure, social anxiety, depression, violence and substance abuse. One of the aspects Plummer mentions, the connection between self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and academic success, has been documented by other writers, particularly Daniel Goleman (1996, 2004). For Goleman and others, emotional intelligence, or the ability to recognise and manage emotions is seen as having an enormous impact on young people's motivation and learning potential, and some accounts have reported emotional intelligence to be more significant than IQ in terms of long-term attainment (Goleman, 1996, 2004, Lantieri, 2008). This is illustrated by Goleman (1996) when he said that,

School success is not predicted by a child's fund of facts, or by a precocious ability to read so much as by emotional and social measures; being self-assured and interested; knowing what kind of behaviour is expected and how to rein in impulse to misbehave; being able to wait; to follow directions and to turn to adults and peers for help; expressing needs whilst getting along with other children (p. 193).

Other protective measures of positive self-esteem are self-motivation and self-reliance (Plummer, 2014), the ability to problem-solve (Bandura, 1971), the development of insight, the recognition of the need for support or assistance and the confidence to seek assistance or help by asking appropriate people for the appropriate resources (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995). The outcome of these processes is that the young person, rather than feeling diminished for asking for help, has a sense of enhanced resourcefulness for having used their own initiative and achieved the optimum outcome. These positive experiences of self can be transferred to other arenas of activity, as discussed later.

2.2.4 Risk factors for adolescents

Adolescents, especially when in the company of peers, can be impulsive risk takers (Steinberg et al., 2017). This may be explained, at least in part, by the prefrontal cortex, which controls impulses, being one of the last areas of the brain to develop. However, this is not necessarily related to maladjustment regarding risk, as this is typically a gradual accumulation of stressful experiences that can cause lasting damage, not usually the result of a single life event. It is difficult to analyse the causes of vulnerability because the reasons have developed over time to create a layered effect. There are, however, identifiable elements and characteristics in an individual, which, when combined with elements of the social environment, can help to clarify an appreciation of the individual's current responses and experience. It is these factors that will have a bearing upon the quality of an individual's self-confidence and self-esteem, perhaps especially when confronted with a novel yet meaningful experience, such as 'The Horse Course', which contains perceived risk.

My professional training and experience have shown me that in their very early lives, children develop excellent observation skills, ideally during their intimate and nuanced interactions with others, or less ideally, as they observe others from a distance. Those children who are exposed to prolonged stress or adversity learn coping strategies, which, while they may disguise or suppress their genuine emotions, are adaptive for the presenting situation. In the short term, they are adaptive because they produce an acceptable outcome. However, in the longer term they are maladaptive because they result in a discrepancy between the outward appearance and the inner state of the child or young person, which results in fragmentation of their sense of self and inhibits healthy development. Although it is sometimes possible to assess children's emotions by observing their behaviours or by making reasonable associations between events and their emotional responses (e.g. fear with threat or sadness with loss), it is often difficult to do this with children who have developed maladaptive coping strategies.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study (Felitti et al., 1998), which began in the US in the 1990s, highlights the influence of psychological, biological and social determinants on children's development and wellbeing. Findings suggest that exposure to ACEs such as loss, abuse, violence, poverty, poor schooling, parental drug and alcohol misuse, parental mental illness, or parental incarceration in earlier childhood can have a toxic effect and can alter the subsequent development of nervous, hormonal and immunological systems. The more ACEs children are exposed to, it is argued, the more likely they are to have long-term health and social problems (Edwards et al., 2003). Findings from the study suggest that 50% of students in a classroom have experienced one or more adverse childhood events.

Children whose primary driver is to survive are unable to access higher-level skills and to develop. Exposure to trauma or toxic stress has been found to impair a child's ability to access higher level executive functioning and negatively impact on their emotional and physical health and development (Harris, 2018). Recent developments in neuroscience and neuroimaging of trauma in cases of post-traumatic stress also support this argument. As Van der Kolk (2015) states,

[t]he body keeps the score. If the memory of trauma is encoded in the viscera, in heart-breaking and gut-wrenching emotions, in autoimmune disorders and skeletal/muscular problems, and if mind/brain/visceral communication is the royal road to emotion regulation, this demands a radical shift in our therapeutic assumptions (p. 86).

The absence of stable, long-term relationships is a well-established indicator of increased risk and vulnerability, especially when associated with one or more social inequality factors or exposure to ACEs. Research by Jon A. Shaw (2003) and Susan Dvorak McMahon et al. (2003) concur that chronic instability, such as changes of home within the looked after system, or through the experience of war, and the rejection inherent within a range of life events, are known to have long term psychological (or psychosocial) consequences. This is also

inherent in disruptions to attachment, as noted in the previous section, which can also have an adverse impact on young people's emotional health and wellbeing (Doherty and Hughes, 2009).

Further, Glaser (2013) suggests that fear of rejection and the powerful need to belong can outweigh the need to feel safe. A young person experiencing rejection, or feelings of rejection, will also experience feelings of fear, which in turn increases cortisol levels, resulting in protective behaviour.

In turn, a parent whose own experiences of attachment have been disrupted as a child may struggle to establish and sustain stable relationships with their own child, or to provide the 'good enough parenting' (Winnicott, 1971, Crittenden, 2017) required for their child to feel a sense of belonging and security.

For children and young people to achieve their full potential, adults should be able to recognise and understand risk factors and make appropriate interventions in order to prevent difficulties arising, or to support children in building resilience where difficulties have already arisen. This is based on the view that children are experts with unique perspectives and insight into their own reality (Shaw et al., 2011). The Children Act (1989) and The Children Act (2004), which represent the most comprehensive reform of English childcare law in history, have children's welfare as a central tenet, stressing the importance of 'ascertaining the wishes and feelings of the child'. Also, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by the United Kingdom in 1991, promotes the child's voice, stating:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express these views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UNCRC Article 12).

Both define the age of childhood as 0-18 years, but differing ages of consent and other age-related issues blur this definition. A prime example is the age of criminal responsibility, which is currently ten years in the United Kingdom, lower than most other countries. Moreover, for children and young people in the care

system, it has been easy for their voices to be outweighed or overruled by adults. Children and young people are no more inclined towards dishonesty or fantasy than adults, yet social inequality and age may result in their evidence in court being deemed inadmissible, meaning that the issue of informed consent with children and young people continues to be a legal and moral minefield for conscientious practitioners. There is still, therefore, a tension between different societal discourses that may have an impact upon young people in general, and those suffering the most social inequality even more so, and these discourses as enacted in legal and other practices may serve to undermine, rather than support and develop, resilience and wellbeing.

What are considered risk factors can also be linked to cultural notions of what childhood and youth are or might be. These too shape the social environment and how children's voices are understood, and so have an impact upon young people and the professionals serving them alike. The literature of childhood studies is relevant here. According to Allison James and Alan Prout (1997), the nature of childhood is defined and shaped by culturally specific philosophies and practices. Globalisation may be reshaping notions of childhood, yet every society has beliefs about the status and nature of children and young people, which consequently influences how decisions about relevant issues are made.

Clues about the status of children and young people are also reflected in the nature of some of the services and interventions provided for them (which may themselves impact upon wellbeing and resilience in negative rather than positive ways). Wendy Stainton-Rogers (in Foley et al., 2001 p. 29) describes two discourses of childhood that influence policy, services and interventions for younger people. The first, based upon 'romanticizing childhood', assumes that children are entitled to a good childhood and in need of protection. The second, based upon a 'puritan notion of original sin', assumes that the young lack self-control and need to be regulated (implicitly critiquing behaviours like risk taking) and seeing young people as solely responsible for their actions, so excluding societal determinants and the potential toxicity associated with ACES. There is often a different understanding of age embedded within such policies and

interventions, in that 'children' are most typically associated with protection, while 'young people' are often seen as problematic.

Today in Britain, such discourses about childhood and youth still permeate society, and many adult attitudes towards children and young people demonstrate an underlying belief that they should stay childlike, respectful and unquestioning until they achieve the status of adulthood. This serves to act as part of the background against which work that develops resilience and wellbeing is played out. Common notions of childhood still tend to portray children and young adults as inadequate adults or *tabula rasa*, rather than intelligent, capable young human beings who can develop their resilience despite challenging life experiences given the right circumstances and support.

The propensity to minimise or avoid the need to develop meaningful communication with children and young people also leads to childhood having an inferior cognitive status, when in reality it is the adult's appreciation and evaluation of their ability that should be in question. The way in which this has become embedded in the provision of services and the legal system also reflects the power imbalance between adults and children. This is evident and compounded in the tendency to discredit young children's versions of events and their abilities to bear witness to what they have experienced. Miranda Fricker (2007) describes this as 'testimonial injustice'. This too is a counterpoint to the work around resilience and work that aims to develop participatory roles for children in terms of services for them.

In the light of these background discourses around constructions of childhood and youth, and their potential for compounding risk factors for young people, the need for developing approaches across a range of practices and disciplines that may develop resilience and self-esteem in the face of social inequality becomes yet more significant. Such approaches are important in the work of many academics and practitioners. For instance, Angie Hart's (2011) perspective is that children need advocates to help them make 'resilient moves'. One resilient move, such as discovering a new interest, hobby or talent, has the potential to cause a chain reaction and lead a young person into a new direction. Hart and

her team at *The Centre for Resilience and Social Justice* at Brighton University are working co-productively with communities through the organisation *Boingboing* (2021), which aims to ‘model and promote resilience research and practice that challenges social inequalities’. They have developed many user-friendly materials including evidence-based ideas and remedies to support young people in making resilient moves. It is reassuring to reflect that Hart’s idea of ‘making resilient moves’ practically applies the developments in academic thinking about resilience. This approach builds upon Gilligan’s (2009) work and the success stories of young people who developed their confidence through playing a sport, discovering a talent or meeting an inspirational person. It also chimes with Masten’s (2001) idea of the ‘everyday magic’ of resilience and confirms that it is not just about the internal resources of an individual but how their internal mechanisms and external circumstances interact (Hart et al., 2016).

2.2.5 Social disadvantage and power dynamics

The positive link between self-esteem and authentic, empowering relationships between young people and adults, is highlighted by Laursen and Birmingham (2003) and Spencer et al. (2004). Additionally, according to Plummer (2014), and as discussed earlier, a young person with healthy self-esteem will be more likely to develop mutually respectful and fulfilling relationships with others. However, inevitable power struggles in relationships as young people search for social recognition, approval and acceptance, can make adolescence a stressful time, especially given that susceptibility to peer pressure and the potential for conflict increase (Konrad, 2013). Conversely, sociological theories of labelling and tagging (Tannenbaum, 1938) suggest that being labelled or tagged, for example as ‘failures’ or ‘criminals’, may cause individuals to act accordingly.

Inequality is a major factor here too, as noted above. Epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009), for instance, commented on the “pernicious effects that inequality has on societies; eroding trust, increasing anxiety and illness” (Satterthwaite, cited in Hutter, 2017, p.117). Although criticised for its methodology and assertions (Snowdon, 2010), Wilkinson and Pickett’s research

has had significant political influence. Further, Johnson et al. (2012) suggest that mental illness is more prevalent where power is unequal. In their study of the role of the Dominance Behaviour System (DBS) model in psychopathology, they suggest that from a very young age, children become aware of opportunities and threats to the ultimate goal of having power in the social environment. In this context, every nuance of each social interaction, whether verbal or non-verbal, as young people search for approval and social acceptance, and every concern about their status and how they might be judged, has the potential to affect young people deeply. They argue that children's experiences or perceptions of their own achievement influence their self-concept (or what they know about themselves), which in turn influences their self-esteem (or how they feel about themselves).

Issues related to power and self-esteem also emerge in relation to hierarchies created by institutions and discipline (Foucault, 1975), such as in school. For example, Lisa Proctor's (2013) study on the socialisation of 'angry boys' suggests that "ascribed emotional identities are reflective of the ways that institutional power plays out within children's school lives and interactions" (p. 1). Additionally, Lawler (2014) also highlights some of the pitfalls of social issues becoming located within individuals, and Goleman (1996, 2004) and Linda Lantieri (2008) argue that long-term life success and positive self-esteem are linked to emotional intelligence or the ability to handle feelings and emotions successfully, both of which increase the potential for socially approved achievements, so forming a reinforcing cycle.

In addition, this is an era where neoliberalism has infiltrated our thinking and behaviour and where human relations are defined by competition. In an article entitled 'Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems', George Monbiot (2016) described it as anonymous yet pervasive, stating:

We internalise and reproduce its creeds. The rich persuade themselves that they acquired their wealth through merit, ignoring the advantages – such as education, inheritance and class – that may have helped to secure it. The

poor begin to blame themselves for their failures, even when they can do little to change their circumstances.

However, there is work that aims to counter this overwhelming ideology by both pointing out the significance of education and class whilst also attempting to address the impact of lack of access amongst those labelled as 'poor'. For example, one notable American longitudinal study, *Lifetime Effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40* (Schweinhart et al., 2005), suggested that high quality, active learning preschool programmes can provide young people born into poverty with significant lifetime benefits, affecting their wellbeing through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. This study followed 123 young African American children who were living in poverty and therefore deemed to be at risk of school failure. The participants were randomly assigned to initially similar programme and non-programme groups. Those in the programme group had access to additional input from qualified teachers who used the HighScope approach in daily classes and visited their homes weekly. In the programme groups, there was an emphasis on developing positive interrelationships between parents, professionals and children. The participants were followed up at regular intervals throughout their childhood, adolescence and into adulthood.

Compared to the non-programme group, the programme group showed better school achievement and literacy, higher graduation rates, higher adult earnings and home ownership, better family stability and lower rates of teenage pregnancy and lifetime arrest rates. The outcomes evidenced in the data have been described as 'dispositions'. From a young age, that group of children were facilitated to be intrinsically motivated and to develop self-confidence, initiative, creativity and problem-solving skills, that were intended to equip them for the rest of their lives. This approach is used worldwide today and has been influential in the development of early years policy for children in England and Wales since the 1990s. For example, the current Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2017; 2021) standards link neatly to HighScope's Key Development Indicators. Similarly, in England and Wales in the early stages of the Sure Start implementation, Tony Blair's Labour government was

convinced not by the potential benefits to children's lives as such, but by the economic argument made by Lawrence J. Schweinhart et al. (2005), that for every dollar invested into quality early childhood provision, \$12.90 was returned to society in savings to welfare services.

Although originally developed within the early years sector, the HighScope curriculum has subsequently been further developed for older children, young people and adults. It is also user-friendly for adults with learning disabilities, whose preference is for a secure base and a consistent and predictable routine. There are many similarities to the person-centred approach (Rogers, 1957), particularly in the ways in which they promote mutual respect between adults and children, authentic communication and problem-solving strategies. There is much support for the idea that children learn best when they are intrinsically motivated (Middleton, 1990; Bandura, 1997; Jensen, 2005; Plummer, 2014; Hohmann and Weikart, 1995). Music (2014) concurs, "Being extrinsically rewarded for being good... is not as rewarding as the intrinsic rewards from [doing] an altruistic and generous act" (p.14). While motivation may be difficult to measure, Plummer (2014) asserts that we instinctively recognise the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, arguing that when we are intrinsically motivated, such activities, "lead to a tangible change in self-belief (e.g. through the experience of mastering a skill)" (p. 37).

2.2.6 Wellbeing

There has been a general rise in awareness of the importance of good mental health and wellbeing. Over recent years, the interconnectedness between mental and physical wellbeing, and between emotional, cognitive and physical development has been established. However, this recognition of interconnectedness has a longer history in research. Kathy Sylva et al. (2004) and Crittenden (2008) agree that when educational and social development are complementary and equal in importance, children make better all-round progress. Rachel Dodge et al. (2012) acknowledged some of the difficulties and challenges of defining wellbeing, proposing a definition which suggests that,

“Wellbeing is the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced” (p.230). In addition, they argued that,

Stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, their wellbeing dips, and vice-versa (p. 230).

This definition can be directly compared to the core elements of risk and resilience factors previously discussed.

The growing awareness of the importance of children and young people’s wellbeing has increasingly been reflected in policy, for instance in the UK Government Green Paper: *Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision* (DoHSC, DfE, 2017). This increased national awareness and recognition of the lack of services for adolescents with mental health problems in England. The *Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: A Green Paper and Next Steps* (DoHSC, DfE, 2018 p.3) states,

One in ten (around 850,000) children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition. These illnesses can have a devastating impact on their physical health, their relationships and their future prospects. The challenge often extends into a person’s adult life, with half of all mental health conditions beginning before the age of 14 (p.3).

According to the Children’s Society (2019), wellbeing and mental ill-health, whilst related, are not necessarily the opposite of each other. A child could have low subjective wellbeing without symptoms of mental illness and high subjective wellbeing with a mental illness diagnosis. More recently, there has started to be a stronger emphasis on the importance of understanding different kinds and aspects of children and young people’s wellbeing and a move away from adult-

based assessments of children’s lives, towards children’s self-reports. Figure 5 focuses on the components of self-reported wellbeing.

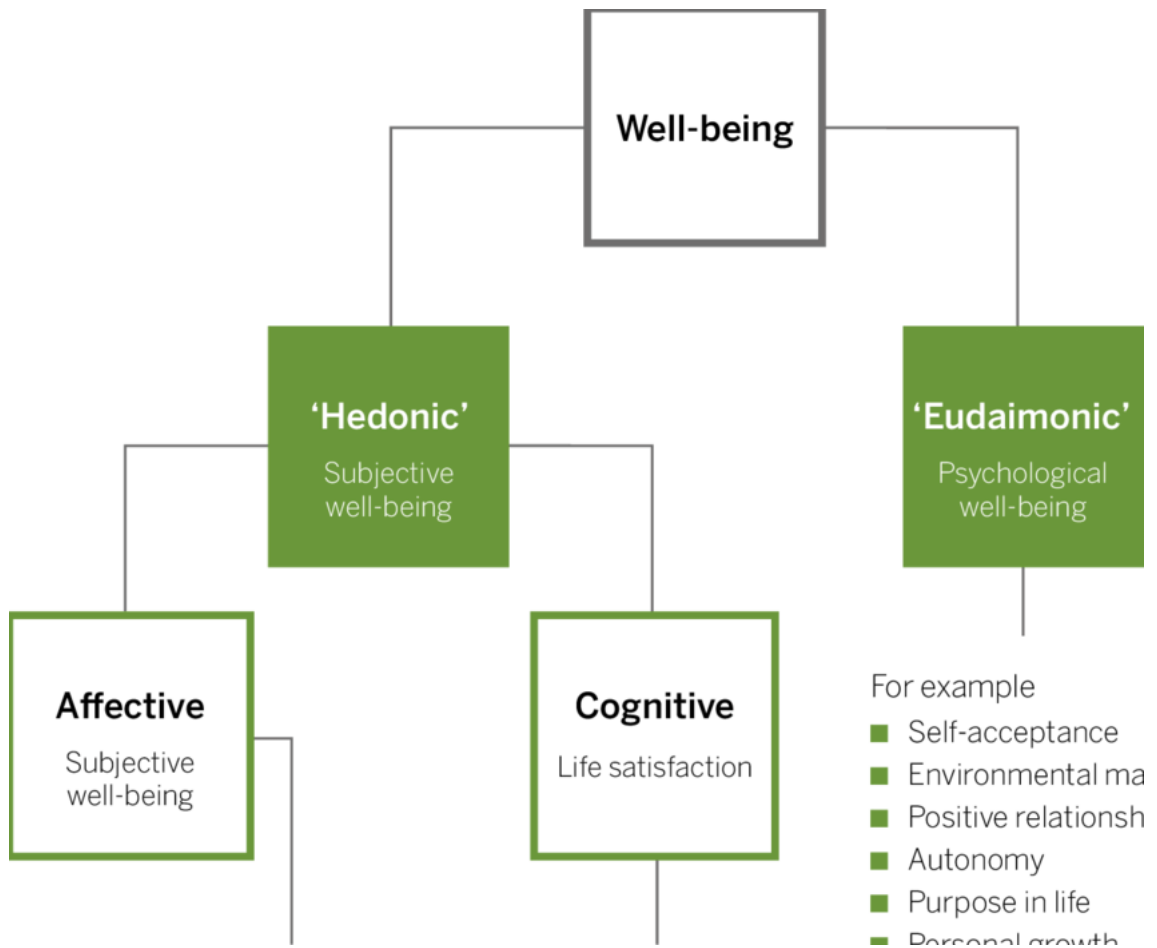


Figure 5. Components of self-reported wellbeing (*The Good Childhood Report, 2018, 2019*).

Notably, this report considered the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, terms that I return to later in this thesis, and which became particularly significant when I came to analyse the data and discuss my findings. Here I offer a brief introduction to these ideas.

Hedonic approaches to wellbeing, which originated with Greek philosopher Aristippus, focus on the presence of positive affect (pleasure), and the absence

of negative affect (pain) (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Kahneman (1999) asserted that hedonic psychology was the study of what,

...makes experiences and life pleasant and unpleasant, and is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (p. ix).

Hedonic approaches focus on materialistic goals and can be seen as extrinsically motivated. They may be understood as being about pursuit and acquisition of wealth, power, (short term) pleasure, which can involve greed, the exploitation of others and compromising values (Ryan et al., 2008).

In contrast, eudaimonic wellbeing has a different focus. The term 'eudaimonia' is typically described as the pursuit of human excellence. Translating it from the original Greek, 'eu' meaning 'good', and 'daimon' meaning 'self', it is a reference to the pursuit of the 'true self' (Waterman, 1993, p.678). The incorporation of the word daimon emphasises that this concept is about having meaning and direction in life. This differs from 'happiness', which emphasises contentment and life satisfaction. The term therefore encompasses feelings that accompany behaviour directed to realising one's own potential. In effect, this is about intrinsic motivational goals such as personal growth, living according to one's values and prosocial concerns for society. These are linked to a process of how to live well (Ryan et al 2008).

The concept originated with Aristotle, who proposed what Abraham H. Maslow (1971, p.42) described as an 'ethical doctrine to provide guidelines for how to live a good and virtuous life'. Maslow added,

This is in line with the self-actualising stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Self-actualising people are involved in causes outside of themselves, working at things they feel called to and which they love ... so that the work-joy dichotomy in them disappears (1971, p. 42).

In this research, eudaimonic wellbeing is concerned with how young people make meaning from their purposeful engagement in 'The Horse Course'. However, this does not mean that hedonic wellbeing was absent, as explored later in the thesis.

Whilst these accounts of wellbeing allow more understanding of it, the 2020 iteration of the *Good Childhood Report* paints a bleak picture for children living in the United Kingdom, citing it as having the largest increase in relative child poverty and stating that more than a third of 15-year-olds scored low on wellbeing. There are many possible social, psychological and health reasons for this, in addition to all of the 'developmentally normal' teenage angst (including at the time of writing the decline in young people's mental health resulting from the Covid-19 Pandemic). A report from the National Youth Association (NYA) and wellbeing charity 'Brook' (2020) *Inside Out, Young People's Health and Wellbeing: A Response to Covid-19*, stated that 72 per cent of young people asked reported a decline in their mental health during lockdown. Some 77 per cent said they had experienced loneliness and 50 per cent said family problems had increased.

Overall, research in this area recognises a number of developmental, social, political and economic reasons why children might experience adversity, develop low self-esteem or become classed as 'vulnerable'.

2.2.7 Critiques of notions of therapeutic terminology

Although the above sections summarise work in the field, and this research aims to add to it, there have been critiques of the language of emotions and resilience as it has emerged in the late 20th and early 21st century. For example, Frank Furedi (2004) in the introduction to his book, *The Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*, suggested that Western cultures take emotions 'so seriously that virtually every challenge or misfortune that confronts people is represented as a direct threat to their emotional wellbeing' (p.1). He criticised the expansion of what he saw as pathologizing psychological and therapeutic terminology, expressing concern that this leads to individuals lacking 'the resilience to deal with feelings of isolation, disappointment and failure' (p.6). In relation to the term self-esteem, he recounted how a Factivia search of over 300 UK newspapers in 1980 found no references to 'self-esteem', three references in 1986, 103 in 1990 and 3,328 in 2000. Similar

patterns were recorded with related terms including 'trauma', 'stress', 'counselling' and 'syndrome'.

Additionally, Furedi highlighted how the understanding of low self-esteem has dramatically changed over past four centuries, from having no link whatsoever to emotional difficulties, to becoming what he considered 'one of the most overused diagnoses for the problem of the human condition' (p.3).

Likewise, writing about what they described as 'the dangerous rise in therapeutic education', Kathryn Ecclestone and Dennis Hayes (2008, 2019) refer to the 'snowflake generation' and propose that the well-intended focus on emotional education and mental health has disempowered children and young people and portrayed them as less resilient. They consider what they criticise as pathologising normal responses. However, it should be noted that the term 'snowflake generation' has become a common wider cultural shorthand used by older people to criticise young people as being less resilient and more likely to take offence than themselves. This could be seen in several ways, including possibly identifying an actual phenomena, but it tends to be used to maintain older adult power. Whilst a comparatively new label, it may serve to reinforce power relationships between generations by silencing the voices of younger people and routinely insisting that they are less capable.

The critiques outlined above offer a counterpoint to much current understanding of emotional education and mental health, implicitly suggesting that disempowerment and lack of resilience are created, in part, by professionals, leading to the shift in wider media discourses and representations. This could also be seen as linked to Lawler's (2014) argument that labels like 'vulnerable' might result in young people developing narratives of powerlessness, or a lack of self-worth. However, the terms Furedi identified as problematic continue to be integral to everyday language today, a recognition, perhaps, of greater cultural emotional literacy rather than pathologizing tendencies.

2.3 Horses as authentic and therapeutic partners. Context.

Turning to the literature that addresses horses and their role as authentic and therapeutic partners, it is important to note that much of this attends to the significance of authenticity in relationships, something that came to be a strong theme throughout this thesis. This is in line with research that solely addresses human relationships. According to Transactional Analysis theory (Berne, 1961) and Humanistic theory (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994), authenticity (also known as genuineness or realness) is considered one of the most important attitudes in any kind of therapeutic relationship, as it is considered vital that [the therapist] “is what he seems to be. His internal being is matched by his external expression” (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p. 54).

Before addressing authenticity more closely, this section begins with a short introduction to Animal Studies, Anthrozoology, and Human-Animal Interaction, followed by literature on the horse’s point of view in communication and interaction, as understood by humans, before returning to literature on the potential of horses as authentic and therapeutic partners. The review of the literature in the following sections incorporates work from a number of disciplines and also highlights links between theory and practice.

2.3.1 Animal Studies, Anthrozoology and Human-Animal Interaction and Relationships

There are longstanding debates about the place of humans in nature as a whole. As stated by Kate Soper (1995, pp. 47-49), these include whether humans are part of nature, have dominion over it, whether they respect and conserve it or whether they destroy it. These debates are reflected, in part, by the way the Anthropocentric - or human-centred - view refers to humans as the only species with moral and intellectual standing, suggesting that all other species are driven by instinct alone. This would tend to emphasise the elements of debate about having dominion over nature rather than being part of it, as part of an overarching notion of human superiority.

Whilst acknowledging that there are more complex arguments to be made, Soper (1995) broadly describes these debates as representing “dualist and monist approaches to the questions of humanity’s relations with the rest of animality” (p. 49). She continues,

For the dualist, our attributes, realised capacities and potentialities as human beings are so radically different from those possessed by other species that there is no proper analogue between humans and other animals. For the monist, by contrast, all the ways in which we differ from other species are matters of degree, which can be all the better illuminated by seeing them as graduations within an essential sameness of being (Soper, 1995. p. 50).

Soper (1995) therefore helps me to locate this research as more in line with the monist approach.

If we start to think about the ethics of ‘keeping’ animals through this monist lens, it leads on to the question of where we stand in relation to the general humanity vs animality debate and subsequently to questions about why humans began to ‘domesticate’ and dominate animals. I return to this in section 2.3.2, on literature on the horse’s history, senses, instincts and communication. Research in Animal Studies and Anthrozoology has explored the relationship between sentient animals and human beings. In this developing inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary field, animals and their relationships with humans are studied for various reasons and from various theoretical perspectives. Some have focused on animal rights (Bentham, 1748-1832) or speciesism (Singer, 1975) and highlighted human disregard, superiority or cruelty towards animals. Others have focused on the more philosophical aspect of how humans define themselves in relation to animals and the animal world. For example, Jacques Derrida (2008) avoids categorising animals as one entity, describing this as ‘violence and stupidity’. In addition, Donna Haraway (2008) considers the complex relationships between humans and animals, arguing that animals are intimate relations and companion species. Kelly Oliver (2009) also investigates this relationship, rather than looking to qualities or capacities that make animals the same as or different from humans.

Another aspect of this research can be seen in the growing interest in the reported benefits to human health and wellbeing of interactions with animals. It has, for instance, led to the establishment of academic journals such as *Anthrozoös* in 1987 and *Society and Animals* in 1993. Further, in building upon Animal Studies, Anthrozoology has become a distinct academic discipline, resulting in the International Society for Anthrozoology being founded in 1991. As a result, the influence of companion animals on human health and wellbeing is now an active area of research in Europe, America and Australia, and several universities now offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in the field of human-animal relationships (Herzog, 2016).

This area of research also looks at historical understandings of beneficial animal human partnerships, as the reference to Bentham, above, implies. For example, whilst Linda Kohanov (2016) suggests that there were periods in history when humans who believed that animals were sentient creatures might have been burned at the stake, Stine B. Christiansen (2007) argues that animals have been recognised throughout history as human companions, healers and therapists. For example, the ancient Greeks believed that a lick from a dog had medicinal powers. They also used horse riding as therapy for soldiers returning from battle and as a cure for depression in people who had incurable illnesses (Brudvig, 1988; Hines and Bustad 1986). This understanding continues into more modern periods. In 1792, at the York Retreat in England, it was documented that the use of animals enhanced the humanity of those who were emotionally ill (Beck & Katcher, 1996) and Florence Nightingale (1860) observed that companion animals were beneficial for chronically ill patients.

More recently, interacting with pets has been found to lower blood pressure and stress levels. The Harvard Medical School (Frates et al., 2014) report, *Get Healthy, Get a Dog: The health benefits of canine companionship*, reviewed numerous studies on the physical and psychological benefits of dog ownership. Additionally, relationships between humans and other animals (large and small) are associated with increased human survival following heart attacks. In addition, some epidemiological studies have reported that pet owners make fewer visits to doctors, are more physically active, and have lower levels of

depression. Furthermore, interacting with animals has evolved into a therapeutic intervention for disorders such as autism, and to enhance morale in institutions such as nursing homes, hospitals and prisons. Whilst relatively few randomized clinical trials (in which participants are assigned at random to different treatments) have assessed the long-term effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy, it is clear from the literature that many people find the company of animals socially supportive and deeply satisfying (Fine, 2015).

Whilst touch and play may seem quite generalised, there are significant underlying biological processes that explain this satisfaction. These include how the nervous system facilitates the ability to sense and respond to external stimuli (Bloom and Lazerson, 1988) and the major role oxytocin plays in this process. While oxytocin is recognised as one of the birth hormones that influence the bonding process between mother and baby, the important role it plays in social bonds in general has been documented by several studies including Carol Sue Carter (1998), Carter and E.B. Keverne (2002) and Karen L. Bales et al. (2007). Skin-to-skin contact and positive, empathic social interactions between humans are reported to release oxytocin from the hypothalamus, inducing feelings of calm, connection and pleasure, and decreasing levels of stress (Uvnäs-Moberg, 2013). Although, as Plummer reports, “levels of oxytocin vary enormously according to how much positive physical contact we experience” (2014, p.14).

Research by Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg (2010), Meg Daley Olmert (2009), Plummer (2014) and Cynthia K. Chandler (2012) suggests that all mammals have this capacity. This is enabled by the neural connections in the brain that seek rewarding social contact and connections, even through bonds with mammals from other species (Panksepp, 2005). Kohanov (2016) advocates that oxytocin,

...buffers the fight or flight response in favour of tend and befriend behaviour. It heightens learning capacity, social recognition circuits and pain thresholds. It helps heal wounds faster, reduces aggression and creates a sense of connection and wellbeing (p. 35).

Chandler (2012) reports that oxytocin effects may be triggered in response to single meetings with animals, but that stable relationships with animals are linked to more potent and long-lasting effects due to the repeated exposure to oxytocin. In addition, the bond between human and animal may contribute to oxytocin release. It is clear that animals can teach us much about the importance and value of social and physical contact (Bergman, 2014).

In synthesizing work on Human Animal Interaction (HAI), Beetz et al. (2012) considered evidence from 69 original HAI studies, concluding that both HAI and oxytocin can have positive effects on human wellbeing and social interaction. Reported benefits included reductions in cortisol, heart rate, blood pressure, and self-reported stress and anxiety. Plummer (2014) also cites a study by Saphire-Bernstein et al. (2011), suggesting that oxytocin is involved in the utilisation of three significant psychological resources for coping with adversity, one of which is self-esteem, the other two being mastery and optimism.

2.3.2 Understanding the history of the horse, their senses and instincts, and their communication abilities

According to Deborah Goodwin (2007), the domestication of horses is relatively recent given that they have been evolving for 65 million years. Their adaptability to diverse habitats has enabled their survival, however, depending upon where they are 'kept' and how they are treated, domestication can constrain or restrict some of their natural behaviours including their "freedom to roam and their freedom to choose food, shelter, mates and social companions" (Goodwin, 2007, p.1). In the wild they may have depended on flight (escaping danger by running away), but in domestication, they are restricted and unable to flee. However, they have adapted over time, and as Charles Darwin (1859, 1871) suggests, being responsive to change is more important to survival than strength or intelligence. This may explain why domestic horses today still have highly refined and reactive senses that have evolved through their experiences and ever-changing roles and contexts.

Sadly, humans have tapped into horses' ancient instincts for selfish purposes, manipulating their natural fear of predators in order to dominate them into

submission, thereby mis-using their power, strength and bravery in hunting, war, industry, transport and leisure activities. Yet, as already indicated in this study, there is significant evidence that humans can gain horses' trust and respect through taking on the role of protector rather than predator, and working in partnership. This relationship, as Goodwin (2007) summarises it, centres on the way that we humans,

...expect horses to accept and interact with us, and to understand our instruction, even though we evolved as predators and our own behaviour has been shaped by a very different evolutionary history (p. 1).

Establishing a mutually respectful animal-human bond, as suggested by Kohanov (2016, p.178), can “create a powerful feedback loop of increasing curiosity, respect, comfort, trust and care”.

Horses (*equus caballus*) rely on their body language and senses to survive and communicate. By observing domesticated horses' body language, we can begin to understand what is going on in their minds, so work in this area is directly relevant to 'The Horse Course' and is a core element of the young people's experience and learning. Horses tune in to their herd members for signals on how to behave, when and where to rest, feed, drink or run. They are natural herd creatures, preferring the quiet safety of company with other horses. Whilst there are established bodies of research and practice that believe that the herd is hierarchical, more recent research suggests that this is not necessarily linear but complementary (Rees, 2017). For example, Kohanov's (2016) research suggests that there are actually five roles, which may be shared between the herd, with each member taking on more than one. Each role, when used judiciously, is equally important for the survival of the herd. *The Dominant's* role is to direct and protect the herd through the use of assertive energy. This is different from the role of *The Leader*, who sets the boundaries and whose confidence, curiosity and energy inspires other members. *The Nurturer/Companion* monitors and promotes the wellbeing of the herd, making them feel comfortable and connected, for example, by promoting the generation

of oxytocin through the encouragement of mutual grooming. *The Sentinel*, or guardian of the herd, watches over while others rest, scanning the environment and alerting others to potential danger. Finally, horses are essentially non-predatory animals, so the role played by '*The Predator*' in the herd includes protecting them from other predators and taking ultimate responsibility for tough decisions. In unusual situations, this may involve them fighting to protect the herd, but they are likely to stop if the aggressor backs off. These roles are revisited later in relation to some of the behaviours exhibited by the horses involved in the research.

When observed grazing quietly together, the slightest sound causes the herd to raise their heads in unison as they collectively decide whether any action is required. When they are relaxed, their mouths and nostrils are loose, their lower lip often hangs loose, they breathe evenly and gently. Whilst at rest, they may rest a back leg, lower their entire head and neck, or lie down. Their eyes are soft and gently blinking, their ears may be sideways, or turning softly, monitoring for sounds. When fully relaxed they may exhale with a loud sigh (*P'rrrrr*) and lick their lips. Horses groom one another when at rest. This is a mutual arrangement often demonstrated by two horses facing towards one another, grooming the neck, withers and back areas with their respective teeth in a demonstrative form of caring for one another related to the way that their sense of touch covers their whole body (Miller, 2013).

When something catches their attention, they appear alert and their use of their highly refined hearing is evident as their curiosity or interest is demonstrated by their ear movements, which in turn co-ordinate with where their eyes focus; their reactions to sounds are immediate (Wathan and McComb, 2014). Their body language makes it seem as if they grow in stature when attentive, as they extend their necks and heads, and sometimes hold their tails aloft. They may quiver with excitement, expressing their senses through their entire body. However, when anxious or unsure, although their neck, head and tail positions remain elevated, their overall posture changes. This is evident in the tense way in which they hold their whole bodies. Their eyes become wide, often showing

the whites. They may snort and/or turn to run when encountering something they perceive as threatening.

Horses' vision is panoramic, so they do not fully see a rider on their back, which necessitates another form of communication. When ridden, they therefore rely upon deep muscle pressure and sensory information from the human rider. The horse and rider have complementary sensory information as a unit, which in part is why 'The Horse Course' does offer a riding element. For example, although jumping is not part of the programme, in a situation where a horse and rider combination are approaching an unfamiliar obstacle, such as a jump, the rider is studying every detail of the jump, but the horse loses focus from 3m away. Equally, if that jump is brightly coloured, while the rider, having trichromatic vision, may worry about this, the horse, having dichromatic vision, sees it differently and may not react strongly. In contrast, should the jump involve water, while the rider sees shallow water, the horse sees light and due to poor depth perception, may be wary of entering it.

There are also physical responses from an annoyed horse; even when in a small space like a stable they will swish their tails and turn away to avoid the annoying person or irritant. Submission to, or acceptance of others is shown by the horse lowering the head and mouthing (licking the lips). Humans need to be able to recognise the difference between an excited horse and a stressed or frightened horse, as the situation could become dangerous if handled insensitively. In perceived danger, the ears are likely to flatten backwards, the teeth may be bared and the eyes wild. The body may swing around at speed, ready to kick and run. Because of their excellent memory, this aggressive behaviour may be based on fear from past experiences of inappropriate treatment from humans. As Bayley (2007) states,

People can make themselves look threatening to a horse by squaring their shoulders and drawing themselves up to their full height, puffing out their chest, looking the horse straight in the eye and holding their arms out to the sides (p. 16).

Bayley goes on to suggest that avoiding eye contact, rounding shoulders and “letting the life go out of your body” (ibid.) is perceived by the horse as less threatening. This is borne out in the practice of horse trainer, Monty Roberts (1999), also known as ‘The Horse Whisperer’. His technique of ‘Join up’, based on mimicking how horses in the wild interact with one another, has been adopted and adapted extensively on a world-wide scale. This idea is further acknowledged by Amy Victoria Smith et al. (2018), who presented horses with a free choice between two humans adopting different kinds of submissive and dominant body posture, concluding that the “horses showed a significant preference for approaching the submissive posture in both the first trial and across subsequent trials, and no individual subject showed an overall preference for dominant postures” (p. 307). In contrast, equine behaviourist, Dan Franklin, who agrees that body language is important, argues that 75% of communication with horses is achieved through intuition. He believes that every action starts with a thought and that “horses can tune in to the thought well before they read the body language that results in the action” (In Bayley, 2007, p. 62).

As with every living being, the horse’s unique ‘umwelt’ (Von Uexküll, 1909), or sensory perception of their world, will inevitably affect their behaviour and the nature of their interactions, both with their environment and with other living beings. This again highlights the importance of understanding and ‘speaking’ a language they can understand.

Finally, to expand further on how individual horses respond to individual humans, Goodwin (2007) proposes that everything in the universe has an energy field and that this should be balanced. As highly sensitive creatures, horses are immediately aware when humans are ‘out of balance’ and can reflect how a person presents themselves, an aspect of human-horse interaction central to ‘The Horse Course’.

2.3.3 Animal-Human Activities and Therapies

As indicated earlier, animal-human activities and therapies are becoming more well-known and popular. A wide and varied range of charities, programmes and projects are emerging across the world, taking various forms and encompassing a range of specialist and non-specialist physical, psychological, educational and social approaches that may employ animals as guides, learning mediums or therapeutic tools in the work of human development. However, the growing consideration of the ethics and politics of human-animal entanglements means that it is becoming more important to understand the relationships we share with animals. Such understandings allow us to make positive contributions to the debates that Suzanne Rice and A. G. Rud (2016) describe, in the subtitle to their edited collection, as 'blurring the species line'. In addition, the implications in such programmes, including 'The Horse Course', around power and human-centric perspectives need to be balanced against the redemptive qualities animals afford human society. Consequently, I now turn to some examples of how these approaches differ and what literature focuses on them in understanding how animals in general, and specifically horses, have potential as authentic and therapeutic partners.

2.3.3.1 Pet Therapy

This concept marked the beginning of researchers' and practitioners' interest in the psychological effects of human and animal interaction, and highlighted a critical shift towards regarding animals as partners in therapy rather than tools to be exploited (Zamir, 2007). This is considered to have begun in 1961, when psychologist Boris Levinson 'accidentally' discovered that his dog Jingles had a positive effect on one of his young patients, when he briefly left them alone. Levinson was inspired by this incident to do further research with Jingles and his other young patients, and found that the presence of a dog during therapy sessions had a positive effect. Levinson later coined the expression 'pet therapy' in reference to Jingles' beneficial effects on emotionally disturbed children in a therapeutic setting (Levinson, 1965). At the time of writing, Pet Therapy is a popular practice. The national charity 'Pets as Therapy' (PAT),

established in 1983, works to provide therapeutic pet visits to a variety of health and social care establishments in England.

2.3.3.2 Animal Assisted Therapy

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), as defined by the Delta Society (2006), is a goal-directed intervention with the involvement of a health professional who utilises the human-animal bond to promote physical, social, emotional and cognitive aspects of human functioning. Chandler (2012) states that the practitioner guides the animal-human interactions. It is considered a useful intervention for individuals who may find it difficult to engage in verbal therapies. Nimer and Lundahl (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of articles reporting on AAT, concluding that animals can help with healing. AAT was associated with moderate improvements in Autism-spectrum symptoms, medical difficulties, behavioural problems and emotional wellbeing. Some regard AAT as exploiting animals for human benefit, so due regard for animal welfare is important in such work, in ensuring that animals are not restricted or harmed in any way. Indeed, there is evidence that the human-animal bond can promote the wellbeing of both (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2021).

Many researchers have highlighted the positive influences of non-verbal communication, intuition and empathy in human-animal interactions, and relationships on emotional health and social development. In turn, these can positively impact aspects of physical health including heart rate, blood pressure, cortisol levels and stress (Serpell et al., 2017; Holttum, 2018). According to Hennie Viviers (2014), companion animals can provide socio-psychological support and esteem (p.3). This link with emotional wellbeing was also noted by Christina Risley-Curtiss (2010), who considered extensive evidence of “powerful relationships between humans and companion animals” more broadly, and concluded that the human-animal bond can “help individuals and families build resiliency” (p. 44). Also, as noted earlier, Gilligan (1999) noted that resilience, (and by definition, self-esteem) enhancing activities with animals have been shown to help young people who have been previously troubled or unsettled.

2.3.3.3 Equine Assisted Activity, Learning and Therapy

The realms of both learning and therapy with horses have been shown to offer benefits to participants of all ages and backgrounds, as argued by Kay Trotter et al. (2008). They are different yet overlap in a number of aspects. For example, Equine Assisted Counselling (EAC) offers individuals opportunities to work with horses to prevent or resolve emotional and behavioral problems (Beck, 2000; Ride High, n.d.; EAGALA, n.d.). According to Kersten and Thomas (2004), EAC can also help individuals develop skills in communication, problem solving and conflict resolution, whilst at the same time building their self-confidence.

The work in this area is typically linked to one of two organizations. The first is the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), founded in 1999 (Trotter et al. 2008). It monitors safety requirements, standards and, significantly, the practices of Equine Assisted Therapy. The second international organisation dominating the field is the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl., 2011), which insists that mental health professionals who are involved in EAT should also be certified by PATH Intl. as equine specialists. This combination means that this particular field is tightly controlled, as the cost involved, as well as the monitoring and training that must be completed, act as constraints on who can enter it.

All the same, EAT was one of the first models to incorporate horses into mental health treatment. There is no riding involved and all therapy takes place on the ground, facilitated by mental health professionals and equine specialists, who support clients to interact with horses as they wish. There is some academic work in the area, as indicated above, but overall, it tends to be practice focused. However, Tomasz Trzmiel et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis and a systematic review of the benefits to children with autistic spectrum disorders of Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT), which concluded that they were highly effective, especially with regard to improved social functioning. Also, EAAT has been proven to significantly reduce aggressive behaviors (Trzmiel et al., 2019).

In summary, it is argued that people undergoing EAT show increased self-esteem (Vidrine, Owen-Smith and Faulkner, 2002; Macdonald and Cappo, 2003; Kaiser et al., 2004). Further, Russel D. Marx and Edward J. Cumella (2003) argued that equine therapy typically resulted in trust, confidence and communication.

2.3.3.4 British Horse Society

Again, emphasising the practice-based elements in terms of learning and therapy with horses, the British Horse Society (BHS) state that whilst in Britain, the equine industry mainly provides opportunities for sport, leisure and relaxation, it has engaged with a growing range of health and therapeutic interventions (BHS, n.d.). Their analysis of reasons for the increase in membership of organisations like the BHS and Riding for the Disabled (RDA) also indicates that there is an increasing interest in horses and ponies for therapeutic purposes. The BHS *Changing Lives Through Horses* (2020) programme claims to,

Use horses as the inspiration for change, and to improve the lives of disengaged young people, regardless of their background, and has the specific aim of giving them the opportunity to develop skills that enable them to return to mainstream education and/or employment. They argue that their intent is to both 'celebrate the powerful impact that horses can have on society and the unique development of life skills which can help young people for the rest of their lives.

This focus on employment and education, however, positions the young person in terms of a future self that is an ideal citizen, rather than addressing them as individuals and holistically. The BHS programme, like many of the approaches outlined, is non-academic, although, as noted above, a limited amount of academic work has been done analysing their effectiveness (Chandler, 2012), usually in the form of either case studies or systematic reviews.

2.3.4 Horses and humans as attuned bodies and in kinaesthetic empathy

The review now moves away from specific forms of therapy and the studies about them to the ways in which humans and horses may become attuned to each other. This is an expanding area of research directly relevant to The Horse Course. The ways in which horses and humans tune in to non-verbal cues, the intentions of others, body language, expressions of emotion, and their mutual changes in oxytocin and cortisol levels, clearly demonstrate how two different beings can be in a state of 'attunement', sharing and matching their inner states or true selves (Winnicott, 1965, 2018). This non-verbal language has a unifying effect. It links to the concept of 'entrainment', or the ways in which the human body responds to, and synchronises with, external rhythms. For example, Evans and Franklin (2010) describe in beautiful and dynamic language a how horse and rider can achieve 'floating harmony' (p.176) (see Figure 6). They form a partnership or 'kinaesthetic unit' (p.194), acting "as one to produce acts neither would undertake on their own" and in which, "the drives, needs and desires of both partners matter" (p.173).



Figure 6. Horse and rider in 'floating harmony'.

It has been documented that horses almost mirror the human companion when both animal and human present elevated levels of cortisol, again suggesting that horses are attuned to body language, facial expressions and emotions (Scopa et al, 2019). This ability to interpret facial expressions and emotions also reflects anthropologist, Desmond Morris's comments that "no animal in the

world has a more expressive face than the human being” (1994, p.19), so implying that humans can be ‘read’ by other creatures.

Researching the concept of kinaesthetic empathy was a significant learning moment for me. It has roots in Dance Movement Therapy, which focuses on how “the dance therapist gets empathically involved in an intersubjective experience that is rooted in the body” (Fischman, 2009, p.1). Jaana Parviainen (2003) describes kinaesthetic empathy as seeming to have,

a partial capacity to make sense of others’ experiential movements and reciprocally our own body movements. It makes it possible to understand the non-verbal kinetic experiences through which we acquire knowledge of the other’s bodily movements on the basis of our own typography (p.151).

This is noted in related research on the body. For example, the story of the famous horse, ‘Clever Hans’, is ostensibly about how he and his owner ‘duped’ people into thinking he could perform mathematical additions, when what he was really doing was anticipating and interpreting human movements and responding by tapping his hoof. On the one hand, this is a prime example of how animals can influence human behaviour. However, in exploring this narrative, Vinciane Despret (2004, p.111) argues that it is also an example of how beings’ bodies can “*attune*, affect and transform each other”. Here, as in ‘The Horse Course’ body, emotions and communication interweave as “to have a body is to learn how to feel” (ibid).

Such work is further exemplified in an article inspired by an interest in philosophical post-humanism, in which Hatten et al. (2020) considered Hatten’s daughter Rosalind’s extraordinarily close relationship with her horse, Nigel. In doing so the article identifies “how the sensory aspects of the environment, atmosphere and entanglement of each create meaning together” and how “this sense of intra-action and co-being sits with her experiences in the equine world” (Hatton et al., 2020, p.125). They concluded that,

Intra-actions and partnerships with horses can help us to build relationships; develop social and emotionally; be aware of our senses with advanced observation and communication skills and create empathy and caring for another being (p. 133).

In addition, the voice of the young person is present in the article. As Rosalind reflects,

Having Nigel took me away from all the usual pressures of our age group. The partnership that we had enhanced my self-confidence in general. I talked to him about anything, which sometimes helped me make sense of my feelings as he wasn't judgemental (p.133).

2.3.5 The potential of horses as therapeutic partners

There is evidence of a high success rate in a number of equine-assisted or equine-facilitated approaches, and programmes that claim to develop horse-human relationships. Although, as discussed, they tend to have slightly different emphases. What seems to be central is an acceptance by both academics and practitioners of the particular value of relationship-building therapeutic experiences in relation to trust, communication, confidence, problem solving skills and healthier emotional relationships (Schultz et al., 2007), and that horses instinctively recognise authenticity (Burgon, 2011).

Aubrey H. Fine (2015) suggests that because the horse is a large animal, to interact with it, the human participant is required to find a non-verbal way to communicate to establish any sort of relationship. In effect, the human body uses an array of multi-sensory factors, with an emphasis on touch and physicality, to promote a feeling of confidence when confronted with a large, moving stimulus such as an equine. For example, when grooming, a human develops first-hand experience of the size difference and potential power of the horse. This mutual physical engagement also appears when leading a horse, as argued by Pamela N. Schultz et al. (2007, p. 267), given that the experience of

being beside a horse while guiding and controlling its movements can allow humans to move from feeling powerless to feeling powerful. As discussed by Cartwright (2013, p. 16), the measurement of Heart Rate Variability during human-equine interactions has highlighted the effect of human emotion on performance when training horses, and reinforced the benefits of a positive emotional state when interacting with animals.

The sheer presence of a horse demands respect, and the emotional and cognitive state of the individual responds through attempting to gain their trust and respect. In therapies where the horse is ridden, this includes developing the ability to initiate the movement of an animal so large that it could potentially have the capability to severely injure if it so wanted. Consequently, Edwards (2011) suggests that riding interactions can establish and develop communication, balance and trust, something explored in 'The Horse Course'. Ultimately, riding a horse creates a fundamental change in the positional relationship between the human and the horse. This is argued to significantly influence a human's perception of their relationship with the horse and arguably vice-versa.

Horses will sense if someone is anxious or inexperienced. There may be reasons to feel anxious, especially given that, as Schultz et al. (2007) state, the horse is "a large and powerful animal that commands respect and elicits fear" (p. 266). A horse will follow the lead of humans who are respectful and who make reasonable requests but be fearful of those who try merely to control him or her. Emotional incongruity (the act of suppressing emotion or pretending to feel something else) will never fool the horse but in an authentic interaction, the horse will allow the human to connect unconditionally. Whatever the human offers the horse, s/he will receive feedback from the horse's responses. As Chandler (2012, p. 5) argues, "The horse has no expectations, prejudices or motives". Similarly, Kohanov (2003) points out how horses acknowledge the release or removal of emotional incongruity, stating that,

A secure, well-cared-for animal will often relax the moment his owner simply acknowledges a hidden feeling – even if it's still there. When

the mask is removed, an animal that was agitated seconds before will sigh, lick his lips or show some other visible sign of release (p. 162).

These connections with horses may, as Rothe et al. (2005) suggest, encourage the growth of self-esteem, which “may be increased through a new-found ability to positively influence another being” (p. 380).

Daniel N. Stern (1977, 2002) draws attention to the primacy of movement and its fundamental function to our thinking and experiences, in discussing the ways in which parents and infants attune to one another through gesturing and ‘mirroring’ one another’s movements and emotional tenor. He richly describes the internal choreography that infants and parents embody during their interactions together. This internal choreography is one in which they anticipate each other’s movements. Through doing so, they enter what can be termed an inter-subjective field in which they sense one another’s emotional state. As this is repeated, the infant gains a stronger sense of ‘self’, seeing and hearing its own gestures, movements and vocalizations reflected back. This is considered a crucial stage in the infant’s emotional development, having been reflected back through his/her ‘mother’s eyes’. What this fundamental process informs us is that we come to know ourselves through encountering and re-encountering ‘others’ (Levinas 1961).

Paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott (1964) used the analogy of a parent’s face serving as a ‘mirror’ to help the child develop their sense of self. The horse can also act as a ‘mirror’, reflecting human energy, behaviours (verbal and non-verbal) and an awareness of their effects, back to the human and help the human to confront their behavior (EAGALA, n.d.; Irwin & Weber, 2001). This ability to attune to others is the fundamental building block of a therapeutic experience. To observe, evaluate and respond authentically and immediately to non-verbal attitudes and behaviours means that horses, as Chandler (2012) argues, are ideal therapy animals, as they thrive on social contact. They have hyper-sensitive instincts, which ensures that they have the capacity for the clear observation and communication that is vital to survival (Burgon, 2011).

Horses do not trust easily and developing a relationship with a horse can elicit feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, fear and frustration in the human involved. To manage the experience, and to gain the horse's trust, the human needs to acknowledge, accept and express their authentic emotional and cognitive responses (Carlsson, 2017). It is also important to note that just like humans, animals differ in temperament, experience and their levels of tolerance to human emotion (Fredrickson and Howie, 2000). This highlights the significant responsibility of the human facilitator when selecting potential equine partners. There is also some evidence that horses may even behave differently in adolescence, so the animal's age (or phase of development) may have an impact upon how they relate to humans and how they can support them. This further emphasizes that these are two-way relationships.

Additionally, in recent years there has emerged an evidence-based approach to understanding horse behaviour, which suggests a number of reasons why horses may also develop behavioural 'problems'. These include crib-biting, weaving and box-walking, for example, which exist in 7-9% of the population (McGreevy et al., 1995). These behaviours are associated with exposure to stressful events, including premature weaning (Nichol et al., 2005), poor husbandry or inappropriate human regimes that restrict or deny the horse's natural need for forage, social contact and locomotor activity (Bride and Hemmings, 2009). There are studies, for example, the Horse Course at HMP/YOI Portland (Meek, 2012), that indicate that humans with behavioural problems can relate easily to horses with similar issues, perhaps because of a feeling that these horses might be less likely to reject or threaten them.

Finally, Krawetz's (1992) study found that young people identified with emotional and behavioural difficulties as a result of traumatic experiences were able to develop relationships with horses more easily than they could with humans. Similarly, work with veteran soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress suggested that the non-discriminative relationship between horse and human can generate a sense of adventure and achievement alongside mutual respect (Ewing et al., 2007).

2.3.6 Psychodynamic perspectives

As Blakemore (2012) suggests, humans try to 'read' each other's mental and emotional states in order to try and work out what they are about to do or what they want, then modify their behaviour accordingly. Horses function entirely and successfully through non-verbal communication and have neither time nor tolerance for incongruence.

Kohanov (2003) alludes to the synchronicities of the human-equine world and suggests that the human nervous system involuntarily broadcasts feelings "at a frequency horses are especially good at tuning in to" (p. 184). Horses' ability to "mirror the feeling behind the façade" is a key principle of Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (Kohanov, 2003, p. 175). After many years of experience in equine psychotherapy, preceded by a career in developing leadership programmes, Kohanov (2003) reflected on her experiences with a horse named Rocky. Rocky had been badly mistreated by humans before being bought by the mother of one of her riding students. Working with Rocky made her realise that her extensive bank of transformative feelings and intuitions were "not special, not supernatural, and certainly not just my imagination". Rather, she argued, it was "that emotion itself was a resonant multidimensional force that connected all sentient beings" (p. 112).

A study conducted by Kosuke Nakamura et al. (2018) showed interaction between emotional congruency and familiarity. In other words, horses could distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar faces and voices. Whether this is innate or learned behaviour was left in question. Hallberg (2008) also provides evidence that horses can reflect and replicate human behaviour, and that they are in fact as naturally curious about humans as they are about other horses. Further, Linda Tellington- Jones (2010) describes how sensorimotor psychotherapy techniques can teach relaxation and self-soothing skills to the client and create 'connection' between client and horse.

2.3.7 Outdoor Activity and wellbeing

Being outdoors in the natural environment, often described as 'green therapy', has been shown to be a positive influence on holistic human development and improve wellbeing (Foran, 2005; McLeod, 2013). Outdoor activity has been

seen as important in western educational theory since the 18th century (Williams-Sieghfredsen, 2012). The ideas of French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Swiss educational reformer, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) continue to influence our understanding of the importance of children having a connection to nature. Indeed, various pioneers in this area, including Friedrich Froebel who invented the kindergarten, have advocated access to the open air (Cree and McCree, 2012). These ideas have also influenced contemporary educational practice in the development of Forest Schools, which according to Sara Knight (2013) offer children opportunities to develop “confidence and self-esteem” (p.16) and “an enhanced sense of agency, resourcefulness and responsibility” (p. 53). First established in Scandanavia in the 1980s, but now popular across the world, these inspirational outdoor learning spaces, where children engage with nature and learn through using natural resources and materials, could themselves be seen as ‘pocket universes’. Liz O’Brien’s (2007) early research into this type of outdoor activity suggests related improvements in social, cognitive and physical skills, while Arthur Nelsen’s (2017) report links access to trees and green spaces to a reduced likelihood of depression and obesity. In addition, whilst educational theory, especially that aimed at children is relevant here, so too is work that argues that people of all ages benefit from green spaces and the outdoors. For example, the World Health Organisation (2016) emphasises the value of urban green spaces in alleviating stress and promoting social cohesion.

Other research by Peter James et al. (2016, p.1344) builds on the ‘biophilia hypothesis’, which states that natural environments may reduce stress and increase “physical activity and social engagement” (ibid). Moreover, like the hormone oxytocin discussed earlier, dopamine, serotonin and endorphins, all of which are reported to improve feelings of wellbeing and happiness, are all enhanced by physical activity in the outdoor environment (Kalter, 2020). Dopamine and serotonin are neurotransmitters that enable the brain to communicate with other parts of the body via the nervous system. Dopamine triggers feelings of pleasure and positively influences motivation, while serotonin inhibits pain and is increased naturally through light, sunshine and

exercise. Depression is commonly treated by drugs which increase the level of serotonin, known as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors. Endorphins are molecules produced by the brain's pituitary and hypothalamus glands, which are released during enjoyable activities including physical exercise. They remain in the bloodstream after exercise, continuing to trigger positive feelings.

These diverse studies suggest that there are additional benefits to interaction with horses, given the location of the activity. It can be argued that it enables young people to relate to each other in nature and offers them "fresh air, exercise and challenge – all included in the key factors that influence healthy early brain development and academic achievement" (Jensen 2005, p. 35).

In addition, the unpredictability of the outdoor environment requires them to be attentive and responsive to unpredictable situations (Trotter, 2012). The mission of the Calvert Trust (2020) reflects a similar vision, challenging disability through outdoor adventure and stating, "it's what you can do that counts".

The benefits of association with, and positive interactions between young people, the outdoor environment, physical activity and horses are multi-layered: they include "care translation, socialisation and conversation, self-esteem promotion, companionship and affection stimulation" (Rothe et al., 2005, p. 373). It is conceivable that these benefits can be integrated into the young person's sense of self and transferred to other arenas of their lives. The ability to transfer learned skills from one area to another attributes even greater salience to the newly acquired skills and further enhances the individual's quality of resilience and, by association, self-esteem.

2.3.8 Person-centred and relational approaches to practice with young people and horses

In the design and development of 'The Horse Course', it became evident that there were many parallels to be drawn between the horse-human relationship and the person-centred client-therapist relationship (Yorke, 2013). This really should not have been a surprise to me as I have always been an advocate of child centred (humanistic) approaches in my practice. The data, as we will see

in the Findings and Discussion, demonstrates that the young participants did have therapeutic experiences as they interacted with horses.

Given this recognition, the following section reviews relevant literature on the core conditions for person-centred and relational approaches to practice with young people and horses, so completing the literature context for the study. There are clear commonalities between the approaches, but as far as possible they will be discussed separately.

2.3.8.1 Person-centred approaches

Person-centred practitioners who work with children and young people require a sound knowledge and understanding of how children and young people learn, develop and think. They should have genuine respect for children and young people, who in turn need to have confidence that they will be listened to and understood.

The person-centred approach builds on the ideas that underpin Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2013, see Figure 7). Maslow, one of the founders of humanistic psychology, originally believed that humans have five needs, which are genetically programmed into them for the purposes of evolutionary survival. He considered the four more fundamental needs lower in the (approximated) hierarchy, and self-actualisation as different, in that it can only be achieved once the previous four needs have been met.

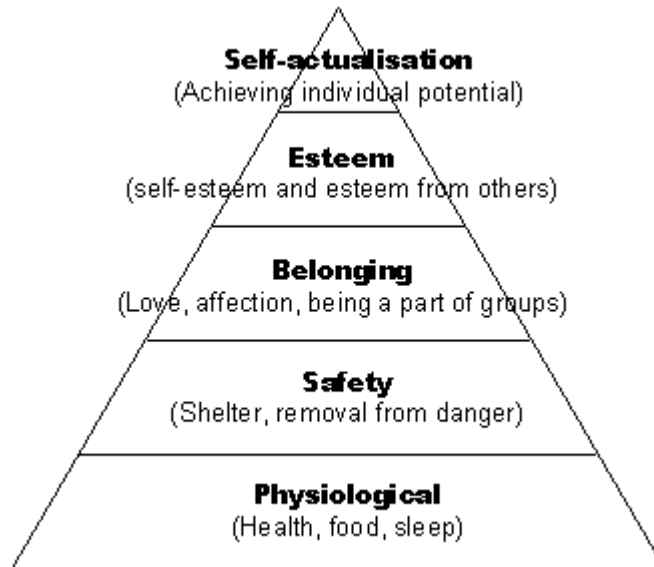


Figure 7. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - version 1 (McLeod, 2013).

Later, Maslow expanded this model to include cognitive and aesthetic needs (see Figure 8).

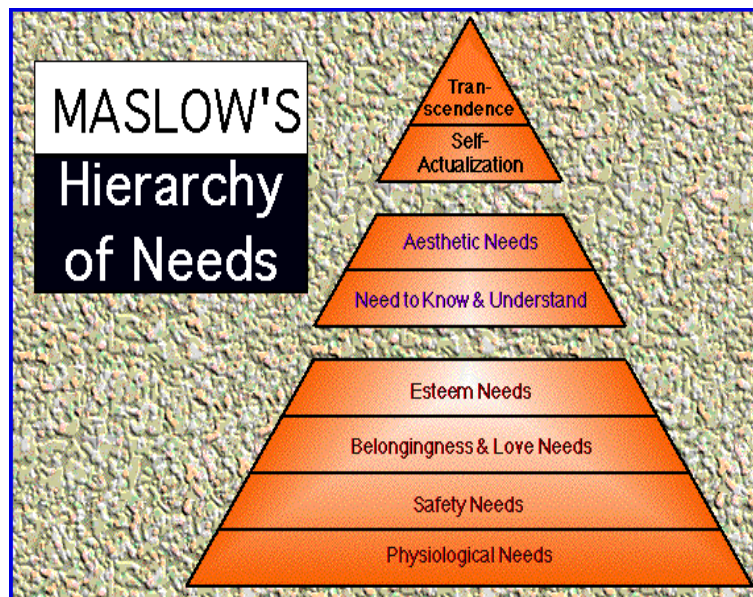


Figure 8. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - version 2

Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs and humanistic counselling approaches have notable similarities. This is clear when mapping the model onto Carl Rogers' (1951, 1957, 1961) person-centred approach, a model that comprises three conditions. These are, as summarised by John McLeod (2013, p.27),

1. **Empathy** requires the counsellor to demonstrate a sensitive understanding of the client's situation, so that the client's experience of being understood will facilitate them to be more self-accepting.
2. **Unconditional Positive Regard** requires the counsellor to show respect and acceptance for the client, irrespective of the issues they are facing.
3. **Congruence** requires the counsellor's outward behaviours to match their inner feelings and to 'mirror' the client's feelings.

Reactions to Rogers' (1957) classic article, *The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Personality Change*, indicate that it had a significant impact on the thinking behind, and further development of, client-centred approaches. Even quite recently, some have identified potential limitations of Rogers' work, or made additional suggestions (Moore et al., 2017). It is therefore evident that this proposed "theory of psychotherapy, of personality, and of interpersonal relationships" (Rogers, 1957, p.1) has left a useful legacy for humanistic theorists and practitioners. Its significance means that it appears again in the Findings and Discussion and Conclusion chapters. The need to like and respect oneself (positive self-regard) too often relies upon conditional positive regard from others (conditional positive self-regard). The danger here is that people become so reliant on the approval of others that there is incongruence between their self-concept and their real self. In the horse's world, there is no such dichotomy.

McLeod (2013) draws comparisons between person-centred approaches to therapy and Gestalt therapy, another humanistic approach, which can facilitate exploration and understanding of how a client makes sense of their immediate experiences (Trotter, 2012). Fall, Holden and Marquis (2004) suggest that Gestalt therapy involving a horse can increase the client's awareness of self and of their interactions with the horse, with people, and with their natural environment. Likewise, Adlerian therapy with horses can facilitate a client to shift from feeling inferiority to feeling physical, psychological, intellectual or social significance (McLeod, 2013).

2.3.8.2 Relational approaches

Relationship-centred or relational practice has been a central focus of the caring professions as we know them today. It is about, as Konrad (2013) states, “building thoughtful and mutually respectful relationships with others” (p. 7) and involves empowering and inclusive ways of working. Jean Baker-Miller’s (1976) *Relational Cultural Theory*, places, “authentic and mutual connection” at the “core of therapeutic healing” and argues that “We need to affirm the value of empowering and therapeutic relationships with children and families” (Konrad, 2013, p. 1).

The core principles of the relational perspective are also similar to those of the person-centred approach. Both believe that children are resilient and can grow and change if given the right support and opportunities. Like Bronfenbrenner (1979), both underscore the inter-relatedness of children, their relationships with others in the context of their social environments and their caregivers, and of human beings and their social environments.

2.3.9 Bringing it all together

As noted, there is little academic work in this area as yet that lies in the darker blue central section of Figure 2, where the various disciplines and approaches intersect. This is reflected in how this chapter draws together what might seem a disparate range of material in analysing and understanding self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing in adolescence, as well as how horses are currently incorporated in thinking about mental health and wellbeing in a number of sectors. However, in juxtaposing this material, I also build a foundation for part of my argument in the final chapters about how an understanding of self-esteem in adolescence and knowing how to work with horses can lead to a new approach to person-centred practice that includes non-human co-therapists.

Consequently, a final aspect that helps to set the context for this study is about the exploration of the ‘in the moment’ experiences of young people interacting with horses, and the impact this has on their self-esteem and wellbeing.

Mindfulness has become widely used in education, health and therapeutic practices, including with horses (Burgon, 2011, Burgon et al., 2018). It is

recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2015) as a way to prevent depression.

For example, one of the mindfulness activities on 'The Horse Course' involved young people relaxing with their horse partners, breathing in synchrony and talking about how they were feeling prior to and after riding. The horses typically tuned in to their emotional state and demonstrated through their body language that they were listening. This is interesting in relation to neuroscientific research that suggests, "with the practice of mindfulness, the cortex of the brain literally grows, with an increase in grey matter and more gyrification" (Spencer 2012, p.4). It implies that working together in the moment has a beneficial effect upon the human participant.

These positive ideas about humans fulfilling their potential, self-actualising and transcending sit easily alongside concepts of 'feeling comfortable in one's own skin' and 'being at one with nature', and with Jan Styman and Helen Moira Sutherland's (2012) description of wellbeing as "a state of being" (p.36). This also reminded me of an old Danish proverb, which suggests that if you follow the horse at his pace, then your soul has time to keep up. This culturally specific proverb is reflected in the way that many Danish schools allow time for young people just to 'be'. Similarly, the psychosocial perspective recognises that psychological issues and subjective experiences cannot be seen as separate from social and cultural issues, as will be explored further in the Findings and Discussion chapter. In this chapter, I have identified literature relevant to this study and indicated the multi-disciplinary nature of the research in this area.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The chapter will include a description of the research, explaining why I adopted certain methodologies and approaches and how the selected methods allowed me to collect young people's accounts of their experiences and to evaluate them systematically. I will also consider the ethical issues encountered and discuss the limitations of the study.

Donald H. McBurney and Theresa L. White (2009) suggest that the impetus to conduct a research study can stem from a practical concern of the researcher. The impetus for this work initially came from a concern about how easily young people can be labelled, as noted earlier. This was complemented by my experiences of horses as sentient and therapeutic beings. The underpinning philosophical drive has always been to champion the value of authentic interactions and relationships (human-human or horse-human), and to highlight their influence on young people's self-esteem, whilst reflecting the view, shared by Shaw et al. (2011), that young people are the experts in their own lives and have unique perspectives and insight when it comes to their own reality.

This study was designed to understand what can, and does, happen when a young person with low self-esteem is paired up with a trustworthy horse in a person-centred environment. My aims (listed in Chapter 1) were to develop an understanding of the impact of 'The Horse Course' experience on young people, to identify the 'ingredients' of successful and authentic interactions between young people and horses, and to discover what can be learned from horses about communication. I also wanted to know how the findings from the study could contribute towards a theoretical framework and/or practical guidance on 'The Horse Course' approach and its potential influence on the development of young people's wellbeing. However, it became clear as the study progressed that much more was involved. In addition, I realised that a list of useful ingredients intended to support others in replicating the course could not really be neat and universal. The horses, the young people, the adult team and the environment were all part of a specific dynamic. Understanding and

analysing the dynamic became a route to understanding not only impact, but how and if the course could be repeated elsewhere.

3.2 A philosophical journey from positivism to interpretivism and ethnography: how I got there

There were several phases in the development and exploration of methodology regarding this research. In the early stages, my thinking around the methodological approach I was taking shifted and changed, altering my philosophical journey. I share the journey here as part of my original contribution to knowledge, and also because I feel that others may learn from reading about the process I went through. Based on previous experiences of working with young people, I initially saw 'The Horse Course' as an activity that had the potential to improve their self-esteem and I wanted to 'prove' this. So, despite being far more inclined towards qualitative approaches, I began the first phase of the research with a positivist outlook. This meant, for instance, that I employed the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), believing that my research would have more impact if I could provide quantitative data. This concern about proof can also be seen in some of the research discussed in the literature review, where writers have tried to think through what they have observed, whilst being unsure of how much they may be projecting if they are familiar with horses (Hatton et al., 2020). To me, Rosenberg (1965) seemed to be offering a potential way to understand what the interactions might mean, and whether they did actually relate to self-esteem. However, there were limitations in the RSES regarding detail and accessibility, as discussed later in this chapter and in the Findings and Discussion, which meant that I additionally turned to a phenomenological approach to add depth and nuance to the measurement and put the focus on the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of interacting with the horses.

I began to realise the complex nature of what was happening in terms of my thinking about methodology, as well as the complexity of the phenomenon I was investigating, as I moved from measuring cause and effect to exploring the lived

experiences of the young people as they interacted with horses, and to seeing what could happen if the 'conditions' (Figure 1) were right. As I engaged more in reflexivity, it became clear that it was going to be very difficult to find a straightforward causal relationship between 'The Horse Course' and a measurable numeric outcome. I realised that I had taken up a stronger interpretivist stance, which put the emphasis on the young people's experiences and that I felt more comfortable with such an approach.

I had expected the study to be complicated given that it involved two species and especially because the representatives of one species (the humans) were groups of individuals who had experienced adversity during their childhood. The other species (horses), although also sentient, but behaved and communicated in extremely different ways. In addition, the physical size differences and the power dynamics between the species added further complexity. I came to understand, therefore, that this was multi-dimensional research in which the relationships between horses and humans were, or became, to an extent symbiotic. As this understanding developed, I recognised that methodologically I was now in the realm of interpretative phenomenology. According to Martyn Denscombe (2014), this style of research emphasises subjectivity, description, interpretation and agency, and considers people's attitudes and beliefs. I felt that I was trying to make sense of how the young people had made sense of their experiences with horses. This felt an even more comfortable position, appropriate space and approach, yet I continued to struggle with terminology as I tried to make links to and between interpretivism, intersubjectivity, constructivism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and double hermeneutics (Smith and Osborn, 2003), all of which focus on how humans make meaning of their worlds. Eventually this returned me to the seminal work of Norman Denzin who effectively described two types of interpreters, 'the people who have experienced what is being described and, so called informed experts, often ethnographers, sociologists and anthropologists' (1989, p. 109). I felt closer to achieving a fuller understanding at this point, given Denzin's writing.

A further shift in understanding occurred when I presented a paper about aspects of this research at a Social Work conference. While it was well received, I realised afterwards that I had felt relief that no-one had questioned my methodology too deeply. This realisation, combined with my growing awareness of my positionality in relation to the research, was when I first recognised that this study was also ethnographic, and I made further progress by incorporating some of the approaches I was increasingly taking. As with some of the authors mentioned in the literature review, my experience of horses made me recognise that I too was part of the research, both in relation to my personal history and my positionality as researcher and participant (volunteer). This seemed more in line with Smith et al. (2009) who describe Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as being committed to examining a particular case in order to find out how a person experiences something and how they make sense of what is happening. In addition, Smith and Nizza (2021) suggest getting as close as possible to the experience of participants in order to examine the detail. This felt very familiar, and I realised that I also wanted to observe how much my own experiences might be reflected in the young people's experiences as they began to interact with horses. This led to further reflection and questions about whether the outcomes were really situated 'in' the young people, or in the safe space they were developing with the horses. I also wondered whether they would have the language and confidence to express this. Therefore, including observations and parallel reflections about my insider / outsider role and my own past experiences became key, confirming that the methodological approach was both interpretivist and ethnographic.

I now felt secure with interpretivism as my research was focused on the young people's subjective experiences (Schwartz-Shea et al, 2020), and I gratefully recognised what Coffey (1999) would call my 'ethnographic self'. I also realised that I could use ethnographic methods to interpret how the young people made meaning of their experiences with horses.

Coffey's (1999) understanding of the researching self was very relevant, especially the argument that as researchers we are,

...thoroughly implicated in the way we collect, understand and analyse [...] data such that the researching self is often presented as a kind of medium through which fieldwork is conducted (p. 122).

This felt especially pertinent to my research. It was time to revisit and re-establish my position in relation to my role as researcher. In doing so, rather than being a medium (as Coffey commented), I turned to Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2007, p. 17) and the idea of the researcher as a 'research instrument par excellence'. Extending this concept, I felt attention was needed regarding the way in which my body became a valuable instrument in the research in terms of sensory experiences regarding data, given the interactive outdoor settings, the horses, and the physicality of 'The Horse Course'. This also emerged in the findings and discussion in relation to the young peoples' experiences. This notion is also related to the concept of 'umwelts' (Von Uexküll, 1992), which explains how organisms experience their own environments in unique ways based upon their specific bodily senses. Consequently, aspects of the research engage with the umwelts of the horse, of more-than-human ways of knowing and communicating (Carlyle and Graham, 2019), in which researcher and participant bodies are caught up together in mutual threads of entanglement (Ellingson, 2017). This meant that embodiment, and becoming deeply immersed alongside the young people and horses, enabled a co-production of 'situated knowledge', as purported by Donna Haraway (2008) and Karen Barad (2007).

3.3 Positionality and reflexivity

My positionality (Reay, 2006), or my 'ethnographic self' (Coffey, 1999) and the issue of possible bias in relation to my roles was something I scrutinised and reflected on throughout the research. True reflexivity requires a level of personal awareness not dissimilar to Roger's (1957) person-centred approach. As a researcher, I was both an insider (as a volunteer) and an outsider (as an academic). In this environment, my established position as an experienced volunteer added credibility, while my position as a researcher established the academic status of the research. My experiences of interacting with horses over

many years was a further consideration. My relationship with the data changed as I switched between volunteer, embodied participant, academic and horseperson. I tried to use this to good critical effect. The research assistant who supported the data gathering and transcription was in an identical position and, as a doctoral-qualified, retired social work practitioner and children's therapist, was well able to recognise this practice. Both of us hold basic level BHS qualifications in horse care, riding and road safety. Our close involvement as insiders and practitioner-researchers drew upon our professional training and experience of working with young people and horses, and running similar groups. Further, Clifford Geertz's (2000) concept of 'deep hanging out', in this context, spending time immersed in 'The Horse Course' experience alongside the young participants, appealed to me as an authentic way to position myself as a researcher.

The American philosopher, Donald Alan Schön (1983) evocatively described a landscape consisting of high ground (or an ivory tower) overlooking a swamp. In the ivory tower, problems can be solved through research-based theory and technique, but in "the swampy lowlands, where situations are confusing messes incapable of technical solution and usually involve the problems of greatest human concern" (p.42), it is critical reflection on practice that is required. Schön believed that evidence gained in this way is as respectable as other forms of evidence. He separated critical reflection into reflection in action (during practice) and reflection on action (retrospective reflection). In taking this understanding of reflection on board, my reflexivity as both volunteer and researcher involved shaping and being shaped by the research experience.

According to Carol Costley et al., (2013), insider researchers have an advanced level of knowledge through their previous work experience and expertise, which gives them the right to be "acknowledged as practitioner[s] of good standing" (p. 6). On the other hand, and because of the subjective nature of researching one's own practice, constant attention needs to be given to issues of bias and validity.

I knew that I had a vested interest in 'The Horse Course' approach but was equally aware that I needed to be critical and open to criticism, to counteract this. This had been particularly important in the construction of the research tools and in the initial evaluation of the data. In relation to validity, it was important to recognise how my own views and opinions may have affected my generation of meaning as well as how the study was directed, and the data interpreted. I wanted to be non-judgemental, to interpret the data with respect and to be self-consciously reflective and reflexive in relation to my own beliefs. An awareness of my 'situatedness' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) or 'social situatedness' (Vygotsky, 1962) was necessary in order to understand the interplay between myself as the researcher (or agent), the situation (or particular set of circumstances and my position within it) and the context (or place, time and background) (Costley et al., 2010). Cognisance was also taken of the ways in which my values, and personal and professional heritage, background, gender, history, culture and socio-economic status could threaten objectivity (Khatwani and Panhwar, 2020) and affect interpretations of the data.

I had to consider my positionality as a white British female, born into a working-class culture on the cusp of the 1960s, who had personally experienced the mainstream education system as 'unfair' – as a pupil (long ago), as a parent of two (grown up) children, as a professional practitioner (for almost three decades), as a school governor (three times over), and more recently as a grandparent. I have come to recognise that much of my own self-doubt has its roots in my own (negative) experiences of educational inequality.

Furthermore, whilst I clearly acknowledge my personal positive views on the benefits to humans of interaction with horses, I am embedded in the world of horses and I have first-hand experience of the sense of wellbeing that having authentic relationships with horses can bring. In one sense, 'The Horse Course' and related research was testing this experience out with young people, who I could see were struggling with more extreme versions of what I had experienced, but who had similar self-doubt, lack of confidence and low self-esteem. It may be, that along with the horses, the young people recognised my authenticity given my life experiences and so trusted the horses because I did.

Coffey suggests that “fieldwork always starts from where we are” (Coffey, p. 158) and highlights how important it is to “critically [...] engage with the range of possibilities of position, place and identity” (Coffey, 1999, p. 36). For Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 416), “the problem arises through recognition that as social researchers we are integral to the social world we study”. Walker (2016, p.256) reflects that the insider researcher is part of the research, and their own sense of self will influence the entire process, and that, “insider-ness may be put to good research use if a professional and reflexive approach is adopted”.

Another aspect of my positionality as researcher is informed by my professional practice background in systemic family support for children, young people and parents. It was this that originally kindled my interest in relational practice and how the development of authentic relationships can support and empower all round human growth, learning and development. This means that my core interest as an academic was in theories of child and adolescent development, particularly in relation to attachment, resilience and self-esteem, and came to involve what have more recently become identified as psychosocial interventions or therapies (Target et al., 2005).

Throughout these two careers I have become increasingly aware of the salience of power dynamics between adults and children, and professionals and parents, which is significant here. I observed how professional and personal beliefs, values and attitudes influence how practitioners from different disciplines assess and work with people of all ages, and how these factors affect the nature of their working relationships.

From both professional spaces, I have learned that a well-founded knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development is an essential prerequisite to good practice. The most effective practitioners are those who work from an evidence base in order to engage with children and young people and to understand their behaviour. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that relevant initial professional training programmes, for example in teaching, nursing and social work, have not always adequately fulfilled their responsibilities in this area (Laming, 2003; DfE, 2018). This too is significant in

relation to this research, as it demonstrates both the context from which 'The Horse Course' emerged and my own positionality.

3.4 A reflection on positionality in relation to communication and physical and emotional interaction with horses.

What also impacted upon my positionality were my attempts to understand the communication and relationship between human and horse in a personal sense through my long-term experience as a horseperson. This remains a point of reflection and relevant to my positionality as an academic. As I continue to try to understand what happens when horses and people meet, I come back again and again to my relationship with Finn, the horse that came to me from a difficult start in life. Finn was genuinely scared of many (human) everyday encounters and objects and, when in fear, he would turn and flee (with or without rider), and it was both difficult and dangerous to ask him to stop. Many falls later in our developing relationship, we learned to trust one another's judgement. Part of this involved riding around the local area unaccompanied, so he had to trust me; I needed to be reliable, calm and reassuring in traffic for example. I talked and even sang to him, which helped me relax so that I could communicate calmness through my body.

In our early days, my verbal communication was incongruent with my internal uncertainty, my words would only work if they aligned with my internal state. I worked hard on this, using ideas from psychotherapeutic interventions (Kohanov, 2003). I would tell him 'it's ok to go' and in his own language, he would reply 'it's not'. In turn, I would believe him and this led to many misunderstandings. But after a long period of 'getting to know one another', we began show jumping training, something we enjoyed together, in what could be considered a personal experience of kinaesthetic empathy. This is best illustrated using a narrative: One day, as we headed towards a jump, I suddenly began to wonder whether this was a wise idea. In the split second it took to arrive at said jump, I realised that the dynamic had changed as Finn was

somehow communicating to me that, “it’s ok, we’ve got this” (Figure 9). Perhaps in that moment we discovered our affinity. We became one – doing something together, enacting kinaesthetic empathy, each feeling what the other felt.



Figure 9. Approaching and jumping: "It's OK, we've got this".

Further, considering the evidence (Miller, 2013; Kohanov, 2016; Goodwin, 2007) on horse behaviour and how they see the world so very differently from humans, I remain filled with awe whenever a horse has indicated that they want to connect with me ‘in the moment’ in nature. This is another aspect of my positionality different from that of the challenges and communication outlined above. The following account focuses on two specific events that exemplify such experiences.

Event 1. One day, as Henry (horse) and I walked as one through the local woods, I realised that we were connected with one another and with nature - both animal and environment. At this moment, I came to understand the concept of ‘biophilia’ (Fromm, 1973), as we were living it. In terms of the sense and emotions, firstly, I was aware of the **sights** of countryside life - greens and browns and blues - even though we were only a mile or two from the nearest village. We saw deer who were unafraid of Henry and barely noticed the human

he was carrying. Depending on the season, we may encounter more creatures including pheasants, moor hens, chickens, sheep, cows, rabbits and squirrels, all of whom go about their own business, observing yet ignoring us. Secondly, the **smell** of the horse is unique, familiar and warm, and the smell of the woods invigorating. Thirdly, there was the rhythmic and comforting **sound and sensation** of the horse's regular footfall. The birds sang, we heard flowing water as we passed the stream, and in the distance, the sounds of farm, air and land traffic. In addition, Henry makes occasional gentle snorts in relation to both familiar and unfamiliar sights. I respond with reassuring vocal sounds. Finally, the connections between us were tactile and emotionally, we **felt** warmth and mutual comfort, **connection and affinity** - we are one.

Event 2. On another day, as we travelled down a country road together, a herd of young calves in the field noticed us and got very excited, eventually charging towards the fence. If this had been early days in our relationship, I would have struggled to control my fear, but we have achieved an understanding now and look out for each other. I relied on this bond we have developed as I know we will soon be in full flight. No point in fighting it. In terms of senses and emotions, I **felt** his back grow and his head change position, I **saw** his ears react, I **heard** his emphatic snort. This is dangerous, but I was ready. I verbally reassured him and relaxed – as best I could. I positioned myself becoming as light and balanced as possible. Sure enough, we were soon hurtling down the road. Against my instinct to panic and my fear of falling (again) onto hard tarmac at high speed, I forced my body to relax and go with the flow, keeping my hands and seat light, sending verbal and non-verbal messages of **calm**. We began to slow, we **breathed**, we were okay. We had **connection, affinity** - we are one.

Whilst described as part of my positionality, these experiences also relate to a different theoretical area; these riding events could be read as a post-humanistic perspective, one which offers an alternative to the traditional anthropocentric lens, which prioritises human experience (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010). In philosophical post-humanism, all things (human and animal) are viewed as important. Indeed, Gala Argant (in Stepanhof and Vigne, 2019) highlights a more relational perspective, arguing,

Over the past several decades, the anthropocentric lens through which domestication has been seen as entirely human-directed has shifted to a more ecocentric view (p.145).

Additionally, I recognise that my world at work is quite concrete, yet my wider world involves a strong spiritual element, an acknowledgement that I am a tiny part of something much greater. This is a perspective expressed by psychiatrist Maya Spencer, who states,

Spirituality involves the recognition of a feeling or sense of belief that there is something greater than myself, something more to being human than sensory experience, and that the greater whole of which we are part, is cosmic or divine in nature (Spencer, 2012, p.1).

In establishing my positionality, and throughout the research, I have taken care to be open and honest about my personal assumptions, beliefs and values, as well as those embedded in my professional heritage. However, to omit the more lyrical and emotional aspects of my positionality would be to misrepresent myself and my engagement with the horse world in general, and some specific horses in particular. All these aspects of self have contributed to 'The Horse Course' and to this research that has emerged from it. Acknowledging and understanding my past, and what interacting with horses has contributed to it, is important. This is counterbalanced by my professional and academic identities, so as part of this process, I have worked hard to ensure that my approach to the whole research project has demonstrated a commitment to considering the breadth of professional perspectives and scholarly debates around the validity, reliability and focus of my work.

3.5 Research paradigm

The interpretative paradigm, or set of beliefs, influenced my understanding of the topic and informed the methodology for this research. In this paradigm, knowledge is partial, generated and 'situational' (Haraway, 1988). Having

outlined how my initial thinking changed and evolved regarding methodology and paradigm (See 3.2), I now explore how using an ethnographic paradigm enabled me to gather and examine data about the ways that participants made sense of their experiences and the impact of these experiences on their self-esteem/wellbeing. It provided a 'partial ethnographic account' or 'thick description' in which "the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals [young people] are heard" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). Working within an ethnographic paradigm allowed me to interact with and observe the study's participants and to discover patterns in human-horse interactions. Using this qualitative approach, data was gathered from observations, interviews, focus groups, field notes and photographs, the latter of which were then used in photo elicitation with the young people, to produce detailed accounts of phenomena.

Ethnography complements humanistic, relational and psychosocial approaches, all of which have influenced my professional practice. Key to this is Rogers' (1951) suggestion that an approach in which clients (or research participants) can gain valid knowledge and understanding through experience is preferable to abstract theorising. In addition, relational approaches emphasise the prominence of relationships with others in the change process (Borden, 2000). Further, psychosocial approaches recognise how a human's psychological state connects to their social experiences and life events, which in turn affect their psychological state (Department for Education, 2019). Interventions with horses sit comfortably here too. While agencies and professionals tend to define behaviours according to their responsibilities, horses are well-established psychosocial beings whose internal and external worlds are inseparable. Their tendency is to 'read' and respond to the internal state of the person so each encounter may be negotiated differently. This is something which is noted in the literature review but also becomes relevant later in the thesis.

In addition, interpretivism and ethnography allowed me to address a key challenge, that of positionality, both my own and that of the young people. Due to my own history and positionality, especially my interactions with horses, I felt that I had experienced what the young people were experiencing and wanted to

see if their experiences echoed mine. I wanted to make sense of how they made sense of it, whilst striving to remain mindful of potential bias. The use of both interpretivism and ethnography enabled me to use a range of methods to interpret meanings in this multi-layered and detailed story of entanglements between horses and young people.

3.6 Research Design

I will now elaborate on how I designed and conducted the ethnographic research study. The methodology for the study was both qualitative and quantitative. It was selected and considered in light of the research concepts, and aimed to address political, philosophical, personal, professional and practical considerations (Robson, 2011). The approach was broadly ethnographic, whilst utilising some case study techniques, supporting the idea of building up knowledge and understanding and giving participants opportunities to share their experiences and perspectives. This is also consistent with the work of Jean Hartley (2004), who suggests that case study techniques enable research to focus on more than one specific phenomenon and are suitable for understanding how the organisational context impacts in social processes. Robert K. Yin (1994) described four functions of a case study approach, namely:

- That it can explain complex causal links in real life interventions;
- it can describe the real-life situation in which an intervention has happened;
- it describes the intervention;
- it allows for exploration of outcomes when none have been established.

This last point is particularly significant because there were no preconceptions about how the benefits might be expressed. It was only through the analysis that they began to emerge.

Yin (2012, p. 9) also suggests that case studies that start “with some initial theoretical propositions or theory will be easier to implement” and that multiple-case designs increase the chances of producing credible results. In this case, the initial theoretical propositions for both (identical) studies relate to how authentic interactions and relationships (human-human and horse-human) can influence young people’s self-esteem.

Inspired by my appreciation for evidence-based practice, I decided to employ a Single Case Method (Morgan and Morgan, 2009; Morley, 2018), to facilitate the collation and analysis of all elements of the qualitative and quantitative data. I constructed a bespoke template modelled on a reporting guideline that enabled me to report on the details of each individual case in a consistent manner. Whilst this research does not detail a clinical intervention, the adoption of a reporting guideline typically used by health researchers seemed practical, as they are employed in order that the intervention can be “understood by a reader, replicated by a researcher, used to make clinical decisions and included in a systematic review” (EQUATOR Network, n.d.).

Reflecting upon the problems involved in linking mixed methods to a single epistemological and/or ontological position, Gert Biesta (2017) suggests that the researcher should identify the dominant approach in their study. In this research, my aim was to use qualitative data to establish an understanding of the phenomena, and quantitative data to strengthen my interpretation.

The overall design took cognisance of the ways in which biases, values and personal background, such as gender, history, culture and socioeconomic status, could affect interpretations of the data. Attempts were made to minimise the impact of imbalances of power between adults and young people, and between me/my research assistant and the participants. This was particularly important for the young people who had had negative past experiences at home, in the Looked After System and/or in school.

One of the unique aspects of the approach was that the learning and personal experience was combined in a sensitive environment that explicitly did not have

proscriptive milestones and goals against which the young person could be judged. The group was not assessed by performance nor was anyone measured or tested. The sessions were for the young people to experience themselves within their relationships to the horses and to experience themselves in this new environment, which was uncontaminated by previous experiences and 'failures' - something that may prove to be an important part of its therapeutic value.

The importance of peer group influence was acknowledged in both in 'The Horse Course' design and in the design of the two studies, anticipating and acknowledging the importance of enabling an individual to develop at their own pace and within a supportive group culture. This was monitored during the sessions to ensure that it did not become an influential a factor in how young people evaluated their individual experiences. This was clearly explained at the start of each course, thereby allowing any young person who was unable to join in with the activities of the rest of the group to have a more relevant personal experience, and giving express permission for that to happen when necessary. Although this accommodation meant the young person was working apart from the main group, the stated aim was always that this was still part of the overall programme and was aiming to help them join the group when the young person felt able. The supportive culture became apparent in the way the rest of the group responded to any young person who was having an individual session because they were always within sight of the group and were often given encouragement from the group when they were clearly making progress. Perhaps each of these elements contributed to the therapeutic quality of the courses.

Although the activities changed on every visit, the group of horses remained largely the same as did the instructor, volunteers and researchers. In effect, the stable yard and personnel were constants that formed a secure base to which the young people returned each week. It was against this backdrop that they were able to assess their achievements and develop or consolidate them session by session.

Both groups of young people had been marginalised within the education system, so their learning, especially the element of being exposed to novel experiences, was something they had been known to struggle with previously. It could be argued that this made the challenge and subsequent impact of the course more powerful, and that it potentially strengthens the case for having the validity of the findings accepted.

3.7 Sampling and recruitment

To return to a more practical aspect of this research methodology, in terms of recruitment, the initial contact was with a regional charity in the North East of England (hereafter referred to as The Agency). The Agency was selected as a possible source of participants because of its work with vulnerable and marginalised young people. For this reason, I do not identify The Agency. A purposive or criterion-based (Ritchie et al., 2014) sampling approach was used. Purposive sampling is described by Alan Bryman (2012, p.418) as 'strategic' in its selection of participants. This process provided two 'typical' (Walliman, 2005, p. 279) core samples. Two separate cohorts of highly vulnerable young people from variable family circumstances, who had longstanding histories of exclusion both from educational institutions and, for many, from social contact with their peer groups, were identified. The latter factor was partly due to their non-attendance at school but also reflected their lack of confidence in social settings in that they resisted, avoided or did not pursue contact through clubs and hobbies, for example. The offer of participating in 'The Horse Course' was an invitation that each young person was to accept voluntarily.

The first step in the recruitment process was a series of discussions between myself, the research assistant and the manager of The Agency. 'The Horse Course' was presented and considered in relation to the profile and needs of the young people currently attending a project, which was essentially a post-education programme aimed at young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), something high on the political agenda during the initial period of the research. This was followed by a visit to The Agency's

centre during which the manager of generally outlined the group's background details in relation to their eligibility for the service. Some had experience of, or were currently in the looked after system, and had been for several years, either remaining in foster or residential homes or moving between family care and the looked after system. We know that when children and young people enter the care system, it is usually because they are experiencing, or at risk of, significant harm (Children Act, 1989, section 47 (section 47 was revised 2019)). Spending time 'in care' or being 'looked after', has been shown to help some children to recover from trauma and to thrive, but sadly for others, it has compounded their negative experiences.

In addition, some of the young people involved been excluded or had withdrawn/been withdrawn by their parents from mainstream education early on in their secondary schooling, and had failed to achieve their learning potential. One of the groups contained a young person who had lived most of her early years abroad, moving frequently between homes and schools, a pattern that was repeating in this country. Finally, two of the young people, one in each cohort, had been identified as having 'additional learning needs'.

In terms of The Children Act 1989, section 17 uses the terms 'in need' and 'vulnerable' to describe children and young people who are,

...unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development' without the provision of local authority services, and who are likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services', plus children and young people who are 'disabled'.

The individuals in both cohorts had met one or more of the criteria identified above, in order to be involved in the post-education service.

The second step was when potential research participants were introduced to us by their tutors. In this very informal meeting, I outlined the background to the proposed research, explaining our involvement with academic work and social work practice, and the reasons for our interest in work with horses. Displaying

the equestrian centre website (also the proposed research setting) on a large screen as a backdrop, I was able to visually introduce the horses and facilities and to describe the BHS standards relating to riding instruction, stable management and quality of horse care. The issues of safety around horses and riding equipment were also highlighted. The ways in which 'The Horse Course' experience could readily link with the young peoples' learning portfolio was then outlined by the tutor.

The introduction to the course also aimed to highlight the fun and inspiration aspects of participation as much as the hypothesis. The novelty element made for an attractive proposition yet also embodied a degree of 'risk' because of each participant's lack of experience with horses and riding. Each young person would have opportunities to manage this risk within the secure setting of expert instruction, attentive but not intrusive support, and with well-trained horses. Although this last element was known to the researchers, the riding instructor and volunteers, it was not immediately apparent to the participants and was therefore assumed to be a perceived risk factor for them.

Both cohorts of young people were offered the opportunity to participate in the programme and/or the research. Those who wished to participate - all except one young person who declined for health reasons (pregnancy) - elected to do both. I then introduced the consent form and information sheets, and explained each element. The young people then signed and dated the forms, which I countersigned.

The young people presented as two coherent groups. Each participant had self-selected their membership of the group and was looking forward to the experience on offer. Some were able to express some reasonable mild anxieties about the prospect of riding. One young person was concerned about dogs being on the yard at the equestrian centre, and we agreed to manage this for her. Although I had no prior knowledge of the individual young people, most of the group members had previous experiences that had undermined their confidence. This could be seen most acutely in their social skills. In some cases, in their reluctance to establish or hold eye contact or initiate conversation.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the research was granted by Northumbria University Ethics Committee. Research ethics were considered throughout the research process, in line with Northumbria University's guidance on Research Ethics and Governance (n.d.), the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013) and BERA (2018). This included adherence to the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence in relation to all people involved in, or affected by, the research.

As with previous iterations of the programme, the BHS instructor and volunteers were involved in the planning and review of each group session. The volunteers were invited to take part in one individual semi-structured interview, which also added to the data (see Appendix 2 for Volunteer Information Pack – The Horse Course Research Study). Safeguarding and Health and Safety protocols were already in place for the riding school (in line with their BHS Approval) and were adhered to by all involved for the duration of the research. Every individual member of the team (whether researcher, instructor or volunteer) had up to date DBS clearance. Before the research began, my role, responsibilities and ethical stance was made clear to the young people, in order to differentiate my role from that of the research assistant and regular volunteers. Both myself and my research assistant were involved in the initial data collection and transcription. We both took responsibility for being clear about participants' rights in the research, including confidentiality, safeguarding issues and ensuring that this information was refreshed at each stage. I alone carried out the ethnographic analysis. As lead researcher, my additional responsibilities in relation to storage, retention and disposal of data were fulfilled in line with the university's guidance and in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998) (now superseded by the Data Protection Act (2018)). Age and developmentally appropriate literature outlining the research and seeking consent was prepared in the form of an information pack (see Appendix 3: Young Person's Information Pack).

At the end of the programme, participants had the opportunity to debrief and to discuss their experiences of being involved the research. During the research,

they also had opportunities to review and respond to the photographic data and to select which images they would give me permission to use. This factor began the process of photo elicitation (discussed elsewhere in this chapter).

Throughout the research and in the debriefing phase, I strived to make it inclusive. I was mindful of Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, meaning that children and young people do not necessarily process information at the same rate or in the same way, so differentiation is important. Moreover, someone who learns easily in one area is not necessarily more intelligent than someone that needs to take more time to understand.

3.8.1 The ethical balance of unique experiences within research studies with horses

It is reasonable to posit the case against using horse riding as the basis for research because, for many young people, it is not a leisure activity they could continue to enjoy after the end of the study. The affordability of lessons and/or availability of a riding establishment, where they could volunteer and continue contact with horses, may both be beyond their financial and/or practical abilities. However, one of the arguments in favour is that the uniqueness of the experience is a true test of the individual's ability to manage a potentially stressful event. Secondly, the novelty of the experience in the context of the individual's social and familial life provides an exceptional topic of conversation, one which could generate new, positive interest in the individual from people with whom the individual chooses to share their experiences. Thirdly, the fact that nobody in the individual's personal world has had these experiences and they are valued by those people, could contribute to the individual's desire to achieve more in subsequent sessions, thereby promoting the development of adaptive coping strategies in order to manage the anxiety raised by the activity. Fourthly, the fact that this is a first-time experience may assist in the development of greater insight by the individual into the meaning of the experience, in order to embrace the opportunities offered during the sessions with the horses.

The horses involved were trusted riding school veterans. Their personalities and experience were central factors in their selection and participation. The horses'

welfare remained a priority throughout, another aspect of the ethical dimensions of 'The Horse Course' and this research. This is related to Lori Gruen's (2015) notion of 'entangled empathy' which she describes as an alternative ethics with which to consider relationships and animal welfare. She details how attending to relationships with (non-human) others one may activate a moral response that could be seen as eudaimonic (Carlyle and Graham, 2020).

3.9 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was established as a precondition for both 'The Horse Course' programme and for the research. The young participants were afforded the same degree of confidentiality as adult participants would have under similar circumstances, with one exception: if a young person was deemed to have suffered or was likely to suffer significant harm. Should such a situation have arisen, I would have fulfilled my responsibility to discuss the relevant disclosed information with the named contact for the Local Safeguarding Board. This was made clear to participants in the introductory session and reinforced in the informed consent document included in Appendix 3.

The interviews with young people and volunteers and the focus groups were recorded on a digital voice recorder and the recordings were transcribed in order to facilitate analysis of the data. Had anyone objected to being recorded, notes would have been taken using pen and paper. Only myself and the research assistant had access to the data, and pseudonyms were used to identify participants throughout the research process. Photographs were also taken during sessions, again with stipulations about confidentiality. The participants chose images they were happy with to be used in the research subject to anonymisation.

The boundaries of confidentiality were described to satisfy participants that their contributions would not be disclosed to anyone outside, and their anonymity would be protected at every stage of the study. Participants were made aware that their involvement was entirely voluntary. At each interview and focus group,

participants were reminded of the group's safe learning agreement, which also reminded them of their rights.

3.10 Informed Consent

Informed consent exists within the context of a conversation that allows the participant to ask questions, safe in the knowledge that the researcher is genuinely interested in each perspective and that there are no wrong answers or responses. This approach creates the secure base from which the young person and researcher can explore the young person's understanding together (Graham and Hemmings, 2012). Participants were fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation would entail, and what risks may be involved. They therefore had adequate appropriate information to help them make informed decisions.

I was mindful that obtaining informed consent from young people is an area which requires sensitive handling. For many young people, their experiences of family life and other adult behaviours mean that concepts such as confidentiality and trust are alien to their understanding of the world. In addition, there is the misguided belief in the broader population that children in general are unable to comprehend the subtle principles and practical applications stemming from such ideas. Historically, adults have felt justified in sidestepping their responsibility to address these issues in ways that ensure children and young people fully comprehend the meaning of engaging with research.

Extra time and care were spent ensuring that the young people were fully aware of the implications of being involved in the study and were in agreement with its aims and procedures. It was important to clarify that the focus of the research was on the young people's experiences of the programme and not about sensitive issues in their general lives. It was expected that all participants would have the capacity to give their informed consent to take part in the study. It was my responsibility to employ effective communication techniques in order to achieve this goal and this task was the primary stage in engaging with the young people.

The research assistant and I are both experienced practitioners who have also had experience of dealing with sensitive situations in interviews with children and young people. We therefore felt confident that we had the necessary skills to facilitate the interviews and focus groups (Graham and Hemmings, 2012).

It was made clear to participants that if they wished to withdraw from the research, the programme, or both at any point, they could do so without needing to provide an explanation. This was to ensure that there was no coercive pressure from the researchers, the gatekeepers or their peers to continue involvement and that each person would be valued for their unique contribution.

3.11 Managing expectations

Full attendance was strongly encouraged and there was a strong emphasis that attendance would not be dependent upon behaviour outside the riding programme sessions. This was agreed with the gatekeepers, establishing that sessions were neither punishment nor reward for a young person's behaviour. Terms of membership were established at the outset with the gatekeepers and the young people in order to ensure that being part of the group was not associated with any additional status, whether negative or positive. Attendance at 'The Horse Course' was voluntary. Absences were minimal and were largely because a young person was genuinely unwell that week.

It was made clear that the young people would be encouraged to contribute actively to the group and that this was a prerequisite of membership. It was also made clear that the opportunity to participate in this time-limited experience of being with horses offered young people experiences outwith their everyday world, thereby promoting their potential to meet novel challenges and develop new and transferable skills.

3.12 Preparation

Young people's levels of prior experience with horses were established using a self-rating scale. A 'baseline assessment' of competence was also carried out by the BHS II Instructor, who used their expertise to differentiate activities and to match young people with appropriate horses.

The 'safe learning agreement', which was co-constructed with the group prior to the first session of the programme, helped to establish a supportive and collaborative culture, reflected in a heuristic rather than a competitive learning environment.

3.13 Parental consent and the role of the gatekeepers

I was aware that parental consent needs to be sought when undertaking research with young people under 16. Although these young people were aged 16-19, the fact that they had been identified as 'vulnerable' and/or 'anxious' meant that I needed to carefully consider their capacity to understand informed consent. Their key workers, who had first-hand knowledge of the young people and a sense of their often complicated family situations and status, were thought to be in a good position to act as gatekeepers for the research study as well as the programme. In discussion with the organisation, we agreed that the gatekeeper would be a catalyst within the research equation and defined as a person who was neutral within the research process, yet able to consent to the researcher approaching the young person. The gatekeepers were made aware of the content and process of the study, and the risks attached to the young people's involvement. They were also made aware of the safety procedures in place to accommodate these risks. It was their responsibility, as with previous programmes, to ensure that risk assessments were carried out in line with their own organisation before the young people engaged with the programme. They were in a position to provide assurances that parents/carers were fully aware of the research and that they had agreed to their sons/daughters being approached by the researcher (via the gatekeepers) and invited to participate (see Appendix 4 for Gatekeeper Information Pack and Appendix 5 for Parent/Carer Information Pack).

On a practical level, the gatekeeper was also the person that could be contacted if there were a critical situation or if there was the need for emergency services (Graham and Hemmings, 2012). Their permission to act in this last instance would have been sought within their agreement with the parent/carer. The gatekeepers were experienced youth workers, care workers or service managers.

3.14 Participant safety

The venue for the research was a riding school, which is a BHS approved establishment. A physically and psychologically safe environment was created there for each focus group and each interview, e.g. a friendly setting, availability of refreshments, access to washroom facilities, close proximity of peers and familiar adults. The staff team had many years of experience facilitating riding and horse care activities for children and young people, as well as an established reputation for high quality instruction and safety.

This research did not pose any potential for harm to study participants. The researchers' safeguarding responsibilities were described in detail and reinforced at every contact with the participants. Details of support services were shared in order to signpost participants to external sources of support should this be necessary. Gatekeepers were in close proximity at all times.

Participants were not expected to discuss sensitive or personal issues and, given the researchers' extensive experience of working with vulnerable families and young people, we were able to use knowledge and skills to assess the young people's emotional wellbeing at the end of each session and before they left the premises. The relatively short interval between sessions meant that the young person would be able to contact me within a short timescale should they have any issues or questions. Gatekeepers agreed to act as additional sources of support to the young people outside of the sessions.

The activities involving horses were designed to allow young people to develop their sense of responsibility and to become more confident and more

independent as they learned, developed and applied a range of skills. They learned to express themselves in a novel environment with people who were 'uncontaminated' (i.e. had no associations with any other aspect of their lives) and could therefore provide a boundary to the experience. It may be that this focused approach - in terms of the activity, the people and the site - created a therapeutic context.

3.15 Researcher safety

The Health and Safety guidelines of Northumbria University and of the riding school (in line with BHS approval requirements) were adhered to when conducting the research. This included carrying out risk assessments in line with both organisations' guidelines. The research was deemed to be a low-risk activity, based on the researchers' experiences of being involved in similar programmes. Data was collected during focus groups. The gatekeepers, my research assistant and I were present at all times. The individual interviews took place in the riding school coffee shop. This location meant that the interviews were beyond the hearing range of others, but the windows of the coffee shop still allowed visual contact with the gatekeepers, whilst protecting participants' confidentiality. My research assistant and I used our professional competency, based on what the young person may say and share, to judge whether or not they were at risk of significant harm or in any danger, so that appropriate action could be taken. Carrying a mobile phone was also important, so that in the unlikely event that someone needed urgent help, there was an alternative way of contacting a member of the riding school staff or an emergency service.

3.16 Data collection methods

The 'Advanced Mixed Method Model' (Creswell, 2014, p. 222) involved multiple sources of data collection. Numerical data was generated as part of the interview process through use of the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (Appendix 6). This enabled the recording and assessing of changes in scores at

three stages of the programme. The scores were later considered alongside the themes identified in qualitative data.

The generation of qualitative data was less straightforward and took longer, as it involved semi-structured, face to face interviews and focus group discussions. In addition, ‘photo-elicitation’ (Rose, 2012) techniques were used in the final focus group and throughout the research period, I kept written notes based upon observations and conversations.

The total data comprises:

- 28 completed (out of 30 planned) individual interviews with young people (3 per participant)
- 28 completed (out of 30 planned) Rosenberg Scales with young people (3 per participant)
- 12 completed (out of 12 planned) focus groups with young people (6 per cohort)
- 293 photographs
- 2 completed (out of 3 planned) interviews with volunteers
- Field notes

Table 2 illustrates how the interviews, Rosenberg measures and focus groups were embedded into The Horse Course format

Table 2. The interface between the research and The Horse Course.

	Typical Horse Course Session format (highlighting how and where the research activities were built into the programme).
1.00 p.m.	Meet in the coffee shop for welcome, refreshments, catch up time and information about the session. Riding instructor allocates young people to horses.
1.15 p.m.	Stable and yard activities. Young people were invited to leave the group for 15 minutes for individual interviews/RSES before sessions 1 and 4. (The third and final interview took place two weeks after the course ended at The Agency premises).

2.15 p.m.	Riding or working with horses on the ground.
3.15 p.m.	Meet in coffee shop for large group session with teamwork activities, reflection, drinks and general chill time. 6 x 30 minute focus groups were built into this slot at every session.
4.00 p.m.	Close of session. Volunteers took part in one individual interview at the end of the course.

Data collection took place over three months: before, during and after the programme. The programme consisted of six sessions, each lasting approximately three hours. The selected methods were designed to minimise the impact of harm, e.g. interactive activities and games were used in focus groups for young people. A digital recording device was employed to record data during the focus groups and the individual interviews, and some notes were taken by hand during the focus groups. None of the participants objected to being recorded. The data collected was verified with the participants to ensure that there was no misinterpretation.

The mixed method study design suited the size and timescale of this ethnographic study, and enabled triangulation of the data. The systematic collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data assisted in the identification of themes between participants' perspectives and published literature. Identifying the relationships between the variables helped to provide authenticity and validity (Roberts-Holmes, 2011).

3.16.1 Interviews

According to Denscombe (2017, p. 203), interviews are appropriate for small-scale research that intends to explore phenomena such as "opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences, where the aim of the research is to understand them in depth rather than report them in a simple word or two".

Further, Monique Hennink et al. (2011) describe one-to-one semi-structured interviews as being a “conversation with a purpose” (p. 109) and allowing the researcher to gain an in depth understanding. This approach, as elaborated by Susan Kirk (2007), enables the interviewee to develop a more naturally free-flowing exploration of their ideas and experiences, thereby making for more immediate, interesting and valid data. This was equally true of the volunteer interviews. Because interviews can be conducted relatively quickly, they can provide an effective and reliable method of collecting valid, robust data (Silverman, 2011). The swiftness of the interviews meant that the young participants were not inhibited, and this also helped to maintain their enthusiasm and excitement about working with the horses. Similarly, their brevity meant that anxiety, when it occurred, did not inhibit them either.

The interviews with young people were built into the carousel of programme activities to enable participants to always remain engaged. In order to establish the baseline data, the first interviews took place before the first session. The second interview was at the beginning of the fourth session, to elicit the thoughts and feelings of the young people once they had engaged with the programme. The third interviews took place approximately two weeks after the programme. This allowed an opportunity to gauge any longer lasting impacts.

The interview (and focus group) schedules were designed around the self-esteem elements of the Resilience Framework (Daniel and Wassell, 2002), Gilligan’s six domains of resilience (Figure 4), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the BHS syllabus (Auty, 2003). It also must be acknowledged that they were additionally influenced by the course designers’ biased commitment to improving the lives of disadvantaged young people and their passionate belief in horses as therapeutic influences on humans.

My research assistant and I both have significant experience of interviewing children and young people. Among other approaches, prompts were introduced appropriately to facilitate or extend discussion. Validity was considered through the standardisation of the questions and a clear audit trail was maintained. (The Interview Outline is included as Appendix 7).

3.16.2 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (Appendix 6), which was incorporated into the interview process, is a ten item self-scaling tool designed to assess an individual's self-worth when that individual compares himself or herself to other people. The scale is widely used in social science research as an attempt to achieve a one-dimensional measure of global self-esteem. It was designed to represent a continuum of self-worth, with statements that are endorsed by individuals with low self-esteem to statements that are endorsed only by persons with high self-esteem. The scale can also be modified to measure state self-esteem by asking the respondents to reflect on their current feelings. The ten items are listed below. (R) indicates reverse scoring.

1. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all. (R)
3. I think that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (R)
6. I certainly feel useless at times. (R)
7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. (R)
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. (R)
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

(Rosenberg, 1965).

Choice was offered as to whether participants completed the scale unassisted or with the interviewer reading out each item. The related conversations acted as a springboard for further conversation about the participant's experience of the course to date. Although there was some variation in how the forms were completed (in order to be sensitive to literacy levels), the audio recordings of the sessions verified the authenticity of the data collected in this way.

Administering the scale presented some challenges. Whilst the results did show improvements in the young people's self-esteem scores, they did not yield

much detail. Another more significant issue was that some of the participants struggled with the reverse scoring design. This suggests that, had this been relied on as the sole method, the results would have been skewed. Although seminal, the scale was perhaps too much of a challenge for some participants to engage with, so the combination of interviews, focus groups, field notes and images that were used alongside the scale gave a broader and possibly more accurate picture.

Whilst the objective nature of the Rosenberg instrument may have worked to neutralise any influences bias may have had upon the validity and reliability of the qualitative data, the latter form of data provided a thicker description. This meant that at times the datasets counteracted each other, as noted earlier, something that led to a philosophical and methodological change.

3.16.3 Focus Groups

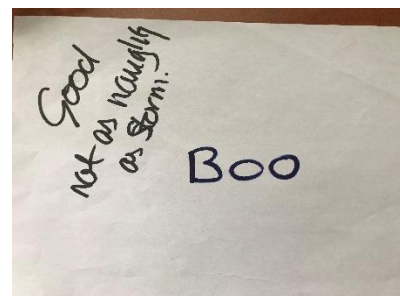
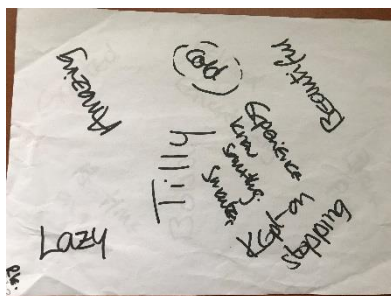
Semi-structured focus groups (Figure 10) were integrated into the final third of each of the six sessions, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. The young people gathered together in the coffee shop that was part of the equestrian centre facilities to relax, have a drink and share their experiences (the Focus Group Guide is included as Appendix 8).

This activity facilitated the collection of qualitative data through engaging small groups of people in meaningful discussions. Questions and prompts were introduced appropriately, in order to facilitate or extend discussion. This made it possible to examine collectively constructed meaning as it developed. The key to the richness of the data in the focus group situation is the interaction between the participants (Silverman, 2011), who may become more expansive in their expressed views when they hear others expressing their opinions.

Some of the young participants clearly preferred the group activities and the focus group discussions, as attention was not focused on them as individuals. In contrast, others who were less confident about contributing to the group discussions were more comfortable and talkative on a one-to-one basis in the interviews.

The focus groups also included the option of engaging with visual methodologies (photographs and practical activities), enabling the less confident talkers to actively take part. This was designed to be fun and included discussions about the horses using prompts like “If your horse was a pop star which one would s/he be?” or “If your horse could talk what would s/he say to you?” This approach encouraged the more reticent participants to add their perspective, thereby incrementally adding to the data.

As with the interviews, the topics and questions reflected the activities in the preceding session and related to the elements of the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965).



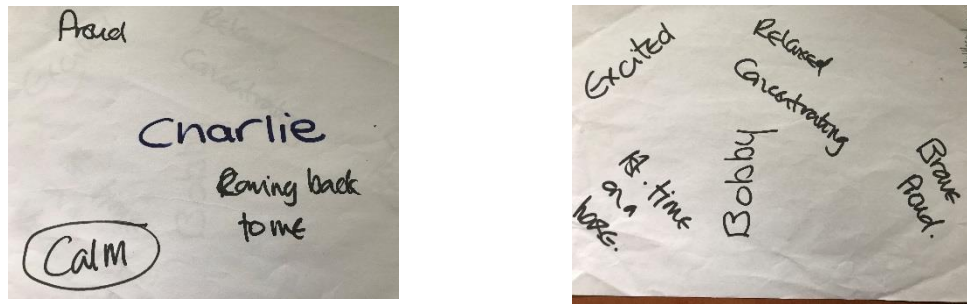


Figure 10. Focus group (top) and feedback (bottom).

3.16.4 Photo elicitation in the Focus Groups

During the second focus group in Cohort 1, I was strongly affected and inspired by Adam, one of the participants, who had a strong response to seeing a photograph of himself from one of the riding sessions. Although we had full permission to take photographs for the research and for dissemination purposes, he was adamant that we should not show this particular photograph as part of any dissemination as he did not like the way it made him 'look' (see Adam's Single Case Analysis). All I had intended to do at this point was to confirm young people's permission to use photographic data in dissemination, but it soon became evident that I had stumbled upon the value of 'photo elicitation' (Harper, 2002), a method that uses visual images to elicit responses in research. As the research progressed, reviewing and selecting photographs from those taken during sessions triggered new conversations among the participants about their feelings about seeing themselves in action and their thoughts about self-image. The method was particularly helpful as the young people were trying to make sense of their experiences and express their emotions.

There are a number of ways to work with images. 'Symbolic interactionism' (Blumer, 1969) provided a framework for interpreting and understanding what could be seen in the photographs. This led to the use of prompts such as: "What do you see here in this photograph of you and the horse?" "What were you thinking?" "What were you feeling?" "What do you think the horse was thinking and feeling?" as deemed appropriate. In addition, Daniel Miller (2010) offered useful reflection on photo and object elicitation when doing biographical

research with 'stuff', as he argued that such approaches enlarge our toolkit for connecting individual and family biographies with public issues of the social structure. These theoretical commonalities clearly related to self-esteem and the influences of power and authenticity on both human-human and horse-human interactions and relationships in the context of 'The Horse Course'.

3.16.5 Field notes

Throughout the research, I reflected on what I was learning and keeping notes, as was my research assistant. As practitioners in work with children, young people and families, it had long since become an automatic part of everyday practice to make observations and to keep notes. This method enabled the drawing together of knowledge of theory and practice skills, which was particularly valuable and applicable when reflecting on the data at the end of each session. Care was taken to use pseudonyms during this process. The field notes also incorporated comments on the discussions between myself and the research assistant, as we transcribed the interviews and focus groups, often sharing insights and reflections on the informal conversations that took place outside of the structured data collection.

3.17 Coding and conceptualising data

Yin (2011) suggests that data should be compiled, assembled and reassembled, and that this analytic process will allow the researcher to organise the data, generate codes, identify themes, measure progress and reach some conclusions (Boyatzis, 1998). In this study, the qualitative data analysis was thematic which, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is extremely useful for decoding complex data. In this case, data came directly from the transcripts of focus group discussions and individual interviews, as well as from the reflections and observations that had been recorded in the field notes and identified in the photographs. In addition, participants' responses to photographs were also documented and analysed in relation to key themes. The qualitative data was reviewed alongside the results of the RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) measures to provide further insights and understanding

through statistical data. A strength of this approach was its flexibility, which enabled me to manage complex data from different sources and to extricate patterns and themes related to the research questions (Grant, 2019). This process involved listening to the recordings, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and making notes and creating tables. It allowed time and space for me to become familiar with the data, identify key themes or patterns, and to measure progress. Any changes in young people's perspectives were noted.

Many of the emergent themes were found to have commonalities with the Resilience Framework (Daniel and Wassell, 2002), which to an extent, I had anticipated. But there were also others, which in retrospect I recognised as relating to elements of wellbeing and which contributed new ideas to the study. Open (colour) coding of the data made it possible to collate a summary for each of the themes and gather rich material to carry forward, including quotations, images and interpretations of the data using theoretical perspectives. The coding and summarisation resulted in a focus on eight key themes, presented in the Findings and Discussion chapter. These were then used as a basis to distil five key outcomes of the study.

3.18 Early dissemination of data

In order to get feedback on my early ideas, the data from the first cohort was presented at the Psychosocial Studies Conference. The feedback was affirming and extremely valuable to reflect upon whilst analysing the data from the second study, which was ongoing at that time. The early analysis of data in turn influenced the development of a now successful undergraduate module on a Childhood Studies Programme, which came to be called 'Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Childhood'.

In 2019, I presented data from the completed fieldwork at the Joint Social Work, Education and Research Conference. Once again, I was inspired by the favourable feedback I received, including an invitation to contribute an article to a social work journal. Around the same time, a colleague and fellow PhD student was researching similar concepts in a different context, regarding interactions between younger children and their classroom canine, and it

became a source of mutual fascination to compare and contrast processes, approaches, common themes and findings. It was through these reflective conversations that I came to further appreciate the “primordial, ingrained nature of relating kinaesthetically being deep within human beings” (Carlyle and Graham, 2020, p. 3) and its relevance to my research. These initial discussions also led to two jointly authored publications (Appendices 9 and 10).

In this chapter I have presented the ideas, experiences and theoretical underpinning that formed the hypothesis for this research. I have considered the limitations of the methodology as well as its usefulness. Despite the limitations regarding the scale of the research, I believe it has provided a useful framework, enabling me to achieve my aims and objectives, and to begin to develop a novel way of understanding human-animal relations in a potentially therapeutic context.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter unpacks how the theories and practices relating to human-animal interactions, and equine assisted learning and therapy outlined in Chapter 2 worked in relation to 'The Horse Course', and explores new insights revealed in the data. In addition, the chapter returns to the literature regarding some of the key aspects of child and adolescent development, particularly in relation to resilience, self-esteem and wellbeing. The findings are presented and discussed in sections. Section 4.2 will present a Single Case Analysis (SCA) of each young person – this includes both qualitative and quantitative data. Section 4.3 will present and explain the overall self-esteem scores. Section 4.4 will present and discuss the data from the interviews with volunteers. Section 4.5 will present a thematic analysis of all data. Finally, Section 4.6 sets out what I have come to understand as the five core ingredients of 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'.

4.2 Single Case Analyses

To begin, I present an overview of the young participants' characteristics, including their self-disclosed histories (Table 3, overleaf). A profile of each cohort was provided by The Agency at the selection stage (described in section 3.6). At no point were the young people asked to disclose anything personal about their histories, but they self-disclosed some information voluntarily during the research activities. A full history of the participants' previous experiences is therefore unknown, but this was an advantage to some extent, as it reduced the real possibility of further labelling.

Table 3. The young people and their cohorts

Cohort 1				
Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Self-disclosed history
1. Janet	17	F	WB	Learning disabled Lack of confidence
2. Vicky	18	F	WB	Self-excluded from mainstream education Depression and anxiety
3. Rose	18	F	WB	Care-experienced Excluded from mainstream education Behaviour management intervention
4. Emily	17	F	WB	Lack of confidence
5. Gillian	17	F	W Undisclosed	Multiple house moves in and out of UK Anxiety
6. Adam	17	M	WB	Self-excluded from mainstream education Depression and anxiety
Cohort 2				
Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Self-disclosed History
7. Ash	18	M	WB	Care experienced Prison experienced Excluded from mainstream education Speech and Language intervention
8. Susan	18	F	WB	Excluded from mainstream education Lack of confidence Poor physical and mental health
9. Mark	17	M	WB	Learning disabled Communication difficulties
10. Lisa	17	F	WB	Lack of confidence

The following section introduces each young person and presents the following information:

- Individual participant profiles composed from photographs and excerpts from interviews, field notes and focus groups.
- Rosenberg Self-esteem self-rating scores at three points (baseline, baseline plus four weeks and post-experience).
- Rosenberg Self-esteem raw score comparisons (total scores).
- Further comparisons with the norm implementing statistical methods developed by Crawford and Garthwaite (2002) and Crawford and Howell (1998). (These data are presented only for the eight out of ten participants who were present at baseline and post-experience data collection points).

In relation to the last bullet point, this was a 'best fit' comparison process. The methods implemented by Crawford and Garthwaite (2002), and Crawford and Howell (1998) were used in relation to much larger samples and based on adult RSES norms. Recent neuroscience (Sebastian et al, 2008) clearly indicates that the adolescent brain is still under development and therefore works very differently to the adult brain. I was therefore mindful that the results would not be directly comparable with, or relatable to the results from my small sample of ten young people.

Each element of the qualitative material and the RSES allowed the participant and the researcher to review their experiences/contributions together, so that the interpretations could be validated. While some participants were quite reticent, others wanted to talk more. Consequently, some of the Single Case Analyses contain extended sections of interview material when particularly rich qualitative data appeared.

The Single Case Analyses that follow set the scene for the thematic analysis and discussion. Each case includes images taken during the research. Using a visual method enabled the young people to control their stories to an extent, in that they reviewed which photographs they were happy with and removed any

they were not happy with. The photographs also offer complementary contextual data. In each case, transformation is shown through the statistics and images.

4.2.1 Janet (Cohort 1)

At the first meeting, Janet was reluctant to respond to any of the general questions or invitations to speak that were addressed to the whole group. It was apparent that she struggled with conversation and needed time to think about the questions and her responses. She was even less comfortable in a one-to-one situation. Despite indicating that she was keen to participate, she often responded monosyllabically and uncertainly.

Janet had had some limited prior contact with horses, but this was some time ago and clearly had little influence upon her ability to make the most of this current experience. She was enthusiastic about the course and open to learning but did not demonstrate initiative or offer spontaneous responses in a group situation. She attended every session (18 hours in total), actively joined in with practical group activities and was keen to be involved in all aspects of the course. When she did engage in short conversations, she expressed a strong desire to continue riding after the course and spoke of how she hoped to do this at regular intervals as well as to pursue the possibility of getting a pony.



Figure 11. Janet practicing how to put a head collar on Storm.

Throughout the first two interviews, Janet gave very limited responses to any of the questions. She thought about what she wanted to say and then gave mostly single word answers.

In her final interview however, when asked what she had learnt about herself during the course, she became very animated. She responded instantly and, without any hesitation, replied 'my confidence'. She went on to explain how she had walked home from the centre on her own for the first time the week after 'The Horse Course' had finished. She repeated this the following week, relating it to an increased sense of confidence in her ability to manage new challenges. Furthermore, she intended to build on and extend this experience by using the bus on her own to get home the following week. These events were significant to Janet and excited her about the possibilities stemming from her improved self-confidence. Throughout this part of the interview, she was openly smiling, welcoming the researcher's gaze, and clearly enjoying the praise and recognition that her achievement generated. Her social and conversational style during this final interview was markedly different to either of the former interviews or her presentation during the focus groups.

This final response was articulate and she was expressive about the impact of the course and its effects upon her. She also made an association between the sense of freedom she got when out on a hack with only one horse and rider ahead of her, and her ability to strike out on her own. Her strengthened internal locus of control is reflected in this achievement and in the way she set herself another realistic goal of catching the bus, initially with the support of her tutor, but with the ultimate aim of doing so alone. This was a significant advance on Janet's quality of independence. While there may be strong arguments that these advances were partly due to the accumulative effects of the work done by the team at The Agency centre, and that Janet may have felt more confident being interviewed in a more familiar setting, her comments indicated that her experience of herself during 'The Horse Course' accelerated her progress. She had clearly developed an enhanced sense of what was possible and was able to transfer the skills she learnt during the course to the wider world. She demonstrated an ability to reflect upon her overall experience of the course,

indicating that she had internalised the experience. She reviewed how she felt at the initial session and how her incremental experiences helped her to feel increasingly confident.

The introduction of a third object to reduce tension is a well-established therapeutic tool. In this instance however, the horse became the much more than a medium through which Janet was able to relax and feel more at ease with herself and others around her. Janet's ability to recognise and incorporate her achievements had a positive impact upon her personal schema; she became more expressive in her responses and built on her improved self-confidence to extend herself into what had previously been very risky territory. The fact that she associated the confidence boosting effects of the course with her new independence presents a strong case for this claim.

Janet recorded a positive sense of self in some elements of the RSES but this was belied by her communication style and was inconsistent. Judging by the way in which she rated herself for items one, two, eight and ten, I could have assumed that she had consistently high self-esteem. The way that she scored the remaining items was contradictory. Items three, four, five and six showed improvements, while items seven and nine indicated an overall decrease. **As discussed in the methodology chapter and revisited in the findings chapter, similar patterns of inconsistency in other participants' self-ratings led me to believe the RSES was unreliable and unsuitable for use in this study.**



Figure 12. Janet riding Boo

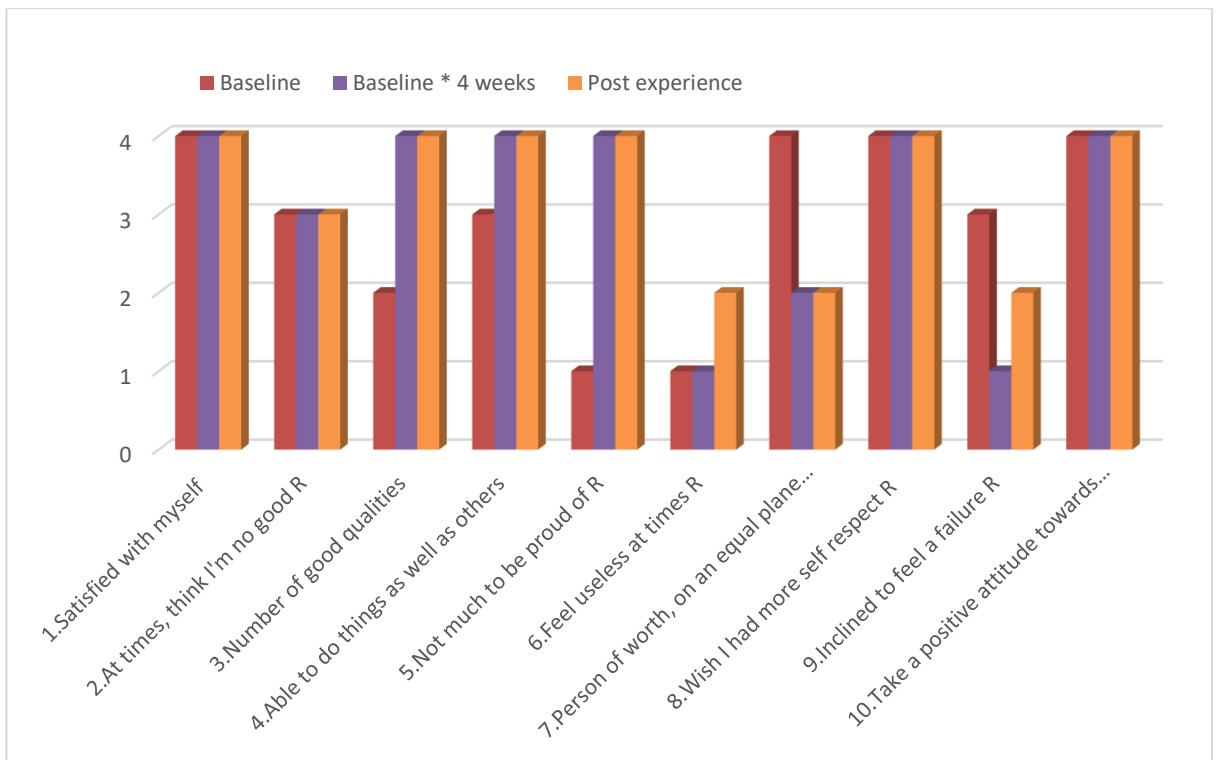


Figure 13. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Janet.

Table 4. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons (total scores) – Janet.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
30	22.79 (5.41)		31	22.79 (5.41)		33	-	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score		Code			
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
 Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
 Sample size of the normative sample= 261
 Individual's test score= 30

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 1.330$
 One-tailed probability = 0.092
 Two-tailed probability = 0.185

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 90.77%
 95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 87.80%
 95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 93.30%

Figure 14. Further comparison with norms – Janet - Baseline.

Janet's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.185$). 91% of the reference population scored below Janet's score.

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 33

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 1.884$
One-tailed probability = 0.030
Two-tailed probability = 0.061

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 96.96%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 95.39%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 98.16%

Figure 15. Further comparison with norms – Janet – Post-Experience.

Janet's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.061$). Almost 97% of the reference population scored below Janet's score, demonstrating improvement in self-esteem.

4.2.2 Vicky (Cohort 1)

Vicky had a very striking appearance with a bold, asymmetrical hairstyle and piercings. She was quite reserved in the larger group, responding hesitantly to direct questions but with a winning smile and a slightly self-deprecating manner. She maintained a positive attitude throughout the course.



Figure 16. Vicky riding Molly.

At the first session, Vicky reflected on the risks associated with working with horses, “... of getting kicked” and “falling off when riding”. She expressed it as a feeling of nervousness prior to mounting and saw her ability to manage the internal state and feel more relaxed once on the horse as a significant success.

...I think I was more nervous of, like, falling off or, like, I dunno, something going wrong, but, like, once the instructors [volunteers leading the horses] went off and we were left to our own devices, I think I was quite good.

Vicky openly acknowledged the stress for her of the novel experience of being with horses. However, she knew she wanted to do all the activities and was able to appreciate her achievement and praise herself for what she had done. Her Rosenberg scores at this stage create a picture of someone who has significant doubts about her abilities but has sufficient confidence to embrace potentially threatening experiences and manage the inherent challenges.

During the third session, the group went out on a ride in the local area, known as 'a hack' or 'hacking out'. Vicky was led by the research assistant and they had a long conversation, during which Vicky talked about her views about how young people are seen and judged by adults. This topic came out of a conversation about how much progress Vicky had made since starting the course. The research assistant recalled how tentative she had been initially around the horses, how she was now riding in the arena independently and today was riding the most energetic and biggest horse in the group. Vicky said that she had been surprised by all she had achieved to date and expanded upon the theme by saying that young people were often treated disrespectfully by older people because of how they looked. She thought older people needed to remember how they looked at the same age and not be so ready to dismiss young people. She said that what is within a person is their real worth and that older people miss out on the chance of discovering the real beauty of an individual because of their readiness to "judge a book by its cover". Vicky told the research assistant that she was a very caring person and wanted to pursue a career in social care services, and wanted to make a difference to other people's lives.

In the second interview, which was conducted after the third session's hack, Vicky reported that she had become more physically active at home, walking the family's dog and going for runs. She associated this change of lifestyle with the experience of being outdoors with the horses and that it had helped her feel better about herself, saying, "I'm a bit more energetic, like, I go for runs quite a lot now. I'm quite a lot happier." It is reasonable to deduce from this that the experience of managing the stress stemming from the perceived risks

associated with grooming and riding, alongside the experience of an outdoor activity, that Vicky had been inspired to extend her choice of leisure activities, which in turn made her feel even better about herself.

Between sessions, Vicky had developed insight into how she felt when around the horses and how she needed to communicate a calm manner to them in order for the horses to feel confident in her. She expressed this in the following statement:

Well before, I was quite nervous being around them and stuff, because I was quite like not used to them and stuff, but now I'm quite used to them and I'm just calm around them. I know that they react to how you feel and stuff you've got to be calm otherwise they pick up on it and stuff.

Her ability to appreciate the two-way nature of communication and 'read' the horses' expressions is a clear indication of her increased sensitivity to their needs and her improved confidence to manage the stress for them. These insights changed her view of horses' natures: she now perceived them to be "really gentle animals" regardless of their relative size. She commented on her experience of being with the biggest horse in the group saying, "Barney - I felt like he was quite intimidating but when I got, like, to groom him and stuff, he was like a gentle giant." She related this to her initial fear of being kicked and acknowledged that her view of horses had changed, and she was no longer scared of them. When asked how horses make her feel about herself, she responded:

Quite happy and quite active. I dunno, like, Barney, like, changed my perspective on horses, especially big horses. I was quite nervous of them, I, dunno I'm quite intimidated but I, dunno, he's just so easy and gentle and quite good and quite good to ride.

Vicky's view of herself and her ability to take on and enjoy new potentially risky activities has brought about a seminal change in her life. By constructing a secure base of information and carefully managed incremental learning experiences, she progressed from being an openly nervous young person to someone who saw herself as taking on the biggest challenge and managing it well. She was also more relaxed about new challenges that might be part of future sessions, saying she was "...open-minded to what happens", indicating that she was confident her coping strategies could manage any anxiety they may generate. This is reflected in her Rosenberg scores at points one and two. Vicky attended 15 out of 18 possible hours. During the latter stages of the course, she found employment in a residential setting for older people and was unable to attend the final three-hour session or the final interview at The Agency.

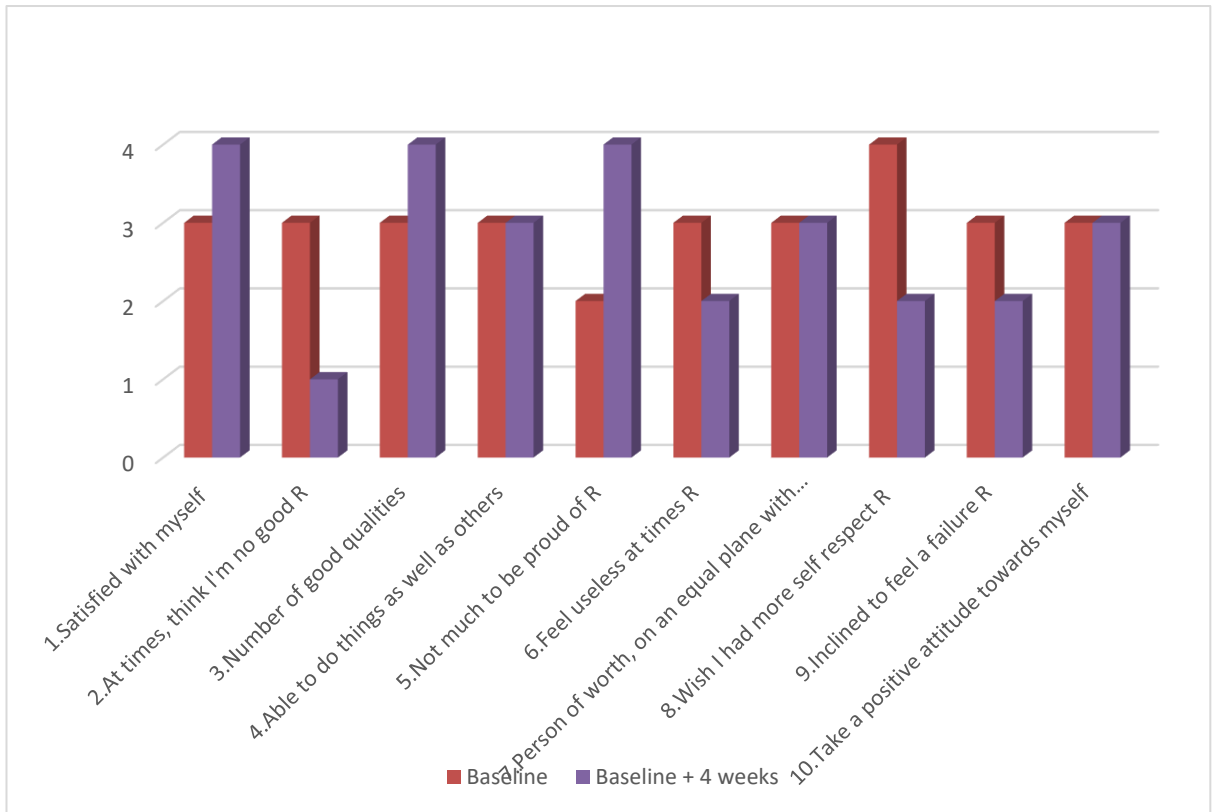


Figure 17. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Vicky.

Table 5. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons (total scores) - Vicky.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
30	22.79 (5.41)		28	22.79 (5.41)		-	-	-
Key:								
Severity Level			Score			Code		
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

4.2.3 Rose (Cohort 1)

Rose initially presented as profoundly anxious around the horses, responding to any movement with extreme alarm and repeated expressions of fearfulness about their potential to hurt her. Her reluctance to be close to the horses persisted in spite of her observing them to be placid animals. While the other participants listened to instructions about how to approach the horses and accepted reassurance that they could manage the tasks at hand, e.g. putting on a head collar; leading the horse out of the stable, Rose resisted any close contact with the animals. During the first three sessions, she stood at a distance from the horses when the rest of the group were engaged in activities. Any activity she did engage with during this initial stage required persistent encouragement and the presence of a supportive helper, and she needed the helper either to stand close beside her or between her and the horse to be able to achieve the goal of the activity, e.g. leading, grooming etc.



Figure 18. Rose (in pink) linking key worker and leading Dandy.
(Illustrating the significance of physical touch).

Rose's extreme anxiety, lack of confidence and inability to trust the horses strongly suggested that she would struggle to manage to complete the

programme. However, because this possibility had been anticipated, we were able to provide one-to-one support for her. This enabled her to progress at a pace that was manageable to her and to achieve goals that she experienced as significant and rewarding. This bespoke approach meant that Rose was able to develop a meaningful experience of being with the horses on her terms, taking time to internalise her learning and gradually increase her practical skills. Her helper acknowledged any achievement she made and encouraged her to stretch herself further.

At the first Focus Group, Rose said that her aim for the second session was to get on a horse. Based on her progress so far and her tendency to react with extreme alarm to the horses' movements, this seemed unlikely to happen. Interestingly, the gap between her achievements and those of the rest of the group, all of whom were riding at walk and trot by the end of the first session, did not appear to bother her and neither did it draw any negative comments from the other participants.

The pivotal moment for Rose came rather later than the second session, but did fulfil her ambition expressed after the first session. Towards the end of the fourth session, she decided she would get on a horse (Tilly). This took approximately 20 minutes of gentle and humorous coaxing, with Rose hovering between mounting and stepping away. Tilly stood perfectly still throughout, clearly sensing in her body the need for complete calm. This undoubtedly was a critical element in Rose's eventual ability to mount. Having mounted, Rose then said she didn't want Tilly to walk anywhere. After a minute or two, during which Tilly remained perfectly still, Rose suggested that she could move forward. Rose's reaction to Tilly's first step forward was to grip tightly with one hand and throw out and quickly pull in the opposite arm. This sudden and automatic reaction looked remarkably like the Moro Reflex, the primitive, automatic response present in infants when they are startled. As she recovered and Tilly continued to walk slowly away from the mounting block, Rose sat securely and seemed to be pleased with this major advance. Tilly was led around the immediate area several times while Rose clung on to the saddle, saying she

wanted to get off – however, it was clear from her body language that she did not mean this and she was laughing when she said it. She agreed to be led into the arena, adjacent to where the rest of the group were riding. It was at this point that the group saw Rose riding and collectively celebrated her achievement. This made her smile and laugh more. Throughout this episode, Rose demanded a second helper to place a hand on her leg, so that she could be sure she would not fall off. So, still feeling profoundly anxious about her own abilities, yet secure on Tilly, Rose rode for the first time and joined the group session for the last few minutes.



Figure 19. Rose with Tilly: Rose sitting on a horse for the first time. *(Touch is a significant part of Rose's experience).*

At subsequent sessions, Rose tentatively groomed her horse, helped to pick out its hooves and rode it in the arena, mounting with the minimum of delay. There was a reversal of progress when she was invited to ride a different horse, one that was slightly more energetic than her usual one. When she was given her usual horse, she mounted and rode with confidence both in the arena and out in the woods on a hack.

In Figure 19, Rose's use of a 'hand of reassurance' helped to synchronise her and attune her body to Tilly. This gives further credence to the bodily nature of our experiences and accentuates the vital role touch plays in sensory processing, sensory integration, and in our communication and wellbeing (Dunn, 2001). Rose gained an important element of emotional regulation through her touch, a sense of deep muscle pressure and proprioception. Here, touch as a pedagogical aspect of learning is key. It can be argued that a focus on movement and its affective, rather than cognitive dominance in learning, should be embraced in work with young people.

Despite Rose's extreme anxiety, she emphatically maintained that she liked horses, "especially because they don't stare at you like people do" (Interview 1). This suggests that Rose had recognised the equine way of communicating empathy, and it felt different, perhaps less threatening, than face-to-face communication with human strangers. The process by which she was enabled to choose, gave her a greater sense of personal security, helped her to develop her sense of autonomy, and arguably strengthened her internal locus of control (Rotter, 1954) or feeling of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

I include here the full transcript of Rose's second interview to illustrate how she recognised her experiences and achievements. Considering that in her first interview, there was no direct contact at all and she needed to hold on to her key worker throughout, her self-reflection and engagement during the second interview suggests significant progress.

Rose (R). Interview two (session four)

Note: Italicised elements represent actions, information deleted or observations.

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout): Has anything changed in your daily life since you were last interviewed?

R: *Shrugs*

Has anything out of the ordinary/exceptional happened lately/since you started the course?

R: Yeah. I got on a horse! *This is an immediate answer, said in a very positive manner.*

You got on a horse and that's a big change, is it?

R: *Nods her head vigorously.*

Yes. OK. How do you feel about being here today?

R: All right.

Yes? Were you looking forward to it or were you thinking, I'm just coming along?

R: *Nods her head.*

Can you say a little about what you think about horses at this stage of the course?

R: They stink.

They stink. OK. *Smiles exchanged.* Is there anything else you know about horses at this stage of the course?

R: They're friendly. Umm.

You know that they can be friends with you. That's quite a big step because It was quite difficult for you at first, wasn't it, because you were quite sort of nervous about them? How do horses make you feel?

R: I don't know. Sometimes I feel a little bit nervous.

Yeah. I think a lot of people feel a little bit nervous about horses, don't they? What else do they make you feel?

R: Umm. Good.

They make you feel good?

R: Yeah.

Good about yourself?

R: Yeah.

Is that because of what you've achieved, do you think? Getting on a horse was massive, wasn't it?

R: Yep.

Is there anything you especially like about them?

R: Yeah. When they know they're getting food and they make that funny noise. *Smiles.*

When they get excited about their food coming along they are greedy, aren't they?

R: *Gentle laughter.*

Is there anything you don't like about them?

R: The horse when it goes like that. *Shakes her head up and down.*

When the horse shakes its head up and down?

R: Yeah. I don't like that.

What does that do? Is it because it pulls your arm?

R: No. I think it's going to get me off.

Oh. Right. It feels like she's going to pull you off when she does that, but do you really think she's trying to get you off?

R: *Nods her head but indicates she is not absolutely committed to the idea the horse wants her off her back.*

So, it feels uncomfortable for you?

R: *Nods her head.*

Can you say a little bit about the horse course?

R: It's good. I like it.

You enjoy it? That's great. How are you feeling about the course today?

R: What? Going out onto the, the track?

Yes. Going out into the woods and onto the road.

R: Umm. I didn't like it by the river last time.

No, you weren't keen on that.

R: But I liked it. It gave me a sore bum though. *Smiles. Gentle laughter.*

Is there anything you are especially looking forward to?

R: Yeah. For somebody not to hold the string. *Pause.* But not quite yet.

Not quite yet, but you'd like to ride round by yourself with maybe somebody walking a little bit further away from you than they have been?

R: *Nods her head in agreement.*

Is there anything you don't like the idea of?

R: *Shakes her head.*

So, if we take it slowly with you then you'll be happy with that? That's great. Are you happy to complete the self-esteem chart again?

R: *Nods assent.*

Based on the fact that this process required extensive explanation by her key worker in the first interview, the statements are read aloud.

1. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.

R: Four. Because I got on a horse.

2. At times I think I am no good at all (Reverse item).

R: Sometimes, so I'll say two.

3. I think that I have a number of good qualities.

R: Sometimes, so I'll say two.

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

R: Depends what it is.

Yes, let's say it is just about the horses then.

R: Umm, three.

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of (Reverse item).

R: No. *Pause.* I do, so one. *Said immediately and with great conviction.*

You do have a lot of things to be proud of?

R: *Nods*

So, in this question four means disagree. I'm going to put that as a four, if that's OK.

R: *Nods*

6. I certainly feel useless at times (Reverse item).

R: Sometimes, when I get upset. Not all the time though.

But sometimes you do. So, would that be a three or a two?

R: Two.

7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

R needs to have this statement explained in detail, about people's global skills and vulnerabilities. She then readily rates herself as four.

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself (Reverse item).

R: Sometimes, two.

9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure (Reverse item).

R: No. One.

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

R: Sometimes.

Sometimes? So, would that be a two or a three?

R: Three.

(End of Rosenberg)

How do horses make you feel about yourself?

R: Good. *Said confidently.*

You feel really good about that? You feel good about yourself?

R: Yeah.

Does that feeling carry on after you've been here?

R: Yeah. I go straight home and tell my family.

Do you? Are they interested to hear about what you've been doing?

R: Yeah.

Do they believe you?

R: Sometimes.

So, you tell them what you've been doing?

R: *Nods her head and smiles.*

So, you've got really good reasons to feel proud of yourself.

R: *Nods her head and smiles.*

The interview material was complemented by field notes taken at the same session, which further supported and consolidated my understanding of the impact of 'The Horse Course'. The following excerpt from the research assistant's field notes is indicative both of the changes in Rose, and also of how the data gathering might progress:

Rose's second interview is charming. She stood throughout the session on one side of the hatch in the Portakabin while I stood on the other side. This was her choice and seemed to work well. She said some lovely things about herself and her hopes and ambitions for the course. I think we need to push on with those next time and encourage her to do even more than she thinks possible without putting her under any stress.

I love the fact that she goes and tells her family all about what she has been doing. Maybe that's something we need to be asking at the last interview stage? Questions like:

- *Who else have you talked to about the course and what you have achieved?*
- *How did they respond?*
- *How has that made you feel?*

It's on the edge of the transferable skills element, I think, the ways in which young people merge their isolated experiences within a therapeutic environment to their everyday world. The integration

process starts with sharing it with others who have little or no knowledge of that experience and possibly can be measured to some extent by the way in which those outsiders respond to the young person (RA, session four).

Later, in the final stages of analysis I reflected on this, and also on another impromptu conversation with Rose that I had recorded in my field notes after the fourth session.

Rose was smoking a cigarette at the gate as I left the premises. I could see that she was distressed by the way she had excluded herself from the group and was now avoiding eye contact, and yet I was also aware from her position at the gate (I had to pass her) and her body language, that she seemed keen to engage me in conversation. So much so, that although I knew I would be late for a work meeting, I stayed with Rose for a while. I think I sensed that this could be an important interaction. She asked where I was going and where I worked. When I mentioned the area of town, she told me she had been fostered there once and that 'they were nice'. She told me that she had been in and out of the care system since infancy and how happy she had been to have her own supported accommodation, and that it was not far from her mother's house. Sadly, she also expressed distress that her desire to establish a closer relationship with her mother was not reciprocated (Researcher, session 4).

Rose's accounts of both her experiences in the Looked After System, and what seemed to be disrupted attachments with her mother and family, were difficult to hear without expressing concern. However, doing so might have stopped what was a significant act of sharing for Rose and so listening quietly and supportively was very important. In effect, I behaved like Tilly the horse, staying calm and still, and so encouraging Rose's discussion and self-exploration. Although technically an adult, Rose was a very vulnerable young woman, still working through the significant impact of the adverse experiences she had faced during childhood.

Rose completed the full programme (18 hours of contact time). With support from the interviewers, she evaluated herself using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale at three intervals (see Table 6). She rated herself as feeling more satisfied with herself, better able to do things as well as others, feeling more equal to others, less of a failure, and with a significantly more positive attitude towards herself. In contradiction, she would have rated herself as having *less* to be proud of, but this can be explained as a confused response because of the reverse scoring design. As illustrated in the transcript from Rose's second interview, items five and six required explanation. Overall, it was clear to see from her actual experience, alongside the main thrust of the rated items, that Rose's achievements during the course made significant improvements to her self-esteem and confidence.

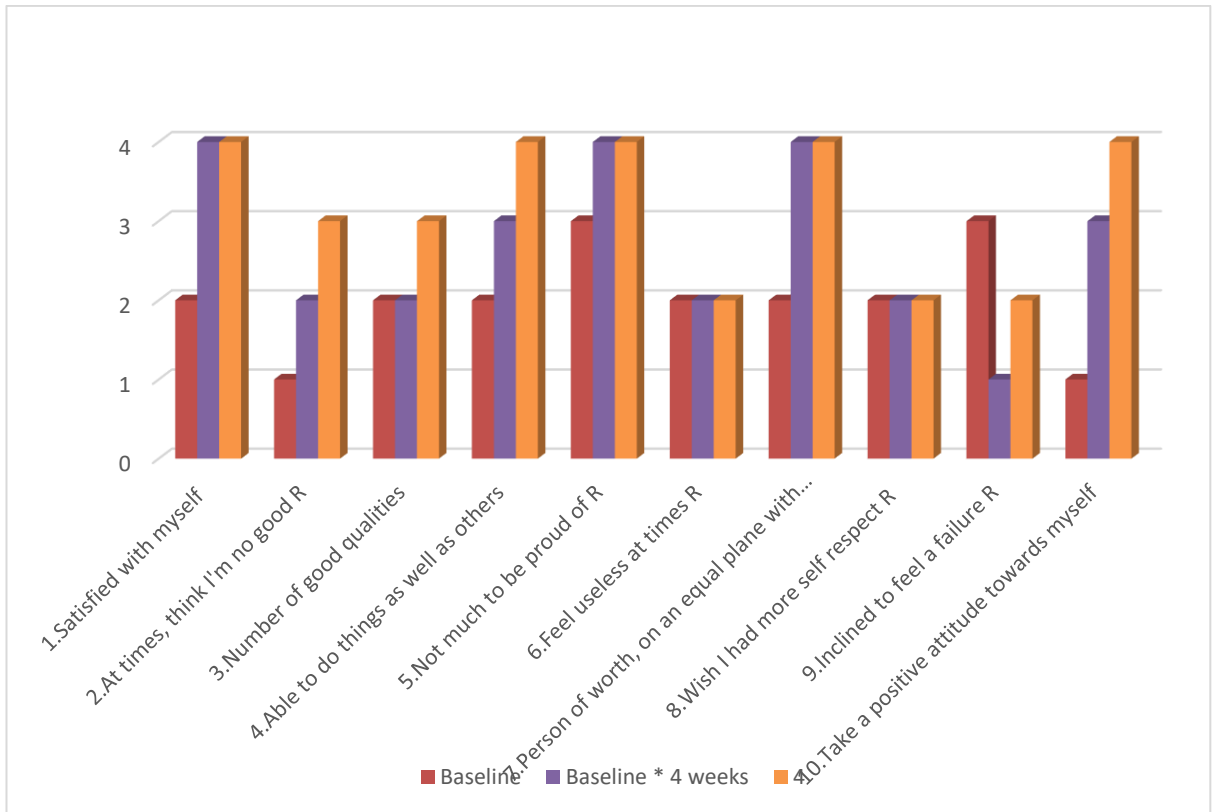


Figure 20. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Rose.

Table 6. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons - Rose.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
20	22.79 (5.41)		27	22.79 (5.41)		32	-	
Key:								
Severity Level		Score		Code				
High		25-40						
Normal		16-25						
Low		0-15						

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 20

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = -0.515$
One-tailed probability = 0.304
Two-tailed probability = 0.607

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 30.36%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 25.96%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 34.97%

Figure 21. Further comparison with norms – Rose - Baseline.

Rose's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.607$). Only 30.36% of the reference population scored below Rose's score.

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 32

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 1.699$
One-tailed probability = 0.045
Two-tailed probability = 0.090

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 95.48%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 93.47%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 97.07%

Figure 22. Further comparison with norms – Rose – Post-experience.

Rose's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.090$). 95.48% of the reference population scored below Rose's score. This improvement in self-esteem appeared to be very considerable.

4.2.4 Emily (Cohort 1)

Emily presented as a very articulate, thoughtful individual who, in interviews, always gave considered responses and often expanded upon her theme. She approached the idea of the course as an entirely positive opportunity. She said she felt inspired. Her desire to learn and make the most of this opportunity was very apparent in the way she engaged with the focus group learning materials, which were often in the form of handouts. Emily consistently brought back her learning to subsequent sessions. Her attitude did not waver throughout. She reported a love of animals but limited experience of contact with horses. She was initially nervous of being near the horses but her desire to embrace the whole experience helped her to overcome that, as shown in Figures 23 and 24 where, with support, she successfully mounted and rode for the first time. She came on the course feeling it was going to be the chance of a lifetime, but was realistic enough to accept that this was something that was probably not going to extend beyond the time of the course unless she was able to find an opportunity to volunteer at stables near to where she lived.



Figure 23. Emily mounting Boo

In her second interview, it became clear that the experience of being with the horses had brought about a seminal change in Emily's self-perception and caused her to think about how she presented to others. When asked, after four weeks, about her thoughts on the course, she responded saying that she was aware that she needed to be more assertive. She described herself initially as being 'meek' and needing to be "sterner" or "firmer" in her manner, or she could see herself being "pushed over". Her experience of practical tasks around the horses had revealed her tendency to be more passive in her manner than she would have liked.



Figure 24. Emily clearly enjoying her ride on Boo.

This movement away from passivity was illustrated when discussing riding too. For instance, Emily connected self-awareness with a wider understanding of both horse and environment, stating that,

When I did diagonals, I had to be more self-aware. I had to be looking around and obviously looking at the legs of the horse. I had to be more

aware of things around me and self-aware of how I am in relation to things around me.

Emily extended these insights and transferred them to the world of work. She appreciated the need to be more assertive and how this will help her “further on in life as well”. Her ability to project into other arenas the knowledge and insights she had gained from her equine experiences is encapsulated in her following response to the question about her view of the course:

‘Cos, if I was, like, to do work or go into business and I need to put forward ideas, if I act fairly meek about it, I don’t think I’m going to have confidence in my ideas if I go out dead mousey and shy. So, I’ll just get pushed around, no one will listen to me, no one will take me seriously.

During and between sessions, Emily had also been thinking about how best to manage the tasks of grooming and riding, and made a direct link between the need to be assertive with the horses in order for them to feel “comfortable” to comply. Her schema implied that she saw a symbiotic relationship between the human and the horse, one that requires the human to take the lead initially, so the horse feels confident enough to enter into the partnership.

In her final interview, she described a distinct difference between demanding obedience from the horse and exuding personal confidence that generates a willingness in the horse to engage in the partnership. She carefully chose her words using the phrase, “They feel comfortable enough to allow me to do it” to describe how the horses respond to her assertiveness. She recognised that their size and physical power means they could easily dominate her, but that they choose to enter the partnership because of her confidence-giving behaviour with them. A week after this interview, Emily was interviewed for an internship with a major legal agency. She was accompanied by her tutor and interviewed by the most senior officer in the legal agency. Her tutor fed back that Emily had been both articulate and appropriately confident in her responses, and Emily was awarded a much prized internship.

Emily attended the full 18 hours of The Horse Course. She confidently and independently opted to evaluate herself using the RSES at three intervals. Her score increased at the second interval then decreased at the third, while the qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus groups showed overall improvement. The difference at the third interval may be to do with the RSES being completed at The Agency. Her engagement with the course and her positive feelings about her mastery, in contrast to the RSES, is also reflected in the way that, in every photograph of Emily, whether she was aware of it being taken or not, she was smiling.

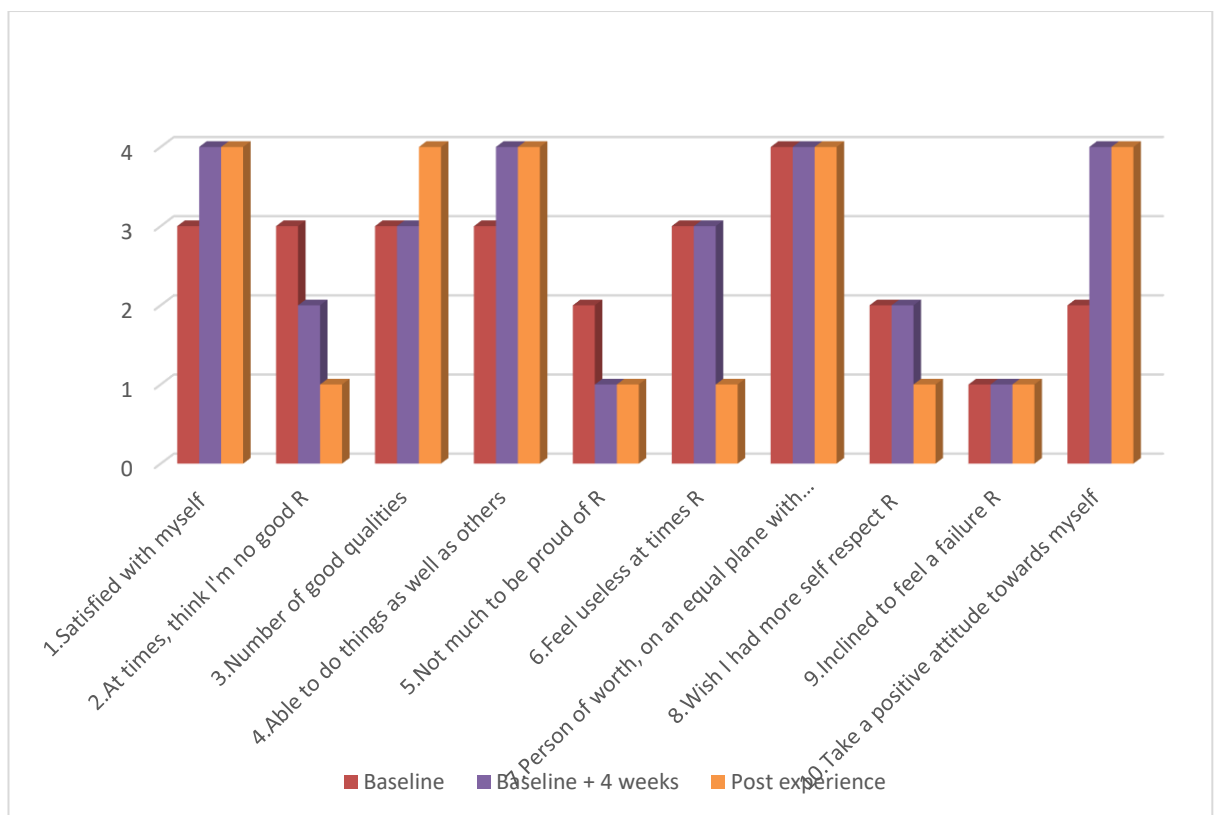


Figure 25. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Emily.

Table 7. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons – Emily.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
26	22.79 (5.41)		28	22.79 (5.41)		25	22.79 (5.41)	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score			Code		
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
 Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
 Sample size of the normative sample= 261
 Individual's test score= 26

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: t = 0.592
 One-tailed probability = 0.277
 Two-tailed probability = 0.554

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 72.29%
 95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 67.77%
 95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 76.56%

Figure 26. Further comparison with norms – Emily – Baseline.

Emily's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.554$). Only 72.29% of the reference population scored below Emily's score.

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 25

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.408$
One-tailed probability = 0.342
Two-tailed probability = 0.684

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 65.81%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 61.10%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 70.35%

Figure 27. Further comparison with norms – Emily – Post-experience.

Emily's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.684$). 65.81% of the reference population scored below Emily's score. On the face of it, this would appear to represent a modest decline in self-esteem.

4.2.5 Gillian (Cohort 1)

Gillian initially presented as very positive and confident in her approach, with a 'can do' attitude, but she was the most defensive participant in relation to her engagement with the practical (non-riding) elements of the course, appearing distant and tired at times. When her riding was being observed or when it was her turn to try out a new riding skill, she developed the habit of giggling. At first this was responded to as an attractive, almost endearing behaviour but as time went by and the lesson sessions developed, it became clear that it irritated the other young people. However, as her confidence grew over the course (she attended every session) this behaviour diminished considerably.

Gillian had experienced a great deal of upheaval and conflict in her life by the age of 17, having attended over fifteen different schools during her primary and secondary years. These frequent changes in her social life and her family's situation had profound effects upon, among other things, her tolerance of frustration. She openly admitted to having difficulties containing her anger at times, both at home and elsewhere. This was one element of her behaviour that she noticed changed during 'The Horse Course'. During the early weeks of the course, she recounted having a conversation with her mother about it. Gillian had recognised that she had needed to develop strategies to manage her frustration when working with the horses and realised that this newly acquired skill had developed in other areas of her life. In her second interview, she reflected:

...it's a very good way to, like, not be so angry and when you spend time with horses. What's the word I'm looking for, you just let it all out and you don't get angry.

She related her new ability to manage the effects of frustration to the way that being with horses enabled her to relax more, possibly because the situation required her to be calmer than she usually was. She said that although she still felt anger inside, even that had diminished and she no longer got as angry as she used to. Gillian struggled to think of words to explain accurately her

experience and decided that, "I don't know what the word is, it's not a healing process but it just helps you" was the best way to describe it.

During the first interview, she spoke about her sense of inferiority within her family culture. Her need to feel better about herself was reflected in her view of the horses and her ability to ride them. She frequently associated the pleasure she derived from riding with the size of the horse; the bigger the better (see Figure 28). She described feeling,

...like a legend being on top of them. You feel so big. You feel like a boss because you're so big. I like being on a big horse. I feel massive... I feel better than everyone else!

This feeling is underpinned by the sense of power that being on a horse gave her. She repeatedly described the relationship between their size and her sense of power as follows:

The big ones look quite muscular. That's what I like about the big ones. ...Like a stallion... You feel really big on top of them. You feel powerful, like you can control everyone. You can look down on them... They can't look down on you.



Figure 28. Gillian smiling broadly, riding Teddy and feeling "like a legend".

Her view of being on the ground with horses was very different. She was afraid that she would be trampled. If anything, the disparity between her different perspectives supports the benefits she derived from riding as opposed to those derived from grooming and other activities with horses on the ground. However, in Figure 29, taken further into the programme, her body language shows her increased confidence on the ground when leading a horse.

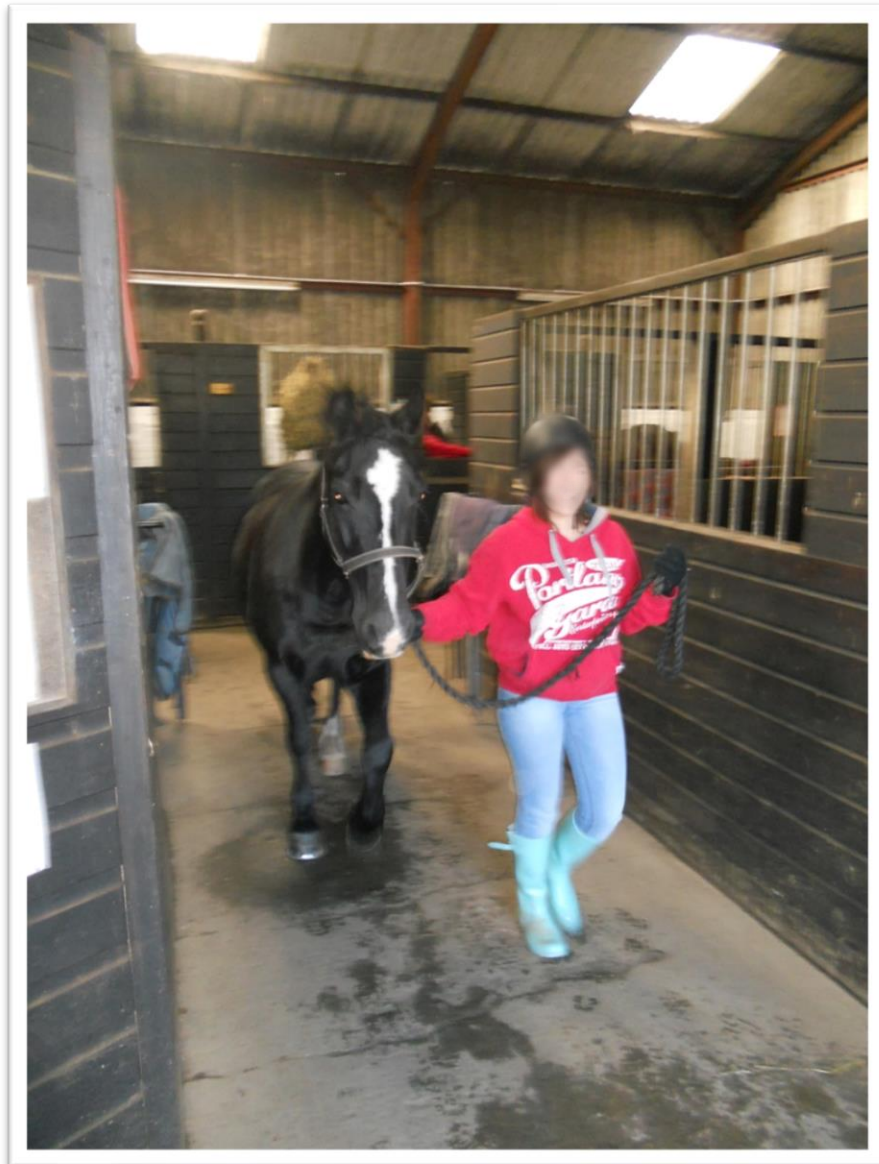


Figure 29. Gillian leading Rosie confidently and correctly

Gillian attributed her sense of inferiority as stemming from her family culture. It was her view that her brother was her parents' favourite. She said:

They favour him... a lot. It's always my brother instead of me because he's older and he's the only boy... he's the only boy in the whole entire family. So he's like the special one.

This explicit favouritism left Gillian feeling less valued and she admitted to a tendency to "...always put myself down. Why can't I be like my brother, the

smart one?” Although profoundly affected by her family’s attitude, she recognised that there was little she could do about it and that she would have to make her own way in the world. Her determined attitude is illustrated in her description of the injustice of the situation and her response to it: “[It’s] not even just the mental, but it’s the physical as well. He gets tons of things and I go, I’ll just go and get a job and get my own things.”

She swiftly recognised the kudos to be gained from ‘The Horse Course’, not least because nobody in her family participated in any outdoor activities. In constructing the research programme, the researcher had been mindful of the balance to be struck between offering a unique opportunity, possibly something the participants would not be able to continue after the course, and the challenges inherent within the novelty of the different horse-related experiences. Gillian, however, framed it in a very different context. For her, this was something nobody in her family knew about and it was, therefore, an opportunity for her to bring something to the family table that was entirely new and belonged exclusively to her. This was her chance to shine in their eyes. In the third interview, Gillian explained how she had been using her experiences on the course to gain respect from her family as follows.

Excerpt from interview three with Gillian (G)

Note: Italicised elements represent actions, information deleted, or observations.

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout). So when people go away from a session, they still feel...?

G: That good feeling and brag about it, saying, yes I rode a horse and I’m so good at it and the photos prove it.

Was that something that you found useful for you, that you could go away and tell other people about it?

G: I would go home and tell my Mum how good I was and when I took the certificate, I said, ‘Look what I have!’ and she said, ‘Oh that’s from The

Horse Course!' and I said, 'Yes!' and I was showing everyone, saying look at me I was on The Horse Course.

Was that something no one else in your family had done?

G: No one in my family had ever done that. They're not as outgoing as me.

So they're not outdoorsy people?

G: No. Well actually they are, but my family are not keen on different sorts of animals, they have cats and dogs.

So this is quite exceptional within your family, for you to have sessions with big animals like a horse.

G: So back in [*previous home area*] they have [*lists other, smaller animals*]. We had experience around them animals but, like, a completely different animal like a horse, it wasn't like, no one in my family would do that.

So, it was a unique experience within your family?

G: Yeah. So I could brag!

...and tell them how good you were?

G: Yeah.

Do you still feel good about it?

G: Yes. I want to ride another horse.

...and get that feeling again?

G: Yes.

Finally, the praise Gillian received from the instructor was a highly significant aspect of her overall experience. Although a relative stranger to her, the instructor's expertise was very apparent and whenever she praised Gillian, it

was in the context of the group and for achieving a riding skill they were all attempting. The context and the medium were both influential factors in the meaning of the praise for Gillian. She thought this sort of experience would be especially useful for people who were depressed and explained her view as follows:

It's like when you're riding a horse and you're doing something good then [name of the instructor] will say something like 'Good job, Gillian' and you feel, right, and you keep doing it and she says, 'Good job, Gillian' and you, like, get a buzz from it. And you feel really good about yourself. So, I think it would be really good for people like that because when you're feeling really low and down and bad about themselves and they get lifted.

Gillian valued the instructor's praise so much that she made even greater efforts to be "noticed so [she] would get more."

The effect upon her self-esteem was one of the paramount benefits for Gillian. She recognised it herself, enjoyed it and spoke about how other people who had similar needs would readily connect with the positive elements that contact with horses provided. So great was the effect upon her that she no longer felt the need to use make-up as the confidence-boosting mask it had been for her beforehand. In her final interview she said:

I used to think that you had to look good and when you go horse riding, you mess up your hair, you mess up your make-up and all of that, so you don't have to look good, so now I don't really bother any more... Usually you cover yourself up with make-up and do your hair and everything and now, like, it's, you know, like it doesn't really matter. It's what I think not what other people think.

The positive effect of 'The Horse Course' experience on Gillian's self-esteem is consistently evident in the qualitative data from interviews, focus groups and photographs. However, while improved scores are indicated in items five, six, eight and nine of the RSES, item three showed a decrease. The remaining five

items started and finished with the same scores, with items one and ten dipping in the second interview. Overall, according to the RSES, Gillian's self-esteem score decreases significantly. It is impossible to know in hindsight what her understanding of the scoring was, but it is interesting to note that the improvements were all in response to reversely scored items. Another possible influence on scores, which applies to all participants, is that the final interview was carried out at The Agency centre, while interviews one and two were held at the riding school. Yet this is not consistent across the sample. Some increase, some decrease and others stay the same on the final interview stage.

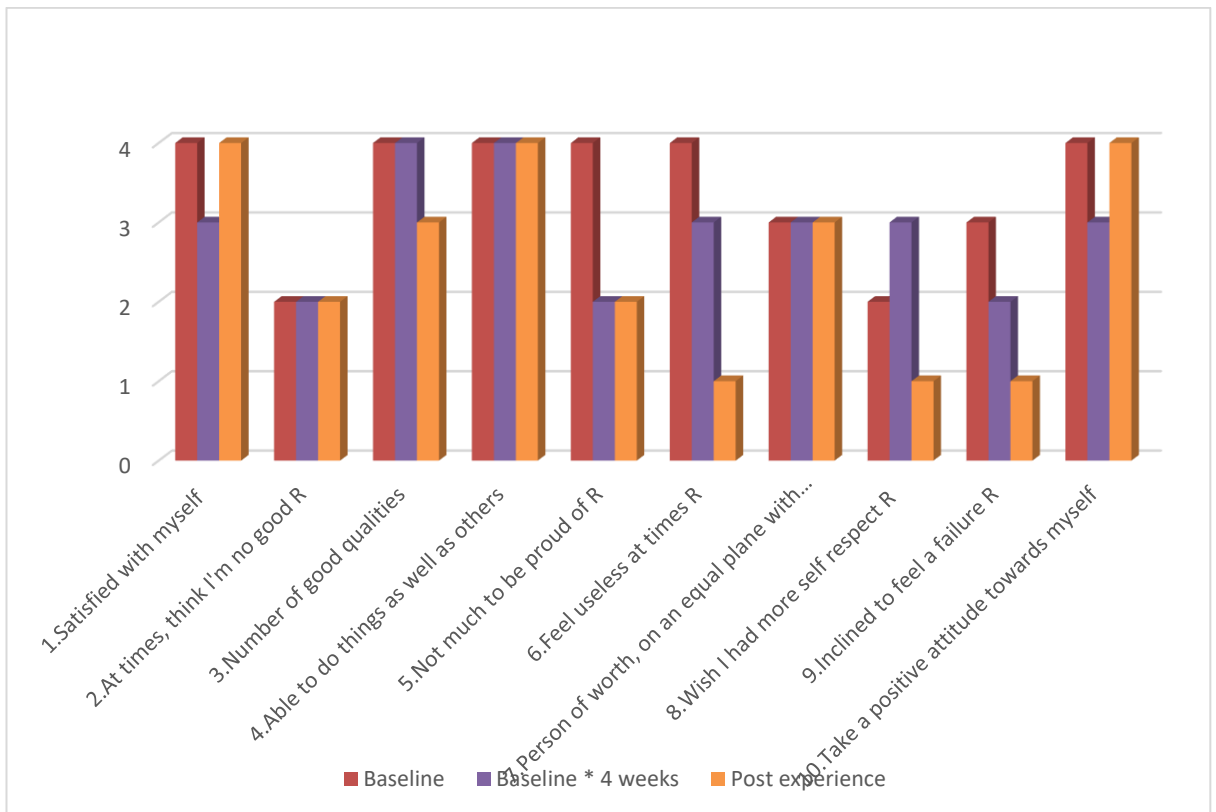


Figure 30. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Gillian.

Table 8. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons - Gillian.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
34	22.79 (5.41)		29	22.79 (5.41)		25	22.79 (5.41)	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score		Code			
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
 Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
 Sample size of the normative sample= 261
 Individual's test score= 34

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 2.068$
 One-tailed probability = 0.020
 Two-tailed probability = 0.040

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 98.02%
 95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 96.83%
 95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 98.89%

Figure 31. Further comparison with norms – Gillian - Baseline.

Gillian's score significantly differed from the reference group ($P \leq 0.040$), calling into question the comparability of this particular reference group and invalidating any post-hoc comparison.

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.41
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 25

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.408$
One-tailed probability = 0.342
Two-tailed probability = 0.684

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 65.81%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 61.10%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 70.35%

Figure 32. Further comparison with norms – Gillian – Post-experience.

Gillian's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.684$). 65.81% of the reference population scored below Gillian's score. On the face of it, this would appear to represent a decline in self-esteem. However, note the possible unreliability of the baseline observation reported above.

4.2.6 Adam (Cohort 1)

Adam's social skills and natural sensitivity to the needs of others, and consequently the horses, shone through from the first meeting. That this was an integral part of who he is was demonstrated consistently at every session and with every horse he was asked to work with and rode. He was enthusiastic about each task and each riding skill. He also accepted times when he was not readily able to achieve and kept on trying. His positivity extended to being interested in the achievements of others, with an element of hopefulness about what was possible for himself in light of how others had progressed. He described how being on top of a horse made him feel powerful "like a boss".

In his initial interview, Adam readily recognised a horse's capacity to appreciate and respond to a person's emotional state. Adam defined this communication as horses being able to "understand ... your feelings. It's like that little bond... It's good, like having a good little friend". He was surprised and delighted that horses could assess a person's mood, and his acceptance and response to this awareness helped him to develop verbal and non-verbal communication pathways with the horses, which in turn helped him to feel more secure and confident around them. In his second interview, after the third session, Adam talks even more deeply about his understanding of 'human-to-horse-to-human communication'.

They probably know more about you than you think. They know from how you're acting. And the same about us, we know more about them from how they're acting. We know more about them than they may think, or other people may think.

Adam's insights and willingness to believe in and act upon this concept deepened his experience of being with the horses and added another dimension to achievements, because he attributed his successes, in part, to the horse's willingness to enter into the partnership that underpinned each activity.

The theme of confidence was reinforced by Adam's experience of being on a horse and being able to control it. He said of his first experience of riding that he was "surprised" by how he was able to do it and that the ability to do so, "gives you more confidence, because you're sat on the back of a big horse and you're in control of it." Throughout this initial period, Adam commented directly and indirectly on the need for a relationship between the rider and the horse. He developed this theme in conjunction with the tenets of attachment theory, inasmuch as he perceived this to be a two-way process in which the initiative is taken by the rider, and the horse's response, as interpreted by the rider, determines the rider's subsequent response. This sequence of reciprocal sensitivity is the foundation of the dyadic partnership: it is a dynamic flow of communication, which forms the psychological secure base upon which the rider can build, thereby extending his experience and developing more skills.

Adam openly shared his view of himself as seemingly confident but inwardly having serious doubts about his abilities. He expressed this by saying "Yeah, 'cos I know that sometimes I come across as confident, but I'm not really that confident..." His self-confidence was a major theme for him throughout the sessions. In his second interview, he spoke of the way in which he had been able to transfer the thoughts and feelings generated by his achievements on the course to other situations and how this had boosted his self-confidence, saying, "Yeah, if you're struggling to do things and you think back and if you're confident around a big horse and that, then you can achieve things."

This remained a significant theme for Adam, who, in his third interview talked openly about the connections he made between his experiences of being with the horses and learning about himself. In particular, Adam relates some of this to going out on a hack.

About myself, from myself point of view, being more confident around the horses, doing like the hooves and brushing them and going out on hacks and along the streets so, yeah, building my confidence with horses and being around them, so learning about them... Being

confident around the horses and being on the roads... I know that I might come across as confident but I'm not really, 100%, so it helped me in that sort of way. So, before I wouldn't go near a horse in case it kicked or whatever, so now, yeah.

In his final interview, Adam reviewed the meaning of the course and saw it as having lasting value. He said, "I'm glad I did this because it's not something I'd done before. As time goes on and I get older, I'll know that I've done things with horses."

The course presented as an opportunity to test his ability to expose himself to novelty and try new ways of managing perceived risks. Adam described the course in positive terms, as follows,

I think it's good to get people used to animals and helps you with your confidence. It's something new, something you've never done before, like challenging, isn't it, challenging yourself.

To return to earlier in the course, after having had one session of instruction and riding, Adam set himself an achievable goal and celebrated what he had done so far. This goal setting was a reflection of his already growing confidence.

It would be good to be able to trot properly and do all the other kind of stuff. It would be brilliant because I've come from nothing... I don't really know, like, how hard it is do them sort of things, so we've done quite a bit today and probably done more than I expected.

This initial well-crafted session enabled Adam to feel secure enough to embrace a completely new situation, make the most of his experience and construct objectives entirely in keeping with his learning and self-knowledge.

This development continued throughout the course and at the end of the third session, when asked how being with horses made him feel about himself, Adam said that he and others should,

Be more proud of yourself. It's like dogs, if you're close to a dog then you've got a friend. You feel more proud of yourself. This is the only thing I've done with horses and it's a good experience to ride different horses every week with their different personalities.

Adam's previous experience of bonding with a dog as a friend was the closest example he had at that point to the experience of the course. Indeed, there are many comparisons to be drawn between dog-human and horse-human relationships and partnerships. However, he also recognised the differences between the two sorts of human/animal relationships because of the confidence-giving issues relating to the size of horses and the control associated with riding a horse. The 'coming together as one' during riding can be characterised as an example of 'kinaesthetic empathy'. He valued and enjoyed his achievements and shared them with friends and family.

I told a couple of my mates. Well, I was joking at first, like, because obviously I'd never been around the horses, but I said. Me Mum said, 'Did you enjoy it?' and I said, 'Yeah. I'll show you some photos of me on a big horse and that'.

The size of the horses was a key factor in the way in which Adam and others on the course assessed their achievements. This underscores the significant difference inherent within work with horses and work with, for example, dogs or other small animals. The magnitude of the individual's achievements had a direct bearing on their perception of the risk entailed within the exercise. This is clearly related to the perceived physical power of the horse, and the rider's ability to engage and develop a partnership of trust and co-operation with the horse.

Adam summed up his experience of the course as follows,

It's like you have the opportunity to try something once, the chance of a lifetime, so it's always good to take the opportunity when it comes. Obviously, it's helped me with my confidence, doing things I'd never done before and also which I've done quite good, you know. Then I can bring it back to doing other things which I haven't done before, obviously around people.

He saw that there was a relationship between the extraordinary experience of the course and his usual life, and also felt that he could transfer the benefits of the experience to other aspects of his life. His ability to reflect upon and integrate those benefits demonstrated an intuitive sensitivity to the value of the course, both in his current situation and its potential to influence his self-perception and choices in the future.

In the first interview, while considering whether he was satisfied with himself (item one of the RSES), Adam suggested that he would like to change “some things” about the way he looked. He said that he was satisfied but considered himself “quite small”. This, and his preference for big horses, were recurring themes for Adam. In his final interview, he reflected, “I like the big ones really, they make you look bigger”. In the second focus group, he mentioned twice how he had learned about the importance of good posture.



Figure 33. Adam with Chunky (Adam's first ride).



Figure 34. Adam and Molly. "You feel more proud of yourself".

The shift in Adam’s sense of self can also be seen in the photographs that were taken as part of the research. The group had the authority to veto images that were to be used in a PowerPoint about ‘The Horse Course’ and he asked that the image of him in Figure 33 be removed from the presentation and Figure 34 substituted. This was because he felt the former did not fully reflect his achievements. Subsequent analysis of the photograph in question indicated that it was his hunched over body language that was the issue for him, as it suggested a lack of confidence that he no longer felt around horses.

His self-ratings in the reversely scored items contradict the qualitative data, which clearly indicates improvements in his confidence and self-image, possibly due to the confusing nature of the RSES. Nevertheless, Adam’s overall self-esteem score increased from 21 to 26.

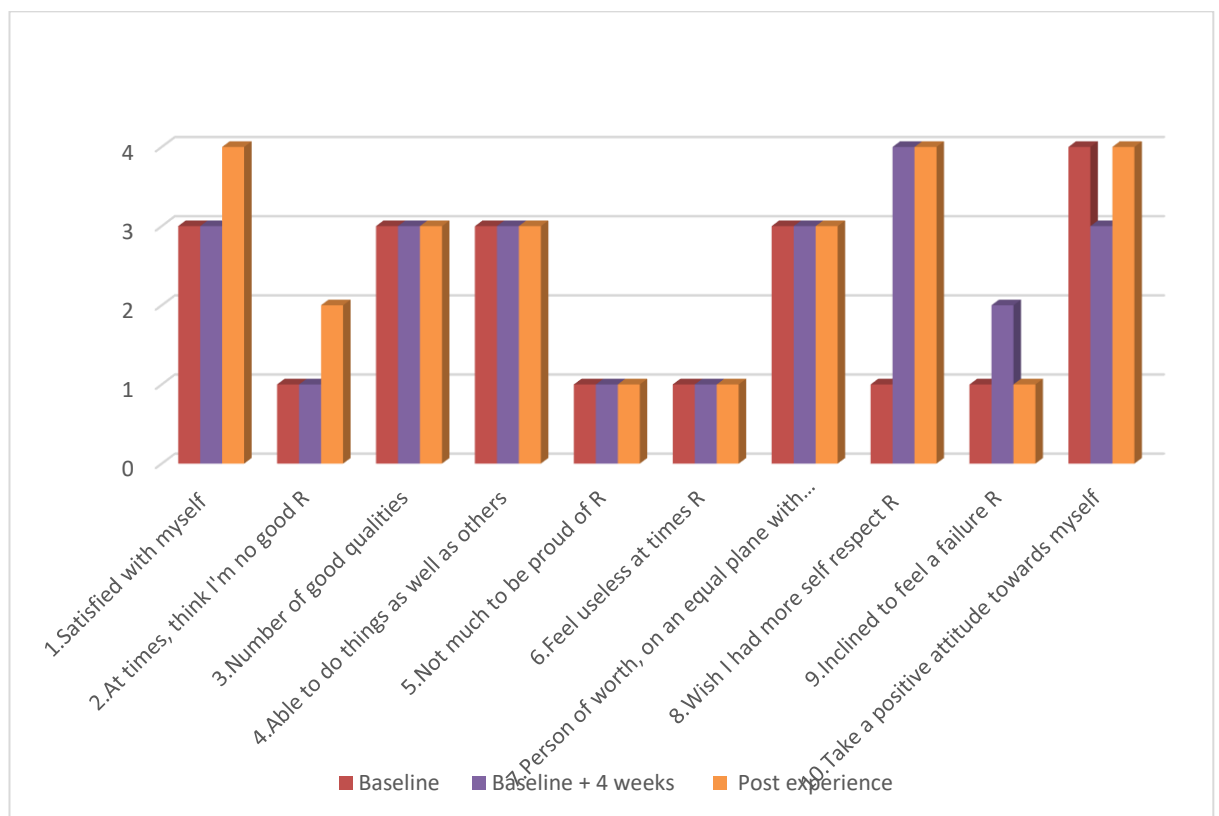


Figure 35. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Adam.

Table 9. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons - Adam.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
21	22.43 (6.21)		23	22.43 (6.21)		26	22.43 (6.21)	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score		Code			
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.43
 Standard deviation for the normative sample= 6.21
 Sample size of the normative sample= 242
 Individual's test score= 21

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = -0.230$
 One-tailed probability = 0.409
 Two-tailed probability = 0.818

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 40.92%
 95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 36.03%
 95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 45.92%

Figure 36. Further comparison with norms – Adam - Baseline.

Adam's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.818$). Only 40.92% of the reference population scored below Adam's score.

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.43
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 6.21
Sample size of the normative sample= 242
Individual's test score= 24

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.252$
One-tailed probability = 0.401
Two-tailed probability = 0.801

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 59.95%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 54.96%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 64.82%

Figure 37. Further comparison with norms – Adam – Post-experience.

Adam's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.801$). 59.95% of the reference population scored below Adam's score. This improvement in self-esteem appeared to be considerable.

4.2.7 Ash (Cohort 2)

Ash was very enthusiastic about 'The Horse Course'. From the first session, he expressed a clear love for outdoor activities, including quad biking, fishing and hunting for rabbits with dogs and ferrets. He had some previous experience of horses through his father, who had owned a horse once and who had friends in the Traveller community, although Ash had only ever ridden ponies bareback in a field. Ash was very open about his past life experiences, including the fact that he has spent some time in young offenders' institutions for minor offences. A significant speech impairment meant that he sometimes struggled to form words, but this did not appear to affect his willingness to take part in the study. At the end of the course, Ash reaffirmed his love of being outdoors and said he was going to apply for a part time job at a farm.

A key aspect of Ash's response to 'The Horse Course' was the development of insight. During the first interview, Ash indicated that he was able to recognise and name the horses' feelings, explaining how they have their "ears back when grumpy and forward when excited". He seemed to have a natural affinity with them and considered them to be as insightful as humans:

Like, it's strange because a horse knows how you are and you just have to look at the horse to know how it is. Me dad's friends are gypsies and that, and they do all the horses and carts and there was a horse, I can't remember the name of it, but it were like come from a bad place and it was distraught and it like, as soon as you stroked it, it was crazy all the time. I think that horses can remember bad times.

In the final interview he continued these reflections:

Say if you're scared, the horse will know you're scared. The same as if you give up confidence, like I did a bit last time, then the horse can tell and it starts... They can tell what you think. They just know. The horse can just sense it.

Ash also had significant moments of experiencing and celebrating success. For instance, in the second focus group at the end of session two, Ash described

the biggest horse as 'calm'. He said he felt "proud" of himself for what he had achieved this week and that some of what he had experienced riding some time ago was "starting to come back to me". He looked very happy with himself and spoke positively about his experience of doing rise and trot.

In the second interview, Ash said that his parents and his girlfriend were interested in horses and also in his experience of the course, stating that, "They are pleased for me. They think I'm getting out and doing something I enjoy... and because it gets us a qualification".



Figure 38. Ash confidently picking out Boo's feet.

Ash was also comfortable and confident when working with horses on the ground, indicated through his relaxed body language (Figure 38). Ash's level of engagement was indicated by the way that he thought in advance about the forthcoming sessions of 'The Horse Course' after each finished. After session one, for instance, Ash said that he was looking forward to riding again and that he had asked his dad for a horse. His confidence was shown in the way that he set himself achievable goals each time. For example, after session four, he was clearly feeling confident as he expressed a desire to "canter more" and to "do a couple of jumps".

Ash's process of reflection, thinking ahead and setting goals was supported by the way that each week, the participants were given learning resources to review between sessions. These took a number of forms, for example, a diagram of a horse with labelled body parts, or a list of tack and riding equipment or some examples of horse breeds. Levels of engagement with these learning resources varied, but every session, without fail, Ash had read and memorised all of the material and offered his thoughts on it to the group.

Throughout the course, there was evidence in the data of Ash's development of personal insight. When asked what he thought about horses in the first interview, Ash commented,

I think they're the most greatest creatures to ride, better than a donkey because you get more joy out of it. Being with horses makes me feel like I'm just calm and that all of me problems just go... until I'm back home.

The only thing I'm afraid of, because it happened before, it shouldn't happen, erm, I was about 13 on a pony and someone chucked something and the horse 'went off it', and it was that [gesture] far to standing on me face.

In the second interview, insight was shown at a number of points, for instance when Ash expressed his preference for bigger horses (as shown in Figure 39).

Excerpt from interview two (session four) with Ash (A)

A: I prefer bigger horses because I'm strong enough to handle the horse.

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout). So the bigger horse helps you to feel stronger as well?

A: Yes, then it makes me more comfortable as well that the smaller horses because if it's smaller then I get thoughts like, 'Oh I'm too heavy for the horse' and things like that.

So you worry about the horse? So when you're with a bigger horse, you feel more comfortable because you know that horse can carry you? What about the power of the big horses? When you're asking Tilly or Charlie to move to the side, to go faster or slower, how does that feel for you that you can actually guide the horse?

A: Just like I'm in charge of the horse. That the horse is listening.

Ash was also aware of how his experiences in and between the sessions could be seen as contributing to his transferable skills. Indeed, in the first interview, after only one session, Ash commented on 'The Horse Course',

It's good, 'cos it gives you all the qualifications at the same time and I enjoy it. And say, later on in life if I get a horse, then I've got like, more experience of them.



Figure 39. Ash out on a hack with Barney and feeling "more comfortable".

In the second interview, after four sessions, Ash was invited to reflect on how he felt when he started the course and how that compared to how he felt now. He replied, "I feel more confident now, like I can trust them more and I feel like I'm targeting my goals and I'm achieving them". When asked if he thought he could use this confidence in other situations. He said, "I can use it with different things, not just with horses, like when I feel scared I can conquer that... I can get to a stage where I want to be".

Ash's confidence was such that he felt able to ask for guidance and help in relation to the reverse scores as he evaluated himself using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale at each of the three intervals. It was clear that he did not fully understand the scoring system but knew to face his worry about it and ask for support. Given his capacity for reflection, he considered each statement very carefully before responding. As with other participants, it was impossible to know how he interpreted the scaling. He did however show improvement in his overall self-esteem score.

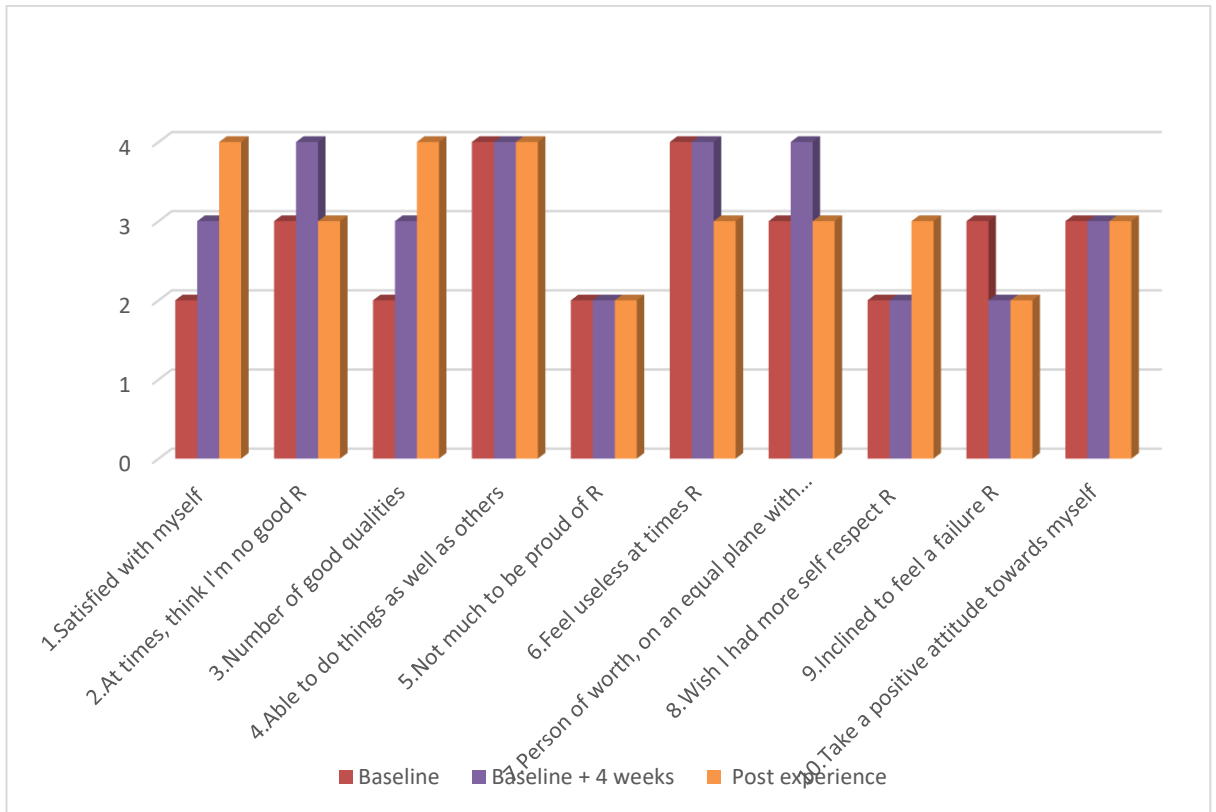


Figure 40. Rosenberg SES self-ratings – Ash.

Table 10. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons (total scores) - Ash.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
27	22.43 (6.21)		31	22.43 (6.21)		31	22.43 (6.21)	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score			Code		
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.43
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 6.21
Sample size of the normative sample= 242
Individual's test score= 27

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.734$
One-tailed probability = 0.232
Two-tailed probability = 0.463

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 76.83%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 72.35%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 80.99%

Figure 41. Further comparison with norms – Ash – Baseline.

Ash's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.463$). Only 76.83% of the reference population scored below Ash's score.

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.43
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 6.21
Sample size of the normative sample= 242
Individual's test score= 31

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 1.377$
One-tailed probability = 0.085
Two-tailed probability = 0.170

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 91.51%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 88.55%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 94.01%

Figure 42. Further comparison with norms – Ash – Post-experience.

Ash's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.170$). 91.51% of the reference population scored below Ash's score. This improvement in self-esteem appeared to be considerable.

4.2.8 Susan (Cohort 2)

Susan initially presented as very serious and rather negative. She explained how she was looking forward to the course but that there would be times when, because of a medical condition, she would not be able to get on a horse. She was reassured that this would not be a problem because there are always other activities to do with horses on the ground and also reassured that everyone would like to have her there. In a number of early conversations with me, the research assistant, other participants and volunteers, she described herself as having “a private existence”. She shared some details about her life, including how she enjoyed walking her dog and listening to music but did not like watching television. She regularly mentioned her “medical condition” but offered no details until much later in the course when she explained it to me. At the end of the first interview, Susan was very clear about how low her self-esteem was and readily completed the RSES.

Her biggest assertion and statement of confidence at this point (as indicated visually in her body language in Figure 43 and 44) was that, “Before, I was nervous and wary about horses but now I’m not. Now I could just walk up to a horse and pat them”. Indeed, as Figure 44 (where she is checking her stirrups and leg position) confirms, she successfully went on to ride as well as having built her confidence on the ground.

Susan explained that her previous fear of horses stemmed from a challenging experience that she had as a very little child. However, she recounted in interview one that a friend had introduced her to her horse more recently, and that through this encounter, she had learned to be less afraid of them, a process that the course was continuing.

A horse stood on my foot when I was little. I didn't cry. I was in shock. So I used to be a bit wary of them. But, erm, my friend had a horse that was called Woody, I think, erm, and he was a really big horse. He was huge horse, he was massive. Yes, he was massive and I was like wary around him as well and he used to come up to us

and like rub his nose on me back and on me arms and stuff and me friend, [name], said, 'Don't worry. He's just saying hallo and he likes to meet you.' And I said all right, OK.



Figure 43. Susan grooming Molly. No longer nervous or wary.



Figure 44. Susan checking her leg position on Boo.

Susan had a lot to contribute in the focus groups most of the time, but there were short periods when she was quiet and avoided eye contact. In session four, she became very upset for no apparent reason. She described feeling faint and left the session early. The following week, she reported that she had gone straight to hospital to get checked and that she felt 'gutted' about missing out on the session's riding element.

When talking about certain animals, including her own dog and one horse in particular (Tilly), Susan's whole demeanour changed. She smiled a lot and lightened her voice. She also talked a lot about how much she loved animals and how humans and animals could read one another's body language and 'energy'. Susan also described how she would feel happy and good about herself if the horse did something she wasn't expecting and she managed it well. She made some really thoughtful comments in the final interview about inter-species communication, the personalities of animals and humans, and mutual understanding.

Susan was interested in the researchers' experiences and views, and this gave her the confidence to lead the conversation, in effect interviewing the interviewer, both in a search for information and showing her increased expertise. This is demonstrated in the following conversation.

Excerpt from session four - informal conversation between the research assistant (RA) and Susan (S). Note: Italicised elements represent actions, information deleted, or observations.

S: How long have you worked with horses?

(RA): About 14 years [*mentions therapeutic background*].

S: Do you think that if you have an animal like a pet you should treat it like a baby or just treat it like a dog?

(RA): Well, like you, I think that dogs and all animals have feelings and different styles of behaviour and we accommodate that in our approach [précis].

Pause

(RA): Do you believe that horses understand what you're saying to them?

S: They certainly understand the tone and there are certain words they will understand, so if we say to a school horse, trot on, and they will understand that and trot on. They will certainly understand the tone of your voice, so if you shout at a horse because they have done something naughty or you need them to move quickly, they will react like that. But if you speak to them calmly and soothingly, then they will lower their heads and be more relaxed.

(RA): I think you're having a lot of fun on this course because you will be finding a lot of what you believe to be very, very true.

Susan's interest in 'energy' between animals and humans was a recurring theme throughout 'The Horse Course' and it became a central focus in the final interview.

Excerpt from interview three with Susan (S)

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout). Do you think humans can tell what horses are thinking or feeling?

S: Yeah. Just by their energy. I mean, erm, they may be making exactly same face, but the atmosphere is different. It's like when I go out to me dad's house, the atmosphere is awful but when I go to me mum's, it's fine.

So you think it's about their energy. So how do you know about their energy? How do you experience it?

S: You can just cut the atmosphere with a knife. It's confirmed when me dad's girlfriend comes, it stops dead. Yeah, you just feel it. It's the same

with a dog. If a dog's upset or hurt you can feel it. You know, you say, 'Oh, are you all right?' but obviously they're not going to talk back to you. They might be walking next to you and looking absolutely fine but they're actually in quite a lot of pain.

Do you think animals can tell what humans are thinking or feeling?

S: Yeah, it's just the same. Horses can read other horses, so it'll be just the same with the energy and stuff.

So horses can read people through the energy?

S: Yeah. They can tell when you're scared of them. They'll just like, erm, what's the word, like take advantage of you being scared of them because of them being bigger. It's the same with dogs. ... With them all the time and if you're scared of them, they make themselves look even bigger.

Can you think of any examples from the course where that might have happened?

S: Erm. With me when I first got on, I think it was Boo, or Storm. Storm was really naughty but when I got on Tilly, after I'd been on horses a few times and Tilly was just like... *(smiles)*.

Oh yes, I remember that. You... there was quite a little partnership going on, wasn't there? So, was that related to the energy between you?

S: Probably yeah, and probably because I'm just as moody as she is. She is... she just doesn't listen to people. She listened to me and did what I told her to do. And then, when I got on Boo, because I was trotting on Tilly then I got back onto Boo, and then I was, oh God, like, I was used to trotting on Tilly and then I got back onto Boo and I was like... *(Hand gesture to suggest small)*.

Yeah. Boo is smaller... What about the energy between you and Boo? Was that...?

S: That was OK, yeah. Umm he was like, he'd put his head down and go for grass.

Yeah, he does that. So you had to be a bit more assertive?

S: Yeah! (*Emphatically*). I use it all the time with me dogs but I used it before the course. You've just got to know how to read them and sometimes it's not that easy. Just like us they know how to hide stuff as well. They'll be like, they'll not be like 'Oh I'm in pain', they'll be like some people who are in pain and just carry on even though they'll be proper hurting. Like those who just carry on even though they've got a massive cut.

Pause

It's a dominance thing. It's the same with humans. They don't want to show their weakness. Like, my little sister's got autism and she absolutely loves animals, she's really good with animals but she can't stand people. Like, she's always being really nasty to people whereas with animals she's fine. She knows how to act around them, like she's 'Oh yeah' and she's full of cuddles for them, so I think if she could be more around animals it would bring out the, like (*indistinct word*).

So what do you think animals make of that? When you see your sister with animals, how do they respond to her?

S: Our dog, with my little sister, he lets her get away with a lot more than he should but with ordinary human beings, he just wouldn't have it.

Do you think he knows something about her?

S: I don't know, but maybe he knows that she's young and like, I told him, I always tell him beforehand that she's only little and, I don't know, he can just tell. It's like the same with a puppy like a horse with a foal, like, you've got to treat this like it was a baby, like you've got to treat the baby like it was a foal, or whatever, and be gentle...

Susan demonstrated empathy with all animals, often mentioning that they have feelings and that animals and humans could recognise one another's feelings clearly by their body language and the ways they each behave. These additional comments from interview three indicate these beliefs. Susan begins by talking about horses before expanding on her theme.

They have all the feelings we have. They have love, they have hate, they have wariness, intimidation, happiness and just... content. A bit like dogs. When dogs are wary, they put their ears back but obviously horses aren't dogs because when dogs are happy they wag their tails but horses can't do stuff like that... People say dogs don't have facial expressions but I can see facial expressions straightaway. Like, when my dog is happy I can tell straightaway that he's happy, I can tell when he's upset, so it would be the same with horses and any other animal really. They all have feelings. It's not just us that have feelings. And they can remember things that have happened to them, like, my friend's horse, well, we don't really talk anymore, but if I went to see my friend's horse again, then the horse would know who I was. I like that they're big and unpredictable, I think. Dogs are unpredictable too.

This suggests a self-esteem (resilience) marker for Susan that she has set, based on previous experiences of manageable challenge; her emotional gift to the dog and her assessment of the interactions that say human behaviour has to be adapted to be sensitive to the dog's or horse's emotional/mental state.

Susan also had a great deal to contribute to conversations and discussions about animal welfare and wellbeing. In Focus Group three, she described the harsh treatment she has seen other people give to their pets, including,

...kicking them and acting disrespectively [sic]. I feel that if you have a dog, it's your obligation to treat it with respect. My dog is older than me in dog years. We may see him as three but in dog years he sees himself as 21 and he thinks: I don't have to listen to you if you're not treating me with respect. My dog is considered a dangerous dog because he is a Staffy cross Pitbull

and people come up to me in the street and say get that dog away from me, he's dangerous. Like, when I'm out walking, the dog is minding his own business with people walking past, but people cross to the other side of the road so they don't walk past him and it's like, if you treat your dog the way you want to be treated, they wouldn't have such a bad reputation. I don't believe in training a dog with treats because then every time it did something it would expect a treat. The way we trained our dog was with fusses and kisses and cuddles so, when he gets a treat he thinks, Wow, I must have been a really good boy... You wouldn't train a child like that, you wouldn't say to a child, go to your room and then follow them up and say, 'here's a cake' or something like that. The kid does something and the kid then says, well, where's my biscuit? Dogs and horses, it's exactly the same.

In the final interview, Susan described 'The Horse Course' as "good" and said she had not come across anything like it before.

It's good to have contact with animals. They should do it for dogs as well as horses because the majority of people have dogs, but just because they have them, it doesn't mean they know how to look after them. My boyfriend's mum runs an animal rescue centre... [Susan then described the farm area and listed the range of animals and birds cared for there].

A final aspect of her interaction with 'The Horse Course' was expressed through artwork, which she brought in to share with everyone.

In Figure 45, Susan's drawing shows how mastery in her own talent as an artist is linked to her developing understanding of caring for and looking after horses. This is particularly evident in relation to the tack depicted in the image. For a beginner, saddles and bridles are often a confusion of straps and bits, but her illustration of a bridle is technically correct.



Figure 45. Susan's drawing.

This artwork also serves to suggest a self-esteem (resilience) marker for Susan that she has set, based on previous experiences of manageable challenge. To show your art to others, some of whom can be considered comparatively expert in aspects of what is depicted, shows confidence and self-esteem. This shift in Susan was also expressed in Interview three, when she spoke about the course. Despite still feeling insecure, her comments about hoping for a future involving horses and how they inspired her, were significant. In addition, an overall increase in self-esteem was indicated when Susan asked for information about stables located in her home town.

Excerpt from interview three with Susan (S)

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout) Can you say something about your self-esteem. Has the course made a difference to how you feel about yourself?

S: It's kind of knocked down a peg from yesterday, when I went to the hospital. It's not great being told that you've got like... this for the rest of your life. Sometimes you can't even get out of bed. *[She explains her physical condition]*. But I didn't feel I was in pain when I was on the horse. It's the same in a car, I don't feel as much pain in a car. It might be the pavement but I don't know, but I didn't feel as much pain on a horse as when I was walking along the road.

Pause

I get on better with animals than I do with people. Yeah. If you walk over to a horse, they don't say 'I don't like her', they say 'she's got food! Aah!'

Pause

Well, I've enjoyed it – that says a lot. There was a job for an instructor at [local riding centre] but I didn't know whether to apply or not.

Was that to train?

S: Yeah.

Wow – so you like it that much?

S: Yes.

You obviously feel very inspired! So you said at the start that you used to be wary of horses. How do you feel about them now?

S: I love them!

Well you can tell by the way you smile every time you mention the word! What about yourself? How do you feel?

S: Just the same. Just insecure.

Do you want to say any more about that?

S: No.

Okay... What is your greatest achievement so far in the course.

S: Trotting I think – just actually getting on a horse I think.

When asked to describe a horse, she replied,

You can't really, 'cos some horses are stronger than others and some could be ill so don't have the strength, then obviously there's big horses and little Shetlands, which are tiny.

When asked to describe the course, she said:

I told me mam about the course, said it was about horses. She said 'well I didn't think you liked horses'. I said 'I know' but I wanted to go into working with animals, so if they asked us to deal with horses then I'd know how. 'Cos everything else, I know how to deal with, like ferrets, guinea pigs, dogs, cats. Dogs have got to be my favourite pet. Horses rank about third or second. And I told me boyfriend. He thinks it's a good idea.

What about the horses that you've worked with?

S: I like Tilly the best [*smiles broadly*].

She's one of the biggest isn't she? (See Figure 44, although now blurred, the joy on Susan's face at riding Tilly is very evident)

S: Yeah.

So what is it about her that you like?

S: I don't know – she's lovely. I like her. She's well behaved she listened to us.

So you felt like you had a connection with her?

S: Yeah she really listened to us, but when [name] was riding her, she didn't really listen. She listened to me.

So when you're on the ground and the horse is there – how do you feel?

S: I just wanna give it a cuddle [*laughs*]. I wanna cuddle it.

And when you're on top?

S: I wanna cuddle it [*laughs*].

And any other time? What about when you're away from horses?

S: I just wanna go and cuddle them! [*Laughs again*].

There's definitely a cuddle theme going on here! How would you describe your experience to another young person who wants to do the course and is where you were six weeks ago?

S: I would say definitely do the course because it does help you to get in touch with, like, animals and that. Like, it just makes you feel happy. Like even people that don't like horses. Like, if they come on this course, they'll like horses by the end of it. They're just so lovely, the horses here. They're like, really well behaved.

Is that not horses anywhere at any time?

S: No.



Figure 46. Susan clearly enjoying her time with Tilly.

Susan was very open from the start about how insecure she felt and mentioned it many times. She evaluated herself using the RSES at three intervals. It was impossible to know how she interpreted the reverse scoring questions, as she

made it clear that she wanted to complete the scaling tool independently. The scores indicate a decrease between the first and second self-rating. This coincided with session four, when she became unwell and left early. Overall, there was an increase of two points. The movement in the self-scaling was consistent with the qualitative data recorded in the interviews and focus groups. There were similar patterns reflected in her facial expressions and body language in the photographs.

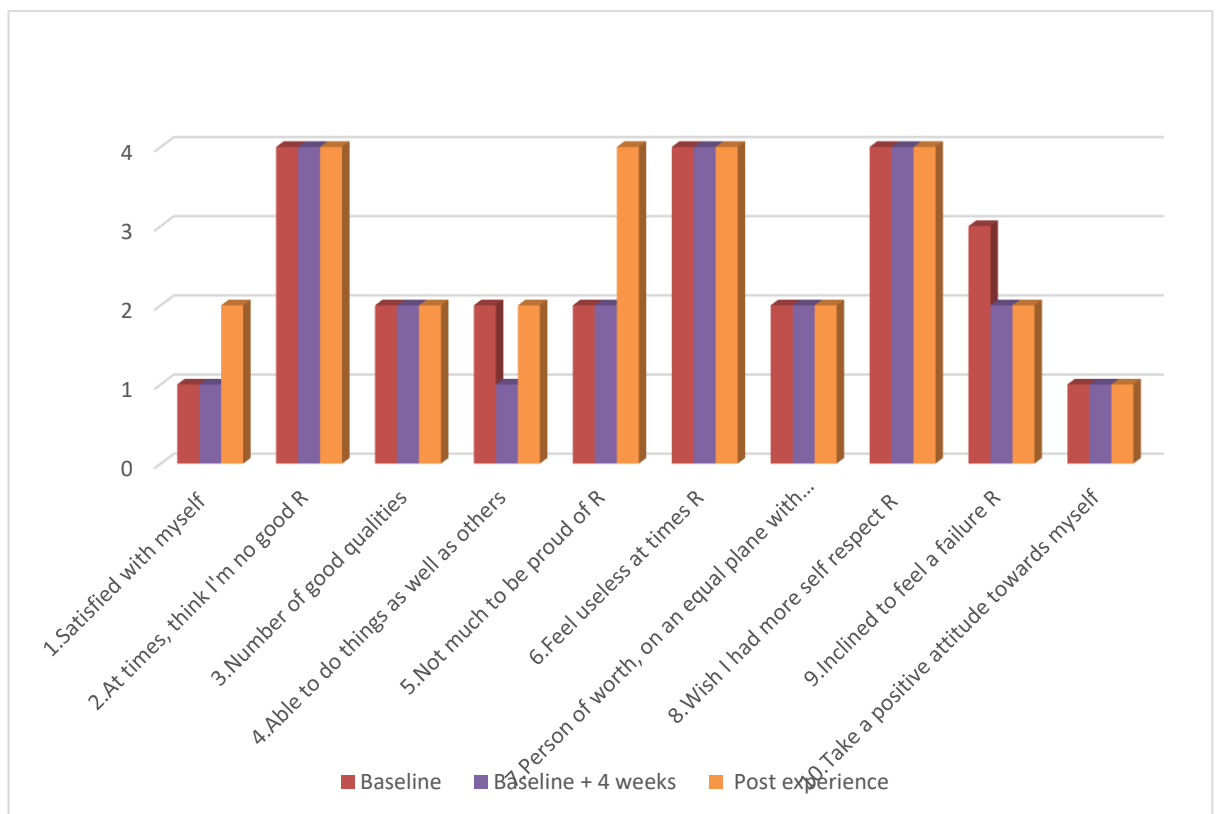


Figure 47. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Susan.

Table 11. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons (total scores) – Susan.

Time point 1 Baseline	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2 Baseline + 4 wks	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3 2 wks Post-Exp.	Norm (SD)	Level
25	22.79 (5.41)		23	22.79 (5.41)		27	22.79 (5.41)	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score		Code			
High			25-40					
Normal			16-25					
Low			0-15					

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
 Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.42
 Sample size of the normative sample= 261
 Individual's test score= 25

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.407$
 One-tailed probability = 0.342
 Two-tailed probability = 0.684

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 65.78%
 95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 61.07%
 95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 70.32%

Figure 48. Further comparison with norms – Susan - Baseline.

Susan's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.684$). Only 65.78% of the reference population scored below Susan's score.

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.42
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 27

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.775$
One-tailed probability = 0.219
Two-tailed probability = 0.439

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 78.06%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 73.82%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 81.98%

Figure 49. Further comparison with norms – Susan – Post-experience.

Susan's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.439$). 78.06% of the reference population scored below Susan's score. This represented a modest improvement in self-esteem.

4.2.9 Mark (Cohort 2)

Mark was shy and quiet in the group. His learning disability was evident. His speech was slow and awkward. He engaged in conversation with individuals but rarely instigated it and was reluctant to respond to direct questions. Given these factors, Mark was provided with one-to-one support, which enabled him to progress at his own pace.

In the first session, Mark was the last young person to be offered a horse to mount. The other young people were already in the school when he mounted and then got straight off. He remained standing on the mounting block. The research assistant left the group in the school (outdoor riding arena) and went to assist Mark. One of the volunteers, an experienced rider and helper, was standing with him alongside one of The Agency staff. The research assistant asked Mark how he was feeling. He said he had wanted to get off. He was reassured that that was a good judgement and there was no problem with that. She asked him if he wanted to try to get back on and he said "no". She then asked him if he would like to go back to leading the horse and Mark agreed that would be fine.

They spent the next ten to 15 minutes leading the horse up and down the drive, with Mark stopping the horse and getting him to move on when he told him to. Mark coped very well with this activity and seemed relaxed. Even when the horse sneezed and surprised Mark, he did not overreact and remained calm. The research assistant complimented him on his reaction, noting how important it was to be calm around horses.

The horse was then tied up as before. Mark expressed how scared he had been when he mounted the horse and how he didn't think he could get on again. The volunteer and research assistant removed the horse's tack, to reassure Mark that this was not going to happen and to make it easier for them to groom the horse.

As Mark and the research assistant spent some time grooming the horse, Mark stood close to the horse, stroking him with the brush and seemed very relaxed. The horse swung round a couple of times but again, Mark did not overreact,

and remained both calm and a safe distance from the hind quarters and hooves. Once again, the research assistant complimented him on his response to these movements.

They talked about how the course could easily accommodate his preference not to ride, if that was the case in subsequent sessions, and how they could do activities on the ground with horses that could be equally satisfying. Mark said he wanted to come next week and would think about it. He then sat on the bench outside the school and was given the task of being the session's photographer, taking pictures of the rest of the group as they went round the school.

Excerpt from interview one with Mark (M) (session one)

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout) Can you say a little bit about what you think about horses?

M: I'd never been on a horse before. I'd never touched a horse and this is me first time touching a horse.

What did that feel like when you touched a horse?

M: Proud. I felt proud of meself.

How does the idea of being with horses make you feel?

M: I felt a bit scared. I was scared when I was nearly riding the horse and I came back off it.

So you were scared by the idea of being on top of a horse.

M: Yeah, umm. On top of the horse, yeah, yeah.

So you got back off. That was a sensible thing to do. And then when you were leading Boo, what did you feel like then? You spent quite a lot of time walking

alongside him, didn't you, and then grooming him afterwards? So how did you feel about yourself then?

M: Yeah, I was good, like very good when I came round the streets, no not the streets, [the drive] yeah, up and down the drive.

Yes, so you made him stop and then you made him go. How did that feel?

M: So, like good, yeah, good.

So that helped you to feel better about things.

M: Yeah.

You may think this is a strange question, but do you think horses have feelings?

M: I think... no... I don't think they do.

Do you think horses think about things?

M: Yeah. Probablies.

It sounds like you're thinking about that. It's a strange idea. How would you know what they were thinking/feeling?

M: Umm, train them or, umm err try to, try to ride it again, try to ride it.

Maybe you're thinking about that.

M: Yeah, maybe think about it.

Is there anything you don't like about them?

M: I'd just like to ride them and that's it. I'd just like to move them around and all that, but I don't like being on top of a horse.

You don't like being on top of the horse, you like being beside them.

M: Yeah, being beside the horse.

How are you feeling about the horse course after today?

M: Umm, umm.

Do you think you will come next time?

M: Yes, I will come next time... and err...

Is there anything you are especially looking forward to?

M: I think I might go on the horse next time.

You think you might? You know there's no pressure, no pressure on you to do it because if you decide when you get there that you don't want to do it, then I have things in mind that we can do together and that wouldn't be a problem.

M: Yeah.

In the second session, Mark still did not want to ride his horse, who was fully tacked up and tied up, and standing alongside two other horses. He was happy to work on the ground with him and spent some time with the research assistant stroking his horse and looking at the way he held his head and responded to his attention. Mark showed some interest in a smaller pony tied up next to his horse and this led into a conversation about the size of the horse in relation to the challenge riding posed to Mark. He realised that the pony would be too small for him to ride and that the horse was about the right size for him.

Mark was happy to lead his horse, using the head collar, into the larger school. He spent the next thirty minutes leading him round the school, stopping and walking him on as he chose. He changed the rein several times, led him over three poles in the centre of the school and did a weaving exercise around several discs (see Figure 50). Mark patted and praised the horse each time he did as he was asked. The research assistant gave Mark lots of positive feedback for every achievement and he clearly enjoyed the recognition this afforded him. As Mark became increasingly confident of his ability to control the horse, the research assistant stepped further and further away from him. In the end she was standing in the middle of the school and Mark was effectively leading by himself.



Figure 50. Mark and Bobby doing a weaving exercise.

After a short while, I set up two sets of jump wings so that Mark had another obstacle to lead the horse through. I stayed in the school and helped to support Mark with encouragement, to which he responded very positively.

Mark was invited to consider getting on again and he tentatively agreed. The instructor held the horse while I helped him get on from the mounting block. The research assistant then constructed a step by single step activity, which resulted in Mark riding between ten and twelve paces in a straight line from the mounting block. He was then (easily) persuaded to enter the school and proceeded to sit on the horse as he was led round the school. After a few times doing this and changing the rein a couple of times, he then rode the horse over the poles and weaved around the discs, feeling the change of bend in the horse and responding calmly. Mark was praised by the instructor who was running the main group's session in the adjoining school, and he was clearly delighted by her recognition of his achievement.

The research assistant took off the head collar and Mark held the reins, which involved him letting go of the front of the saddle. He was broadly smiling when he realised that this meant he was actually riding the horse, and he looked both relaxed and very happy. He was acknowledged for this and for the way in which he was managing the experience. Mark said he felt "excited and proud" of himself for what he was doing.

The main group session finished and Mark was led back to the mounting block so he could dismount. He was grinning and repeatedly said he was excited by this experience, and very proud of what he had done. He then joined the rest of the group for an activity, learning parts of the horse and the different terms for their markings, before attending the end of session focus group.

Mark made steady progress through the next three sessions, riding without a leader alongside him and seemingly enjoying each experience. During the final session, he was trotting independently round the school, smiling all the time and laughing. He was very relaxed and, although he did not ride over the low crossed pole jump, clearly enjoyed being part of the group. He joined the hack

out and confidently trotted up the path, when it was his turn, to join the first two horses.

Excerpt from interview two with Mark (M) (session four).

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout): When you think back to the things that you've done, is there anything you've done that puts a smile on your face when you think 'yeah, I did that'?

M: When the horse moved. When the horse went...

So, when you got on Bobby and he walked forward?

M: Yeah [*Mark is quietly smiling at this point*].

Who have you talked to anywhere else about the course?

M: I talked to me Mum and me Mum was proud because I'd never touched a horse like before.

What did your Mum say to you? How did she tell you she was proud of you?

M: Like, she said 'you didn't touch a horse' and I'd never, and I didn't ride a horse before and she is proud now.

His growing confidence and ability to self-reflect, as well as to attune to the horse, was evident to the other participants, who complimented him on his achievements after each session. An example of this was Ash's reflection on what he had learned about other people on the course:

Some people aren't as competent as some, but given the chance and given time... Mark came and he was scared... terrified... It could have been settled in his head: I'm good at doing this and he just relaxed.

The final photo of Mark (Figure 51), taken just before he dismounted, shows him smiling joyfully. This says more than words ever could about this young man's achievement.



Figure 51. Smiles from Mark and Bobby.

Mark was supported to evaluate himself using the RSES at two intervals. He was not present for the final interview at The Agency centre. Despite my best efforts to explain, it was evident that he did not fully understand the scaling system. His RSES scores remained static but the qualitative data showed remarkable improvements in his sense of achievement.

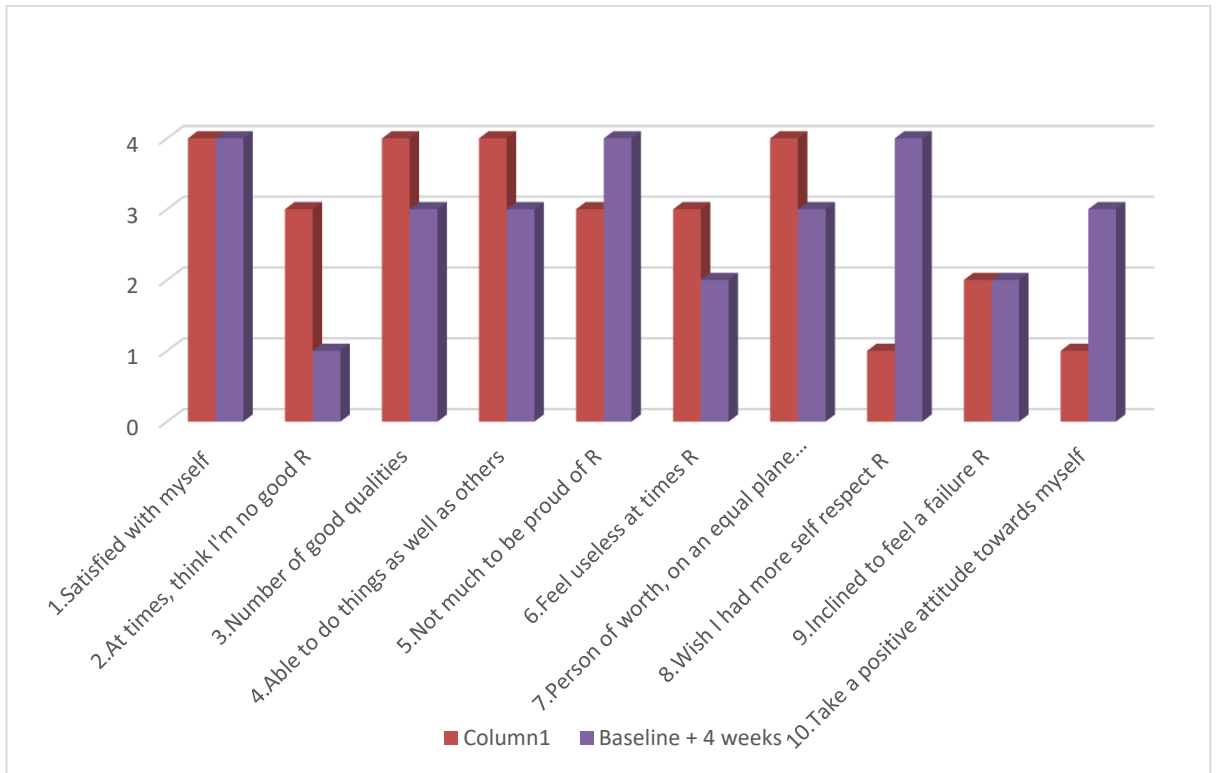


Figure 52. Rosenberg SES self-ratings - Mark.

Table 12. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons (total scores) - Mark.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
29	22.43 (6.21)		29	22.43 (6.21)		-	-	-
Key:								
Severity Level		Score		Code				
High		25-40						
Normal		16-25						
Low		0-15						

4.2.10 Lisa (Cohort 2)

Lisa presented as extremely cheerful, yet quite timid. She initially described herself as “not very good confidence-wise and stuff”. She said that she liked “singing, acting and reading, but just at home”. She added that she had ridden a little before the course and that she loved horses, but didn’t get to ride very much. Following the first session of ‘The Horse Course’, Lisa waxed lyrical about horses:

I like that they’re big. I love, I’ve always loved them, even though my mum and dad are scared of them. I don’t really know where I’ve got it from. Riding kinda makes me feel free, like nothing else in life matters. Takes away the tension. And I like the smell of horses. It’s amazing.



Figure 53. A Lisa and Charlie moment.

Figure 53 indicates Lisa's passion and enthusiasm for horses. She and the horse look at each other and the horse's head and ear position offer a direct response to her positive body language. Their close proximity in the image, even though Lisa is not actively engaged with a specific activity, shows mutual exploration and relaxation. Being in the moment and noticing the detail in these multi-species encounters, where normal social conventions do not apply, each has the opportunity to relax and to re-encounter their self through the other. In Figure 54, similarly, both horse and rider are relaxed and there is a sense of mastery in the riding position. To turn slightly to face the camera when riding out in the countryside also indicates a degree of self-esteem, confidence in one's abilities and confidence in the horse as a partner.



Figure 54. Lisa out on a hack with Boo.

In the second interview, Lisa said that she had been scared of people before she came, but that four weeks in, while she still felt a bit scared of people, she

also felt more confident about herself. The experience of riding appears to have made a change in how she felt about herself and other humans.

She cited the highlight of learning to canter and how this made her feel proud, even when she wasn't on a horse. Each week, she would tell her parents how she felt really good about herself, and the fact that they were proud of her gave her further confidence.

I talked to mama and dad about what I did and that I felt really good about myself for being able to do it - they are proud.

The sense of demonstrating this learning to herself and to others seemed to have a particular bearing upon the value she placed on it.

She clearly enjoyed spending time with horses, whether on the ground, grooming and caring for them, or riding them. She said she had observed horses expressing their thoughts and feelings through their body language.

Like last time, when Angel's ears went back, but one of the other horses had their ears forward which was more positive.

Although identifying tacking up as "problematic", she made many positive comments about the size, strength and power of the horses.

When asked to say a little bit about 'The Horse Course' in the last session, she replied,

It's the best thing that I've had offered to me really, experience with horses. Yeah. I'm feeling good.

She thought that 'The Horse Course' had helped her to "learn something" which, in turn, had made her feel "amazing, smarter and tall".

Lisa evaluated herself using the RSES at three intervals. It is impossible to know how she managed the reverse scoring, as she opted to complete the RSES independently. There was a decrease of one point in her overall scores, contrasting with the positive remarks recorded above.

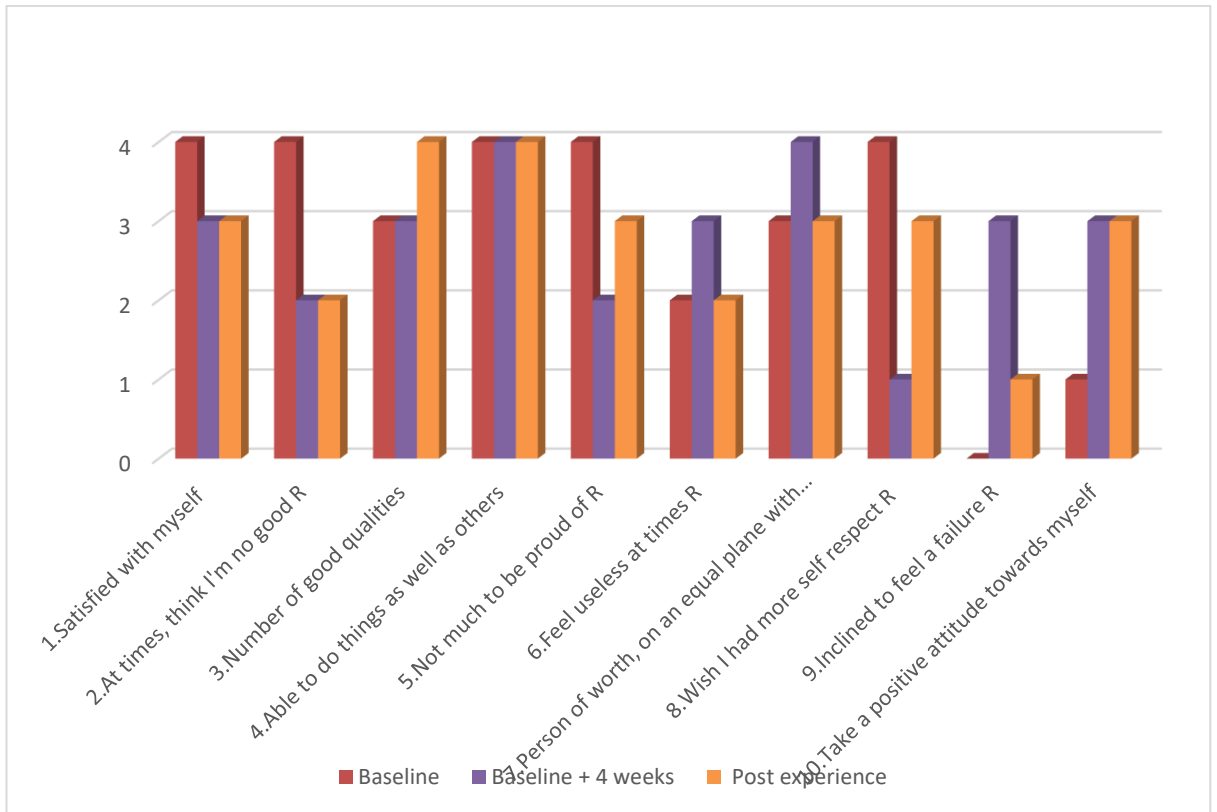


Figure 55. Rosenberg SES self-rating – Lisa.

Table 13. Rosenberg SES raw score comparisons (total scores) - Lisa.

Time point 1	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 2	Norm (SD)	Level	Time Point 3	Norm (SD)	Level
Baseline			Baseline + 4 wks			2 wks Post-Exp.		
29	22.79 (5.41)		28	22.79 (5.41)		28	22.79 (5.41)	
Key:								
Severity Level			Score			Code		
High			25-40					
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Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.42
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 29

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 1.144$
One-tailed probability = 0.127
Two-tailed probability = 0.254

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 87.31%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 83.86%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 90.34%

Figure 56. Further comparison with norms – Lisa - Baseline.

Lisa's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.254$). 87.31% of the reference population scored lower.

THIS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS STATISTICAL METHODS DEVELOPED IN THE FOLLOWING PAPERS:

Crawford, J.R., & Garthwaite, P.H. (2002). Investigation of the single case in neuropsychology: Confidence limits on the abnormality of test scores and test score differences. *Neuropsychologia*, 40, 1196-1208.

Crawford, J.R. & Howell, D.C. (1998). Comparing an individual's test score against norms derived from small samples. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 12, 482-486.

INPUTS:

Mean of the control or normative sample= 22.79
Standard deviation for the normative sample= 5.42
Sample size of the normative sample= 261
Individual's test score= 28

OUTPUTS:

Significance test (Crawford & Howell[1998]) on difference between individual's score and control sample: $t = 0.959$
One-tailed probability = 0.169
Two-tailed probability = 0.338

Estimated percentage of normal population falling below individual's score = 83.09%
95% lower confidence limit on the percentage = 79.21%
95% upper confidence limit on the percentage = 86.59%

Figure 57. Further comparison with norms – Lisa – Post-experience.

Lisa's score on this occasion was not statistically significantly different from the reference group ($P \leq 0.338$). 83.09% of the reference population scored below Lisa's score. This represented a modest decline in self-esteem.

4.3 Overall Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale scores

Table 14. Overall total RSES scores for cohort 1 (R = reverse scoring questions).

Cohort 1	Janet			Vicky			Rose			Emily			Gillian			Adam		
1 satisfied with myself	4	4	4	3	4		2	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4
2 think I am no good R	3	3	3	3	1		1	2	3	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2
3 number of good qualities	2	4	4	3	4		2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
4 able to do things as well as others	4	4	4	3	3		2	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
5 not much to be proud of R	1	4	4	2	4		3	4	4	2	1	1	4	2	2	1	1	1
6 feel useless at times R	1	1	2	3	2		2	2	2	3	3	1	4	3	1	1	1	1
7 person of worth, equal plane	4	2	2	3	3		2	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
8 wish had more self-respect R	4	4	4	4	2		2	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	1	1	4	4
9 feel I am a failure R	3	1	2	3	2		3	1	2	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	1
10 take a positive attitude to myself	4	4	4	3	3		1	3	4	2	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	4
TOTALS	30:31:33			30:28			20:27:32			26:28:25			34:29:25			21:23:24		

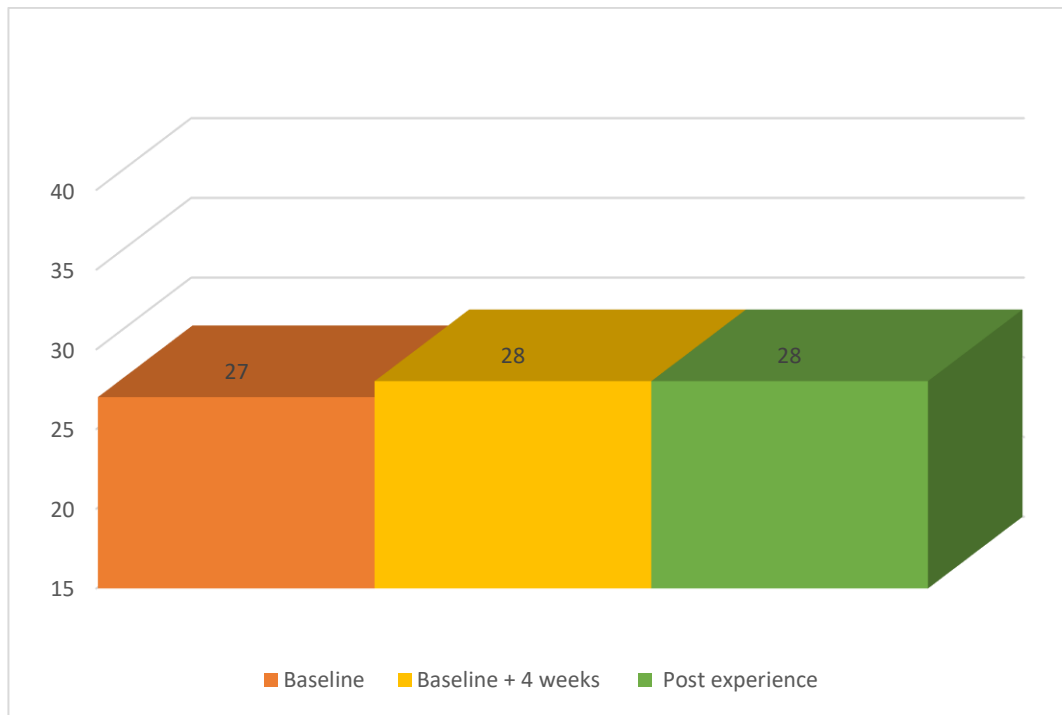


Figure 58. Overall total RSES scores for cohort 1

Table 15. Overall total RSES scores for cohort 2 (*R* = reverse scoring questions)

Cohort 2	Ash			Susan			Mark			Lisa		
1 satisfied with myself	2	3	4	1	1	2	4	4		4	3	3
2 think I am no good R	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	1		4	2	2
3 number of good qualities	2	3	4	2	2	2	4	3		3	3	4
4 able to do things as well as others	4	4	4	2	1	2	4	3		4	4	4
5 not much to be proud of R	2	2	2	2	2	4	3	4		4	2	3
6 feel useless at times R	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	2		2	3	2
7 person of worth, equal plane	3	4	3	2	2	2	4	3		3	4	3
8 wish had more self respect R	2	2	3	4	4	4	1	4		4	1	3
9 feel I am a failure R	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2		?	3	1
10 take a positive attitude to myself	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	3		1	3	3
	27:31:31			25:23:27			29:29			29:28:28		

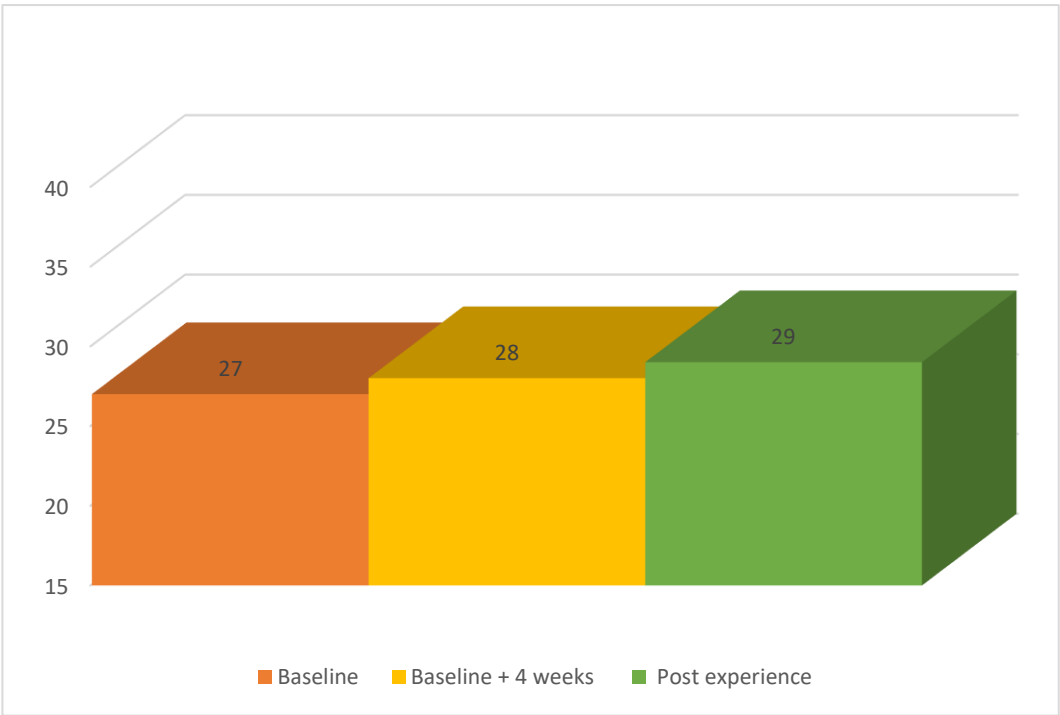


Figure 59. Overall total RSES scores for cohort 2.

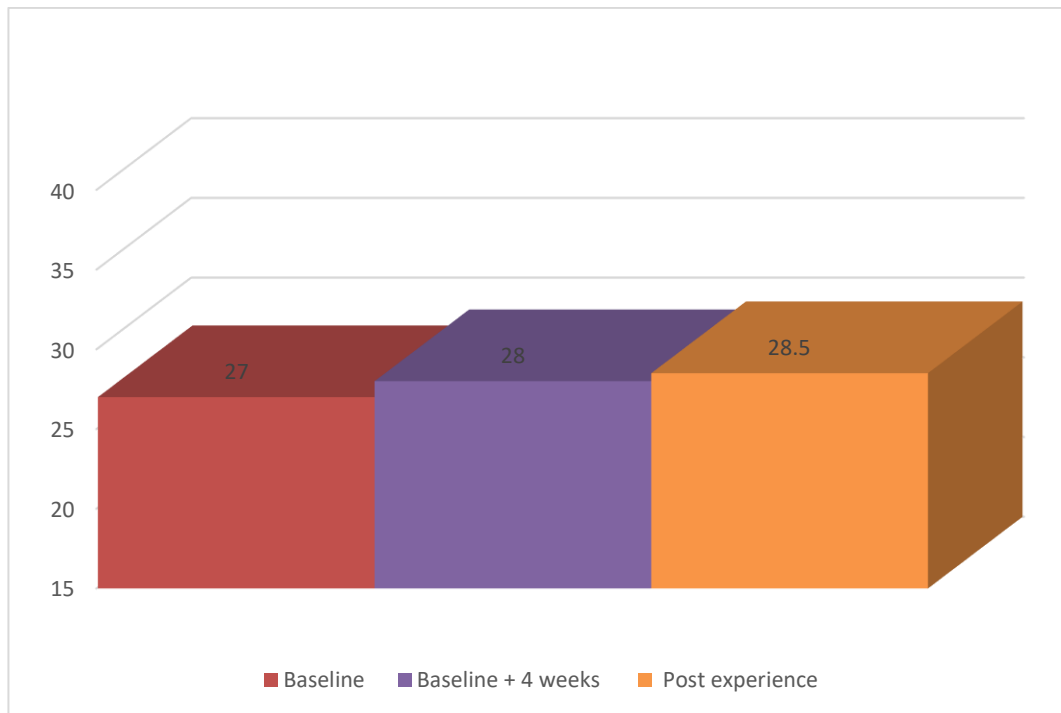


Figure 60. Combined overall total RSES scores - both cohorts.

4.3.1 Friedman Two-Way Analysis Test of Variance by Ranks

A Friedman Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks test was computed, comparing Rosenberg baseline total scores, mid-experience total scores and post-experience scores. The Friedman test is the non-parametric alternative to the one-way ANOVA with repeated measures (Laerd Statistics, 2021). It is used to test for differences between groups at 3+ time points when the variable being measured is ordinal - in this case, Total Score for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale at baseline, mid-experience and post-experience. It can also be used for continuous data that has violated the assumptions necessary to run the one-way ANOVA with repeated measures (e.g. data that has marked deviations from normality).

There was no statistically significant difference between these scores, $\chi^2 = 1.067$, with 2 df. $p \leq 0.587$. In spite of being non-significant, descriptive statistics demonstrated slight improvement in these overall scores at each time point.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Percentiles		
		25th	50th (Median)	75th
Baseline score - total	8	22.00	26.50	29.75
Mid-experience score - total	8	24.00	28.00	30.50
Post-experience score total	8	25.00	27.50	31.75

Ranks

	Mean Rank
Baseline score - total	1.75
Mid-experience score - total	2.00
Post-experience score total	2.25

The individual items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were then tested at each time point. All but one proved non-significant. However, a statistically significant difference was found to exist in response to the item "I feel that I am a failure" at baseline, mid-experience and post-experience, $\chi^2 = 8.444$, with 2 df. $p \leq 0.015$.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Percentiles		
		25th	50th (Median)	75th
I feel that I am a failure - baseline	7	1.00	3.00	3.00
I feel that I am a failure - 4 weeks	7	1.00	1.00	2.00
I feel that I am a failure – Post-experience	7	1.00	2.00	2.00

Ranks

	Mean Rank
I feel that I am a failure - baseline	2.71
I feel that I am a failure - 4 weeks	1.57
I feel that I am a failure – Post-experience	1.71

4.3.2 Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test

In order to effect post-hoc comparisons, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was carried out. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test is the nonparametric test equivalent to the Paired Samples t-test. As the Wilcoxon signed-rank test does not assume normality in the data, it can be used when this assumption has

been violated and the use of the dependent t-test is inappropriate. It is used to compare two sets of scores that come from the same participants, as in the current study, where Rosenberg Self-Esteem Test Scores were compared at baseline, mid-experience and post-experience.

There was a statistically significant difference in response to this statement between baseline and mid-experience, $Z = -2.271$, $p \leq 0.023$, and also baseline and post-experience, $Z = -2.121$, $p \leq 0.034$. However, as three comparisons were made using Wilcoxon tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was applied, e.g. original p-value ($p \leq 0.05$) was divided by 3 = $p \leq 0.017$. The adjusted p-value therefore renders the two reported Z scores as not statistically significant. The Bonferroni adjustment was used on the results because multiple comparisons were made within the same sample, which made it more likely that a Type-I error would be made (declaring a result significant when it is not). The Bonferroni adjustment was calculated by taking the significance level (in this case, $p \leq 0.05$) and dividing it by the number of tests, which resulted in a new significance level of $0.05/3 = 0.017$, meaning that if the p-value is larger than 0.017, it will not be a statistically significant result.

To get a sense of improvement within individual participants, the method of drawing inferences from single cases advocated by Crawford and Garthwaite (2002) was used. In this method, individual scores on a validated instrument such as the Rosenberg test are referenced to a matched control sample. Each individual's Rosenberg Self Esteem Test Score was converted to a Z score based on the Mean and Standard Deviation of the control sample, and this Z score is referred to a table of areas under the normal curve. With this approach, the control sample is treated as though it were a population (i.e. the sample statistics are treated as parameters). These calculations were made using the application (Singlims.exe) developed for this purpose by Crawford. The control sample, however, was not of equivalence to the total population – and when control samples are used that consist of a small number of individuals, the chances of making a Type I error – attributing statistical significance when the actual result is non-significant is greatly increased. For

the purposes of a control sample, data was taken from a study conducted by Sinclair et al. (2010), in which a large sample completed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Male n=210; Female n=261; total sample size n=503), and hence the possibilities of making a Type I error were minimised. Individual pre- and post-comparisons are included in the single case analyses.

4.3.3 Summary

Whilst the qualitative data suggests strongly that all participants benefited from the course, this is not as clearly evident in the numeric data, although each groups' combined RSES scores demonstrate slight incremental increases throughout the study.

It is clear in the audio data from both cohorts that the reverse scoring questions (2, 5, 6, 8 and 9) created some confusion for participants. In most cases it needed further explanation and in some cases this resulted in inaccurate data. The reverse scores were often in direct contradiction to the positive comments made by the participants in the preceding interviews, or during the completion of the scale. This raised the question of how well understood the reverse scores were and how appropriate the RSES is for use with vulnerable young people. The benefits seen in the photographs, interviews, field notes, quotes and observational data suggest much greater incremental increases throughout the study. The suitability of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale for the purpose of this research study was discussed in the Methodology Chapter and is revisited in the Conclusion.

4.4 The volunteers' perspective

Individual interviews were conducted with two of the three volunteers who assisted with the sessions. Their accounts offered additional insights into how 'The Horse Course' was understood and responded to, based on observations they made of changes in the young participants' confidence and self-esteem. The interviews also offered the volunteers an opportunity for a more formal type

of reflection on the experience, so the positive emotional impact on them is also apparent in their comments.

Elaine (not her real name) explained that she had become a volunteer in the riding school based on her positive previous experiences of volunteering in a school and because she had “always loved horses”. She had enjoyed learning to ride with her children and felt strongly that others should be supported in a similar way to that which she had experienced. In volunteering specifically for ‘The Horse Course’, she felt she could offer the young people “the sort of emotional support to give them confidence, to help them in that sort of way. Most people grow in confidence here. It just gives them such a sense of achievement”.

Her evaluation of ‘The Horse Course’ illustrated her insight and understanding in relation to its purpose. She described it as being about,

...building their confidence day to day. I think being with animals, including and not just horses, but any animal, does that to people. It brings them out of their shell a bit. I just think it's nice, it's calming.

When discussing her observations of the young people, she revealed that she was moved by having witnessed their growing confidence and that she had become proud of them. She also stated that she thought the course might have an impact on their wider lives.

At first, I think they were initially quite shocked at the size of them. They seemed a little bit nervous, but I think that's because they've probably never been around horses before. But I think they were fantastic. Their confidence grew and it was just nice to see them all smiling at the end of the day. It was lovely. They did really, really well. Nine out of ten. I was very proud of them all. I think they'll grow in confidence here but be able to put it into their day to day lives as well.

When asked to describe her own experiences of volunteering on 'The Horse Course', she replied, "I thoroughly enjoyed it. I really loved it. I was buzzing". This too shows the productive emotional engagement that the course engendered for all participants, including the adults.

Whilst Elaine had got involved because of other volunteering experiences and having been involved with horses as part of a family, Carla's (not her real name) involvement was of a slightly different nature. She had participated in an earlier version of 'The Horse Course', which had involved a group of young carers, so understood it from the point of view of a participant, as well as that of a volunteer. Her interview stimulated some reflection upon her original experience, her increasing engagement and confidence with both horses and volunteering, and what she felt the course offered the current participants.

Interviewer (underlined comments and questions throughout): What has been your experience of being with horses and your riding experience?

Carla (C): Well, the first time I had a riding lesson was on a similar sort of course to what I'm volunteering on now.

How long ago was that?

C: About five and half or six years. I was about 11 and a bit. That was a course that was held here because I was part of the Young Carers group, because I was caring for my mum and it just sort of spiralled from there, my obsession with horses.

So you have a passion and obsession for being with horses as a result of being on that version of 'The Horse Course'.

C: Yes, it was just, they're just such loving creatures and I think it just... It's just nice to have contact with them.

And do you have riding lessons now from time to time? And have you had contact with horses between that time and today?

C: Well, I had lessons all up until I started at college. Then, whilst I was at college, I ended up getting my own horse and so I stopped getting riding lessons when I got him, but after I left college, I had to give him up when I started my work here. But now I've got lessons every week as part of my job.

Can you tell me a little about your job?

C: It's general horse care, I usually work about four long days but sometimes it can change.

So you work here about four days a week now and do you see your future being with horses?

C: Yes, absolutely. There's no question about it.

So as a result of being on 'The Horse Course', you committed to a life of working with and being with horses? You look very happy about that. What has been your experience of volunteering?

C: Well, when I was at school, I did my Duke of Edinburgh's Award and as part of my volunteering side, I went to a kennels and cattery. I volunteered there for one day a week and I stayed on for a while after my DOE because I loved it there as well. But I couldn't go in with the cats because I'm allergic. I didn't really have much time for volunteering afterwards but after college, I started volunteering here two days a week before I started working here, because I finished college in June and I couldn't start here until September, so I came here voluntarily.

I see. So you have quite a history of volunteering and around animals as well.

C: I think, volunteering, as well, it's the satisfaction you get knowing you're helping. I love it.

Yes, good to be involved.

C: Yes.

What do you think 'The Horse Course' is about?

C: I just thought it was brilliant that, like, these young people who probably don't have the most opportunities, that they've been given this and I think it's just brilliant.

Does that remind you of what it was like when you got the chance to...?

C: Yes, 'cos when I was a carer, I didn't get out much because most of my time was spent looking after my mum. I think I just... Getting the chance to work with horses it just developed into a passion for us and it's brilliant.

You have a special perspective on this course, coming from your background and riding as well as being around horses, can you tell me your impressions of the young people on the course?

C: They seemed very nervous. I don't blame them. New place, new people, new animals being near, and I think they did very well.

They presented as quite nervous. Could you say what sort of signs you picked up on that made you...?

C: Very quiet. You could see as the day went on they were getting very chatty but they were very quiet.

Being very quiet was unnatural for you?

C: No, I think they seemed like they did have a lot to say but they seemed like they didn't know quite how to put it across to these new people because I know that's exactly how I felt when I was a carer as well.

So by the end of the session, did you see a difference in how they were?

C: They all looked so happy. They did just look so happy, like they'd had a really big achievement as well, 'cos getting on a horse for the first time, it's quite scary.

It is a big deal and those of us who get the chance to ride forget what that's like.

C: Yes. Even experienced riders have their ups and downs.

Did you enjoy the volunteering experience for you, seeing that?

C: Yes, I just felt such a good feeling knowing that I was helping people that are in the same position that I once was and it feels really good.

The whole tenor of the interview is one of empathy and reflection. Carla was both confident and articulate and, as she states, her experience of an earlier iteration of the course was inspiring. The return to the riding school had seemingly consolidated the ways in which she had developed since that initial experience. This was clear from the way other staff had noticed and commented on how Carla had grown in confidence.


This confidence, and the fact that the riding school had been a consistently safe and happy place for Carla, came to an unexpected but positive conclusion. At around the same time as I was analysing data, Carla disclosed to the staff and her friends at the riding school that she was gay. This was accompanied by her

second announcement, which was about a dramatic change of career plan. She had decided that she wanted to work in the entertainment industry, something that may be attributable to her increase in self-confidence and self-esteem since working at the stables and the earlier iteration of ‘The Horse Course’.

4.5 Thematic Analysis of key emergent themes (from the overall qualitative data)

As established at the outset, self-esteem (as a building block for resilience) and wellbeing in young people were key elements of the original focus of the study. It was therefore not surprising that the initial thematic analysis picked out many of their salient features. It may be that I saw what I expected to see initially, but on further analysis, it became clear that I had moved through a wider territory of trends, theories and categorisations of self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing, as illustrated by Table 16, which identifies the key themes and sub-themes that emerged, with examples. According to Matthews and Ross (2010), using a table in this way is a beneficial approach to organising and presenting data. In analysing the data, these themes were the elements that appeared consistently, whether linguistically in interviews and focus groups, or visually through observation and images. This was borne out throughout the qualitative data. It was also largely demonstrated by the quantitative data, which showed a similar trend, although as noted earlier, there are provisos about the suitability of the tool with regard to its use with some young people.

Table 16. Key emergent themes from the qualitative data.



Emergent themes, trends, categorisations and theories relating to <i>self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing</i>	Examples (discussed and extended in the following sections)	Summary of Theme

<p>Self-worth, confidence, vulnerability vs. risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving from being scared to having an extended community of learning with horses and peers (all). • Nervous behaviours diminishing as confidence grew (Gillian's giggling and Rose's need to be close – linked to – her key worker for the whole first session). 	<p>Perceived risk management</p>
<p>Self-efficacy, Understanding of strengths and limitations, attunement, non-verbal communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-recognition of developing confidence, mastery and self-reflection when working in-hand with the horse (Mark working on the ground with Bobby, gaining confidence before riding). • Being in synchrony with the horse (Emily's realisation of the need to give the horse confidence by being assertive, Lisa's insight into how Angel felt when 'her ears went back' and Vicky having insight how horses' feelings might influence her feelings). 	<p>Development of insight through definition of the horse behaviour</p>
<p>Secure base, friendships, mutual respect, sense of belonging, feeling safe, secure and ready to participate, balancing the 'power'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling safe, ready to learn and willing to seek help from peers, volunteers or researcher (all). • Working as a pair or within the small group – relying on one another (all). • Seeing horses as individuals, equals and partners (Susan's insight into inter-species communication, Adam describing his self-doubt and positive responses to instructor's encouraging comments). 	<p>Seeking help appropriately</p>
<p>Bouncing back, feeling resilient, self-belief</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being unafraid to admit fear or nervousness (Ash: 'losing his 'bottle'' in session four then recovering for session five, Emily: describing how she was 	<p>Accepting disappointments as a spur to aspiration</p>

	consciously working on her assertiveness outside of THC, and Vicky acknowledging her growth in confidence).	
Sense of mastery and control, intrinsic motivation, encouragement vs. praise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling competent (Gillian realising she did not need make-up around horses and feeling 'like a legend', Mark feeling proud of his achievements) • Sharing control (all) • Expectation of success/realisation that there is always more than one outcome (Rose and Mark experiencing success without needing to ride). 	Experiencing and celebrating success
Active learning, reflection and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sense of learning experiences (Mark, Ash, Lisa and Gillian recounting their sense of achievement to their parents, friends and (in Ash's case) girlfriend). • Voicing hopes for future learning (Janet and Lisa wanting to carry on with riding after THC) • Problem solving (all) 	Thinking about the next session in the intervening intervals
Positive values, wellbeing, flourishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributing success in part to the horse's willingness to enter into the partnership that underpinned each activity (Adam recognising 'it's like having a good little friend' and Vicky: attributing her return to enjoying outdoors and running to her positive experiences of THC) 	Development of personal insight
Education, talents and interests, social competencies, realising potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susan's illustration (figure 45) showing mastery in her own talents as an artist linked to her developing understanding of caring for and looking after horses. (The tack for a beginner is often a 	Transferable skills

	<p>confusion of straps and bits but her illustration is entirely correct).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking the ‘feeling’ from being on top of the world (horse) into difficult situations outside of THC (e.g. getting the bus home alone for the first time ever (Janet) and attending job interviews (Emily and Adam)). 	
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I now discuss and explain some of the complex causal links (Yin, 1994) in the study. This will illustrate how existing theories and practices were tested and refined as the study design evolved in parallel with my philosophical journey (discussed in the Methodology chapter alongside the realisation that I was in fact, taking an ethnographic approach in this research).

The research study was initially grounded within resilience theory, specifically self-esteem as a building block to resilience. It sought to explore the impact of close work with horses as facilitators of enhancing resilience and self-esteem and wellbeing during ‘The Horse Course’. The programme was designed to present incremental challenges with freely available resources to manage these. The design incorporated recognised protective factors, including good quality support and practical help, peer group and individual involvement in productive activities, recognised achievements in valued pursuits, and proof of the capacity to cope with and manage stress. It was expected that accumulative experiences of genuinely positive outcomes would have a similar effect upon each participant’s internal locus of control, which would be demonstrated in their ability to transfer the benefits derived to other aspects of their lives. In the following sections, each of the eight key themes is outlined and expanded upon.

4.5.1 Perceived risk management

The initial responses to each session of new activity were observed and recorded alongside individual coping strategies employed to manage the inherent stress. Support was offered both in practical terms, regarding help with

specific tasks, advice about how to go about a task etc., and as an expression of interest in the participant's experience. Each activity was carefully designed so that the participants were neither overstretched nor expected to manage every aspect of the activity unaided. The volunteers, research assistant and I all worked alongside the participants, and the horses were described as partners in the overall event. The non-competitive nature of the programme was emphasised during the pre-session meetings and at every appropriate opportunity thereafter. It was against this backdrop that strategies such as avoidance, denial, inappropriate behaviours and incongruous non-verbal behaviours were taken as markers of stress.

Resilience theory highlights the salience of novel and out of the ordinary experiences as having the potential to raise or increase anxiety. The initial session and, to a lesser extent, subsequent sessions encapsulated both of these qualities, presenting new and challenging experiences to the participants. The combination of needing to navigate a new environment alongside meeting a group of new people was expected to make demands upon each participant's repertoire of coping strategies, diluted to some extent by the fact that this was a shared experience. In addition, everyone was expected to bring along their personal ideas about what would be expected of them in terms of participation and performance. Both of these clusters of factors were expected to have a bearing upon the level of anxiety generated, and the relationship between that and the coping strategies each person employed.

The level of perceived risk was apparent in the difference between the ways in which the participants behaved when they first came to the riding school and their presentation when I met them at The Agency. At The Agency, they had been relaxed and conversational. At the first session at the riding school, in contrast, they bunched together around the senior key worker (gatekeeper). One participant, Rose, linked arms with the other key worker and was very reluctant to leave her side. The key workers described how on the way there, the young people had all been saying how anxious they were about being near horses and, although excited at the prospect, their nervousness was the

dominant mood. This was expressed in a number of different ways during this initial session.

Gillian was very nervous and, although she said that she thought horses were 'cute', she also recalled a strong memory of being hurt by a horse when she was younger and was afraid of them because of their size (see her Single Case Study Analysis). The disparity between her professed attraction to horses and their association with a painful experience created a tension for Gillian that she struggled to manage throughout the first session. Although she denied being fearful, she managed her anxiety by distancing herself from the horses and by being very tentative during the non-riding exercises. During the riding sessions, she expressed her nervousness through giggling. The way she persisted with this behaviour indicated that it was a way of coping with the stress, and the complimentary comments she initially received regarding her laughter in part compensated for the anxiety she was experiencing. The validity of this explanation was reinforced in later interviews, when she described her feelings about being undervalued by her family and her struggle to draw positive attention to herself.

Rose was the participant who experienced the greatest stress during the first and subsequent sessions. She initially presented as profoundly anxious around the horses, responding to any movement with extreme alarm and repeated expressions of fearfulness, and resisting any close contact with the animals. During the first three sessions, she stood at a distance from the horses. Any activity she did engage with during this initial stage required persistent encouragement and the presence of a supportive helper, someone she associated with achievements from previous sessions. The explicitly supportive culture of the course enabled Rose to make the choices she needed in order to engage with the content of the sessions. The process by which she was enabled to choose, thereby creating a greater sense of personal security, helped her to develop her sense of autonomy and arguably strengthened her internal locus of control. This last quality is one of the key elements associated with enhanced resilience.

Other members of the group found that the quality of the instruction and the calm compliance of the horses reassured them that the tasks they were undertaking were manageable. It is plausible that the quality of the instruction was a critical factor in this process because it helped the participants develop an understanding of the meaning of a horse's behaviour as an indicator of its mood (e.g. angle of the ears, tail swishing, position of the body in the stable etc.). The ability to interpret the non-verbal communication made a great difference to how the horses were subsequently viewed. Adam commented on this in the initial interview and recognised a horse's capacity to appreciate and respond to a person's emotional state. As noted in his Single Case Study Analysis, he defined this communication as horses being able to understand feelings and form a bond. Adam was first intrigued, then delighted to know that horses could assess a person's mood, something which helped him develop verbal and non-verbal communication pathways with the horses, and which in turn helped him feel a greater sense of security and confidence around them.

The whole group, regardless of their experiences of horses, and in a few cases because of previous negative ones, were explicitly nervous and anxious during the introductory session. They developed various ways of coping with the stress, most of which were largely adaptive and dependent upon the level of support from both the volunteers and key workers, along with the quality of instruction. The careful choice of 'school masters' (well-trained and experienced horses) and incremental application of the participants' learning to the practical exercises reduced their anxiety, with the possible exception of Rose, who remained firmly avoidant for the first two sessions. The flexibility of the programme allowed for idiosyncratic responses to the experience of being with horses. The supportive one-to-one sessions enabled Rose to join in with the rest of the group, eventually achieving the same goals, in terms of riding, as the others.

The initial challenge of managing perceived risk required the participants to engage with known and/or new coping strategies to reduce the stress generated by these experiences. At the first sessions in both cohorts, all the participants admitted to feeling both excited and worried because of their

inexperience with, and lack of knowledge about, horses. Some, like Gillian, distanced themselves initially from their anxiety through denial and incongruous behaviours, while others, like Rose, were more authentic in their behaviours and used established coping strategies. Some were more successful than others in achieving the prescribed goals of that session, while others needed more exposure to the experiences and time to develop confidence before they were able to feel more relaxed around the horses. The design of 'The Horse Course', in particular the quality of the instruction and the provision of one-to-one support where necessary, enabled even the most nervous participant to engage fully with the sessions, allowing them all to see the efficacy of their strategies. This positive experience had an incremental effect upon the internal locus of control, as discussed below.

The issue of managing the stress associated with novel experiences was closely linked to the participants' willingness to accept that horses were active partners in the work they were undertaking. Central to this concept was that horses are sensitive to how humans feel and interpret our behaviours as indicative of our mind set. It was equally important that the participants understood and believed that horses communicate both their mood and, on occasion, their intentions, through their stance and facial expressions. Successful outcomes depend in large part upon the participants developing a calm demeanour and responding appropriately to the horses' communication. Although forming a sensitive dyad depended upon a degree of reciprocity, the participants also had to maintain an assertive position within that relationship. This created a delicate balancing act that encouraged the participants to consider every action with the horses as a form of communication that would be responded to and required them to attend to in order to form effective partnerships.

The expert instruction helped the participants to understand and accept the validity of the concept. The concrete representation in terms of the horses' behaviours and responses to their actions confirmed the need to be calm and assertive. The fact that horses behave in this way was a revelation to most of

the participants, and stimulated thoughts about themselves, how they behaved with horses and how they were in other areas of their lives.

The fact that they felt vulnerable may have meant that it was harder to engage but it also meant that any self-serving or bullying behaviours were rendered useless in the face of their fears.

4.5.2 Development of insight through the definition of the horses' behaviour

The ability to develop an appreciation of the meaning of the horses' behaviours indicated openness to thinking differently and therefore creatively about another sentient creature's understanding of the world. The participant's capacity to recognise and respond sensitively to the horse's state of mind would be linked to the quality of their relationship with the horse, an essential element in the construction of a mutually trusting partnership.

The ability or willingness to extend one's understanding of the world is one of the indicators of a secure and resilient individual. This was one of the factors the study sought to explore in relation to participants' capacities to both appreciate the ways in which horses communicate their emotions or intentions, and respond sensitively. This latter aspect, responding sensitively, demonstrated the participant's belief that the horse was communicating authentically.

There were several examples of this throughout the sessions. During the first session, for instance, the instructor had shown the group how the positioning of a horse's ears (e.g. pointing back, pricked up, etc.) and their position within the stable box (e.g. head towards or over the door, facing away from the door, etc.) were signs of how the horse was feeling. This was linked by the instructor to ways in which the horse could be approached safely.

This information became connected with the participants' understanding of and ability to manage the horses. It is best exemplified by the way in which one

participant responded after three sessions. In his initial interview, Adam had recognised a horse's capacity to appreciate and respond to a person's emotional state. In the second interview, having reflected on the instructor's comments and having now had more direct experience of horses, he demonstrated greater insight and understanding of human-to-horse-to-human communication. He argued that horses and humans know a great deal about each other's emotions through the behaviours that each exhibit. His ability to develop insights and his willingness to believe in and act upon this concept deepened his experience of being with the horses. This in turn added another dimension to his achievements because the successes achieved during the course were attributed, in part, to the horse's willingness to enter into the partnership that underpinned each activity.

Similarly, Vicky demonstrated a growing insight into how she felt when around the horses. In particular, she showed an awareness of how she needed to communicate a calm manner to the horses for them to feel confident in her, as noted in her Single Case Study Analysis. Her ability to appreciate the two-way nature of communication and 'read' the horses, stemmed from two sources; first, her capacity to retain factual information from the structured learning programme and link it to practice; and second, her raised sensitivity to horses' needs. These insights, combined with her increased experience as the course continued, changed her view of horses' natures, and she came to see them as gentle, irrespective of size and strength.

All of the participants responded to the information about how horses communicate in ways that signified they appreciated the need to develop a unique partnership, rather than a purely dominance/submission dynamic. This was balanced with an awareness that they needed to be consistently assertive, or the horses would take advantage of them and so the balance of control would shift. It was evident that the ways in which the participants were able to interpret the horses' behaviours added an additional dimension to their experience, as reflected in other qualitative analysis factors, described below.

4.5.3 Seeking help appropriately

The ability to achieve this depends upon recognising the presence of a challenge, assessing its degree and finding the appropriate resources to manage it. Ideally, the outcome is a greater sense of achievement for having managed this process, as well as the satisfaction drawn from the desired or a desirable outcome. The three indicators of this were: i) recognising when events were not going as expected and seeking advice in a constructive and congruent manner, ii) the capacity to form partnerships to achieve a shared goal, and iii) asking questions in the public arena of the focus groups.

Resilience theory draws attention to the significance of how individuals define their identity and attribute value to themselves within a social context. One aspect of this is evident in the way assistance is sought, not least because the need for help depends upon the individual defining a situation as beyond their capability. Such situations have the potential to create a degree of personal vulnerability, which may range from being tolerable and even pleasant to being overwhelming and distressing. Consequently, seeking help, the manner in which it is done and the nature of the outcome, is one of the fundamental elements of resilience theory.

The genuinely resilient individual can identify a challenge or problem to be beyond their capability, but assess it to be manageable with either additional emotional support or practical assistance. How this is pursued varies according to personal style, circumstances and the availability of perceived resources. The way in which an individual goes about asking for help and from whom is an indicator of their ability to assess the situation, recognise it demands more than they can manage alone, and assess who is the best available person to help achieve the desired outcome. A corollary to this process is the ultimate outcome of satisfaction in the achievement of the task. A positive outcome is not only a temporary reward, it is also coupled with a sense of increased resourcefulness for the individual because of the choices they made and the way in which they organised the outcome. This in turn becomes incorporated into the individual's identity, so seeking help is not only an integral element of resourcefulness but can profoundly influence an individual's self-esteem.

The course was designed so that the participants were encouraged to work with a different volunteer each week and ride a different horse, thereby maintaining a level of challenge through novelty. This meant that seeking help might occur at any point. During the sessions, interviews and focus groups, there were many opportunities for the participants to seek advice and practical help as individuals, in pairs and in group situations. This was possible because the volunteers and instructor were present at all times, so allowing one-to-one conversations, if that was the participant's choice. It quickly became apparent in each course that there was a broad range of personal styles regarding asking for support.

Emily and Adam shared a thoughtful approach to the course and often asked relevant questions during the focus group sessions about how best to manage the horses on the ground and how to improve riding skills. The quality of their questions and the congruent manner in which they were posed demonstrated their constructive approach to learning. In particular, Adam became very aware of the importance of good balanced upright posture when riding. The tendency to hunch the body over is associated with a primal, instinctive response to perceived threat; the posture is designed to protect the internal organs. When riding, this is often an indicator of insecurity or lack of confidence. It also serves to unbalance both the rider and the horse.

Adam, as noted in his Single Case Study Analysis, talked about being seemingly confident whilst inwardly having serious doubts about his abilities. Self-confidence was a major theme of discussion and reflection for him throughout the sessions and he acknowledged that he coped by using acquired social behaviours that masked his underlying anxiety. His awareness of these tensions and behaviours was evident in his recognition of his hunched riding position. This highlighted for him the extent of his anxiety, so he paid close attention to this at every session, responding to the instructor's comments by instantly correcting his position.

To return to the course photographs that were later made into a PowerPoint presentation, Adam asked for a photograph taken during an early session, showing him in an unbalanced position to be removed from the presentation.

This reflected his increased mastery regarding equitation. He knew that he had improved through accepting helpful instruction during the course and did not want the slide included, as it did not represent his ultimate achievement. Adam reflected later how he went on to apply this learning about the importance of posture in a successful job interview.

Another key moment in sessions where help was requested was during the times when the participants were grooming the horses. Most asked a volunteer directly for help, especially when picking out the horse's hooves, which involves lifting each hoof and cleaning it out. This was possibly the greatest perceived challenge for them because of the risk attendant in working with the horse's legs. Most participants were reluctant to do this task independently at first and needed a volunteer to be beside them and, in some cases, to lift the horse's leg a couple of times, so the hoof was accessible. This supportive partnership and teamwork enabled most participants to eventually manage this task themselves.

All volunteers were very aware of the need to accommodate a spectrum of styles regarding asking for help within the boundaries of the sessions. When developing a range of supports, it is important to allow for passive or indirect supports as well as active or direct supports. Rose, as noted, was exceptionally anxious about being near the horses and expressed her need for support in ways which, in other social circumstances, may have resulted in her either being reprimanded for her language or being refused help. She had a rich repertoire of expletives, usually accompanied by extreme startle behaviours, both of which indicated the profound level of her stress. The volunteers were able to ignore the socially challenging aspects of these behaviours and understand them for the signs that they were, thus eliminating any potential negative repercussions for Rose. The culture of tolerance and support evident within the group meant the other participants also ignored her behaviours, concentrating on their goals and neither watching nor mocking Rose when she was struggling to manage her current challenge. The fact that she was not rejected by any of the people around her meant she could continue at her own pace and accept the help she was being offered, which was both bespoke and genuine. She followed a very different route to the other participants initially but,

because she was able to accept the help on offer, was able to achieve the same goals as the other participants.

The availability of supportive help and advice was an explicit part of the contract with the participants. The volunteers were all described to them as experienced riders and there to help whenever needed. The instructor's expertise was also clearly stated. The bedrock of knowledge and skills, freely available, meant the participants were able to access whatever they needed in ways that enhanced their experience of themselves with the horses. The ways in which they asked for help demonstrated their vulnerabilities and highlighted for them the goals they wanted to achieve. Tolerance of their different personal styles meant that each participant was able to develop authentic ways of experiencing their vulnerabilities without shame or detrimental effects, which in turn added to their sense of achievement. The success of this approach was evident in the ways in which each of the groups was mutually supportive, regardless of variations in personal style. There was a sense of enjoyment and fun during the sessions, and an appreciation of humour, both as a form of communication and an expression of the shared experience.

Asking for and accepting help was a central theme in 'The Horse Course'. None of the participants had relevant or recent experience of being with horses and therefore needed support to manage the sessions' tasks and activities. The careful design of the course, and the availability of helpful volunteers and the instructor meant that support was clearly available whenever the participants needed it. They all readily sought and accepted help at different times and for differing reasons, and consequently made advances in both their abilities to manage the non-riding tasks and to progress their riding skills. This had a significant effect on their self-esteem, evident in the ways that several participants commented upon their sense of achievement at being able to do what once had seemed an impossible task.

Seeking help was also a feature of the focus groups, which were the final element of every session. The ways in which the participants asked questions, were listened to by their peers and responded to by the volunteers, demonstrated openness to learning both by the participant asking the question

and by the rest of the group, from the way in which they attended to the information given in the response. This reflects Linda Darling-Hammond's (2010) research, which shows that students are more engaged and learn best when they are given various ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This also helps teachers more accurately assess student learning. A wide range of learning styles was accommodated in the groups, enabling everyone to engage fully with the educative aspects and derive the optimum benefits.

4.5.4 Accepting disappointments as a spur to aspiration

The course was designed to present a series of challenges within a supportive environment. As a consequence, each participant would be asked to do things they had never done before and were expected to feel stretched in their abilities to achieve the declared aim of each activity. It was expected that there would be a range of abilities and that observing others' achievements, if they were classified as better than one's own, could be an incentive to try again or have the potential to be disappointing and dispiriting. The construction of realistic, optimistic goals for the next session was an indicator of a positive outcome to these experiences.

One of the markers of positive self-esteem and genuine resilience is the ability to experience disappointment, acknowledge that it has occurred, and resolve to attempt that task again. Opportunities to have those sorts of experiences were embedded within the programme of sessions, because of the unique and novel nature of each session's contents, alongside empathic support. The resilient individual is able to both accept a disappointing outcome and seek the help needed to try again.

Vicky acknowledged that the novel experience of being with horses made her feel stressed, although she knew that she wanted to do all the activities. She was able to appreciate her achievement at each step of the course and recognise what she had done. This achievement was emphasised because her earlier interview responses suggested that she had significant doubts about her

abilities. In the end, she had gained sufficient confidence to embrace potentially threatening experiences and manage the inherent challenges.

Vicky's long conversation with the researcher whilst on a hack (recorded in field notes) emerged from a discussion about how much progress she had made since starting the course. Vicky said that she had been surprised by all she had achieved to date and expanded upon the theme by saying that young people were often judged on their appearance by older adults (see Single Case Study Analysis). From the tone of the conversation, the researcher deduced that it was highly likely that Vicky had experienced negative judgements about her worth and abilities, so 'The Horse Course' and her ambitions were a spur to aspiration. Her desire to enter the caring profession was partly to prove to the outside world that she was capable and should be respected.

In the second interview, conducted at the beginning of the fourth session, Vicky reported that she had become more physically active at home, associating this change of lifestyle with the experience of being outdoors with the horses and stating that it had helped her feel better about herself. Vicky's experience of being with the horses had given her time to think about and focus on some people's readiness to judge the worth of someone by their appearance. She had clear plans to realise her aspiration to enter the caring profession. Part of the value of the course for her was this dedicated time, different to any other period in her weekly life, which she used to great effect to consider and articulate her thoughts. It was, in effect, a therapeutic experience for Vicky in that she was able to make significant progress in consolidating her thinking, and share this with someone who she only met in this environment and within the boundaries of a confidential conversation.

The size of the horses was a key factor in the way in which some participants assessed their achievements. This underscores the significant difference inherent within work with horses and work with, for example, dogs or other small animals. The magnitude of achievements had a direct bearing upon their perception of the risk entailed within the exercise. This is related to the perceived physical power of the horse, and the rider's ability to engage with the horse and develop a partnership of trust and co-operation. The potential for

disappointments, and opportunities to use them to spur aspiration are, then, linked to the size of the horse and the scale of the challenge. For example, Adam identified how the extraordinary experience of the course contrasted with his usual life but also how he could transfer what he had discovered to other aspects of it. This capacity demonstrates an understanding of both his current situation and the potential of the course to influence his self-perception and future choices.

In the final focus group, the instructor suggested to the participants that ‘The Horse Course’ experience would be one the participants could look back on in the future and realise the scale of what they had achieved. She acknowledged that they had all tried even the most difficult tasks and had all done really well. She particularly acknowledged Rose’s achievement in the last session, when she agreed to ride a different horse than the one she was comfortable with and had found the experience an overwhelming challenge. This highlighted how, for even the most experienced riders, it was very scary to get on a horse that is “raring to go and can’t stand still”. The instructor also noted that Rose had not been defeated by her experience of not being able to get on the more energetic horse but had got on another horse and participated fully in that riding session. Rose was clearly delighted by this affirmation.

When invited to share what they had learned and could possibly take forward into their jobs, the responses were reflective. For example, Emily said that it was assertiveness that she would take forward, acknowledging that, “More often than not you have to deal with unruly people and you’ve got to try and calm them down while at the same time not make the situation worse”. In contrast, Adam stated that what he would take forward was, “To feel more confident. Having done things I’ve never done before”.

The learning experiences on ‘The Horse Course’ were designed to be purposeful and to accommodate different learning needs and styles within a secure base. Based on the premise that the learning experience is better when the learner can be fully absorbed, mobile phones were discouraged. For many young people, the demands on their time and the distractions of everyday life,

including digital distractions, prevent their full attention being given to one activity for any sustained time. This is reflected in Goleman's (2014) analysis of how too much information can create 'a poverty of attention'. The opportunity to become fully absorbed in one activity is unusual. The participants were away from their usual familiar surroundings, interacting with different people and signed up to a very novel and challenging adventure, which demanded attentiveness. Their commitment to the course was proof of their intrinsic motivation because the value of the course was not connected to any other value system to which the young people had aligned themselves, suggesting that the experience of being with the horses had value in itself.

Mary Hohmann and David P. Weikart (1995) suggest that young people can be intrinsically motivated through having a sense of shared control in a learning experience. If the experience itself is enjoyable and builds on the learner's interests, needs and strengths, it is likely to generate feelings of competence and expectations of probable success. These factors are all equally reflected within resilience theory (Gilligan, 1999; Daniel and Wassell, 2002): an internal locus of control, enjoyment, a sense of purposefulness, and the employment of successful coping strategies with positive outcomes.

4.5.5 Experiencing and celebrating success

In contrast to systems of praise and rewards, the instruction and guidance on the course was based on the principle of encouragement. Praise, although typically well intentioned, can make young people unsure of how to evaluate their own efforts, whilst encouragement can facilitate their capacity to understand and accept responsibility for their own motivation and intentions. Mistakes or inability to manage a task were always framed as opportunities for learning and improvement. Genuine achievement was responded to with authentic acknowledgement of progress. This was intended to create a mutually supportive learning culture and a desire among the participants to improve their performance, thereby contributing to an enhanced internal locus of control.

The instructor's expert status was established by her relaxed, authoritative demeanour and her detailed knowledge of the subjects. She generated respect

from the whole group while maintaining a friendly and very approachable manner. This well-crafted balance meant that any guidance she gave was attended to and acted upon. Her expert status meant that when she recognised a participant's achievement, her comments were highly valued. The impact of this was particularly evident in Gillian's need for explicit recognition, which she classified as 'praise'. Whenever the instructor commented positively on Gillian's riding, it was in the context of the group and for achieving a riding skill they were all attempting. The status of the instructor and the context were both influential factors in the value of the comments for Gillian. The effect upon her self-esteem was one of the paramount benefits. Gillian recognised and enjoyed it for herself, and spoke about how other people who had similar needs would readily connect with the positive elements that contact with horses provided.

Gillian valued the instructor's praise so much that she said she made even greater efforts to be "noticed so [she] would get more." So great was the effect upon her self-esteem that she said she no longer felt the need to use make-up as the confidence-boosting mask it had been for her beforehand. Gillian attributed this profound change in her self-perception to her positive experience of being with horses.

The culture of positive recognition and support that was the foundation of 'The Horse Course' sessions, combined with the group's shared goals of horse management and riding, enhanced the group's mutually supportive approach. This was evident in their collective responses to individuals' achievements. For example, in their acclaim for Rose's achievement when she was finally able to mount a horse and be led in walk into the adjacent arena. When the group saw her riding in the arena, they all applauded her achievement and encouraged her to join them, which she eventually did.

Celebrating success took four forms. First, it was closely linked to the value attributed to the instructor's expert status: her recognition of achievement was highly valued and considered by the participants to be a marker of genuine success. Second, each participant's level of achievement was valued regardless of how it compared to others' achievements. Third, individuals were able to recognise and value their personal achievements in ways that enhanced

their identity and self-esteem. Fourth, the authenticity of the group's sense of achievement was reflected in their collective ability to enjoy each other's successes in a humorous and light-hearted manner.

4.5.6 Thinking about the next session in the intervening interval

Developing an internal image of the course was an indicator of its significance and salience to each participant. This was assessed by the ways in which participants referred to the meaning of the previous session and their hopes for the next one during the focus groups. This was also connected to how participants related their equine experience to experiences in other settings.

Learning to ride and be confident around horses on the ground is an incremental process. In a therapeutic context, weekly sessions allow a time interval between sessions, during which an individual can consider events of the last session and work through the emotional content to construct an integrated schema that, ideally, resolves the peaks of any distress and builds on new learning. Alongside this internal modelling process, it is important to develop and hold a consistent image of the riding school setting, the horses and people involved. It was apparent that the participants were able to do this with ease, as demonstrated in their cognitive mapping of the school (e.g. remembering where the equipment was kept, recalling the technical terms for grooming brushes, remembering people's and horses' names, etc.) and conversations about what they had done during the previous session. Additionally, they were all asked in the focus groups to think about their goals for the next week and often came to that session with those aims explicitly in mind.

This element was drawn out, to assess the inherent value of the equine experiences beyond their immediate appeal as something out of the ordinary and fun. It was expected that participants would demonstrate this by making links between the learning about themselves and their everyday lives, as elaborated in the section below, Transferable Skills. Evidence of this was also found in participants' aims for subsequent sessions, demonstrating the connections made between sessions. The individual's willingness and capacity to think in these ways is one of the fundamental elements of effective

therapeutic experiences and evidence of engagement with the process. There were several examples, not least the way in which Emily made strong connections between her demeanour in pressurised situations and her desire to be more assertive, both in her verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Gillian also demonstrated the bearing the sessions had on her self-esteem in her conversations with her mother, a relationship which she had previously described as difficult, partly because of the family culture of valuing male children over females. This explicit favouritism left Gillian feeling less valued. Although profoundly affected by her family's attitude, she swiftly recognised the respect to be gained from 'The Horse Course', not least because nobody in her family engaged in similar activities. In constructing the research programme, I had been mindful of the balance between offering a unique opportunity, possibly something the participants would not be able to continue after the course, and the challenges inherent within the novelty of the different horse-related experiences. Gillian, however, framed it very differently; as an opportunity for her to bring something entirely new into the family, something that belonged exclusively to her. The unique experience of the sessions gave Gillian a cachet that she revelled in and exploited to great effect within her family. The certificate, rosette and photos were concrete proof of her achievements and permanent mementos.

Rose, having been extremely anxious about horses, exemplified by her avoidant behaviours during the first session, amazed the others at the first focus group, when she said that her aim for the next session was to get on a horse. Based on her progress so far and her tendency to react with extreme alarm to the horses' movements, this seemed highly unlikely to happen. Whilst it did not happen as soon as she had originally hoped, she did achieve her aim. In addition, as noted in her Single Case Study Analysis, the gap between her achievements and those of the rest of the group did not appear to bother her and neither did it draw any negative comments from the other participants. As stated previously, problem solving is one of the seminal qualities of a resilient individual and this was clearly demonstrated in Rose's behaviour.

All the participants were actively engaged with the course. This was evident in the ways in which they retained information about procedures, and remembered technical terms and the names of people. Each came to sessions committed to the process of embedding their learning from the previous session or sessions and with aims in mind for themselves. Both of these elements are evidence of the productive value of the weekly interval between sessions. Far from being fallow time away from the sessions, participants used it to review their experiences and think about their goals for the next session. Participants were readily able to internalise their successes and build upon them in other arenas of their lives.

The therapeutic value of the course was linked to the process of thinking about the meaning of the sessions, internalising their effects, building upon the benefits and planning for the next one. All the participants demonstrated their commitment to the course by attending each week, with occasional exceptions, such as hospital visits or illness, and by coming prepared to take on the new tasks and improve in the areas where they acknowledged they had not achieved their desired goal. The participants made explicit links between sessions, even referring back to the earliest sessions at the end stage of the course, and remarking on the differences between their riding then and now. Several participants commented on how the experience of being with horses had brought about changes in their behaviours elsewhere and opened them up to think about themselves differently, bringing about positive changes through these insights.

4.5.7 Development of personal insight

The process by which participants enhanced their understanding of themselves, because of the experience of working with the horses, was an especially important factor, because it made the link between the social, public experience and the way in which it was internalised and personalised for each participant. (This is explored in more detail in Section 4.5.8).

The tasks of grooming, tacking up and riding the horses created unique experiences for the participants. They needed to adapt existing skills and in several cases, develop new ones, to cope with both the practical elements and the emotional demands inherent in the challenges. The need to be calm and move in a relaxed way around the horses meant they had to consider every movement they made and the volume and tone of their voices, which was something many of them had not expected to be important. Several of the participants reflected upon the effects these personally stretching experiences had upon them and how they had integrated them into their lives.

For example, Gillian openly admitted to having difficulties containing her anger at times, both at home and elsewhere. This was one element of her behaviour that she noticed changed during the early stages of 'The Horse Course'. During the early weeks of the course, she had a conversation with her mother about it, in part because her mother had noticed a difference in her general mood. Gillian recognised that she had needed to develop strategies to manage her usual sense of frustration when she was working with the horses, also realising that this newly acquired skill had developed in other areas of her life. She related her new ability to manage the effects of frustration to the way that being with horses enabled her to relax more, possibly because the situation required her to be calmer than she usually was. She said, although she still felt anger inside, even that had diminished and that she no longer got as angry as she used to. Gillian struggled to think of words to explain accurately her experience but used the word "unwind" to describe the effect being with horses had upon her.

Another participant had a similarly revelatory experience of herself. Emily was a very articulate, thoughtful individual who always gave considered responses in interviews. During her second interview it became clear that the experience of being with the horses had brought about a seminal change in her self-perception and caused her to think about how she presented to others. When asked after four weeks about her thoughts on the course, she responded by saying that it had made her aware that she needed to be more assertive. She then extended this insight and transferred it to the world of work. Her ability to project the knowledge and insights she gained from her equine experiences into

other arenas was used swiftly thereafter when Emily was interviewed for an internship with a major legal agency. She was accompanied by her tutor who reported that Emily had been both articulate and appropriately confident in her responses, with the result that she was awarded the internship.

Resilience theory proposes that one's self-esteem can be profoundly affected by successful outcomes in challenging experiences. Repeated affirmation from a valued source can promote a sense of wellbeing at the time and have a lasting effect upon one's self-perception. Such experiences can also change longstanding beliefs about oneself, affect attitudes towards others and alter established behaviours. Arguably, the greatest test of the authenticity and value of such changes is an individual's ability to transfer newly acquired skills and self-beliefs to other arenas.

4.5.8 Transferable skills

In many respects, this was the ultimate goal of the course. The participants' ability to integrate the range of experiences and achievements gained from the sessions, and apply them to other settings, to improve their performance and raise their expectations, was taken as a marker of enhanced resilience and greater self-esteem.

Effective therapeutic interventions have an intrinsic value but, arguably, the benefits derived have greatest worth when applied in an individual's everyday world. The ability to integrate the personal learning inherent in therapeutic experiences in a productive manner is typically evident in the ability to make adjustments to previously held models of oneself and the external world. The optimum outcomes of these adjustments are: additional positive experiences of self, a greater sense of contentment and a realistically grounded, optimistic view of the world, linked to other planned goals.

There are several examples of transferable skills, some of which have been cited above. There were also some subtle non-horse related examples, such as when Adam agreed to be the scribe at the first focus group, even though he

was reluctant to put himself forward because of his fragile self-confidence and his openly expressed concerns about his ability to spell. Other ways in which skills were transferred were more horse related. For instance, Rose was noticeably anxious during the interviews, evident in her inability to tolerate normal eye contact in the one-to-one situation and the ways in which she distanced herself within the interview space. However, when asked what she liked best about horses in the initial interview, she immediately drew on what she had learned in the first session about horses and communication. Her response was, "They don't stare at you!" In addition, related to the overall experience of the course, as the programme continued, her eye contact and need for distance both changed significantly, indicating reduced anxiety to the point where she initiated and held eye contact in the final interview.

Similarly, Emily, in her final interview, associated her experience of 'The Horse Course' to a distinct improvement in her confidence, exemplified as follows:

Recently, like before The Horse Course, when X asked me to do a presentation as part of our English qualification, doing presentations is part of building confidence, I really didn't want to do a presentation in a tiny voice and looking down. I mean we did one recently with X on Monday and before I'd be shaking and looking down, but I can look at her now! I mean, I don't like using the phone, I don't think anyone likes using the phone, but now I've started placement I have to use the phone because, I talk to my friends on the phone, but it's different answering the phone to someone who's older than you. I have to say that the lass who's in the office is in a meeting and to call later. Before I wouldn't have been able to do that either. My hands were shaking but I still did it. I did it.

There were also more explicit examples, such as Lisa's confidence in her judgement as a result of successful grooming experiences, Emily developing a more assertive manner in her successful interview, and Gillian being able to celebrate her achievements in her conversation with her mother. The significance of this last example is related to the context of the family culture and the value placed upon Gillian within the family system. These examples

illustrate and confirm the value of working with horses in relation to improved self-esteem and the benefits of inner contentment gained from such experiences.

The therapeutic value of the course lay in the participants' abilities to internalise the benefits derived and transfer them to other arenas in their lives, thereby extending their experience of the world through enhanced self-esteem and a stronger internal locus of control. The illustrative examples above describe the impact of the course and demonstrate the profound effect of the demands of the course, coupled with the participants' willingness to reconsider and reorganise certain aspects of their lives.

The need to develop a calm presentation meant that this situation required them to acknowledge their internal state in an effort to maintain a peaceful demeanour and to work patiently to achieve the desired outcome. In contrast, in previous demanding situations, participants may have responded angrily, due to feeling vulnerable or frustrated. 'The Horse Course' enabled them to develop and then employ this calmness elsewhere. Similarly, in order to achieve a successful outcome, the participants knew that they had to expect compliance from the horses by asserting themselves in the partnership. The need to develop this balance of personal styles drew attention to their behaviours in other arenas. For example, Emily and Adam in job interviews, and Gillian in her experience of sibling rivalry. 'The Horse Course' programme brought about appreciable changes in how they subsequently managed previously unsatisfactory experiences, which in turn, brought about improved outcomes.

This section has presented eight key themes that emerged from the data. I will now return the focus to the potential of horses as authentic and therapeutic partners, and their impact on young people's self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing. The next section will therefore focus on the 'ingredients' that constituted the space that I initially thought of as the safe space of 'The Horse Course' (see Figure 1) and later, as 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe' (see Figure 63).

4.6 The five ingredients of the 'pocket universe'

Throughout history, horses have often been associated with 'magical' attributes or described in romantic terms such as 'majestic' and 'noble'. The findings of this research suggest some reasons why these visions of the horse may have a partial basis in fact. I return to explore the 'pocket universe' in which the sensory, relational and physical 'entanglements' between young people and horses took place. As explained at the outset, after working with numerous groups of young people and horses, I was convinced at a deep level that something special happened between them if certain ingredients were present. However, this was an instinctive understanding based on years of observation rather than a more academic and analytical one. Initially, I was unsure of what some of those ingredients might be and I was unaware of others. As the study progressed and my knowledge of theory and practice increased, I began to identify more formally some of the key ingredients that facilitated the fascinating entanglements that occurred between equally 'agentic' (Maursted, Davis and Cowles, 2013, p. 322) horses and young people.

This is, in effect, facilitated a further distilling of the eight themes above into a set of components that must be present in the 'pocket universe' to create the ideal situation, enabling enhanced resilience, wellbeing and self-esteem to develop. There follows a discussion of the key components, grouped under five main headings, to represent each 'ingredient', enabling 'The Horse Course' to be:

1. Person-centred
2. Multi-layered
3. Relational
4. Eudaimonic (and hedonic)
5. Inter-species

All are interrelated but it makes sense to begin with the person-centred (humanistic) component, as the core conditions of this approach have underpinned 'The Horse Course' since its inception, and it has become evident through the study just how much they permeate every other strand of the pocket universe.

4.6.1 It is person-centred

Rogers (1996) argued lyrically that people are unique individuals, by saying,

People are just as wonderful as sunsets if you let them be. When I look at a sunset, I don't find myself saying, "Soften the orange a bit on the right hand corner." I don't try to control a sunset. I watch with awe as it unfolds (p. 22).

The young people's experience of 'The Horse Course' contributed to their unfolding like sunsets. The emotional power acknowledged in the quotation is reflected in the volunteers' accounts of being moved by what they observed, as well as in the young people's recognition of how they had responded to, and were changed by, engaging with horses.

In addition, Rogers' (1957) six 'Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change' (see Table 17, overleaf) in person-centred practice are particularly relevant in relation to 'The Horse Course'. Rogers hypothesised that these conditions are necessary for change to occur over a period of time and that they "hold in any situation whether it is or is not labelled 'psychotherapy'" (p.6). There were major similarities between these conditions and the ingredients that became evident when analysing what was happening in the 'pocket universe'. As noted in the introduction, it was not surprising that person-centred influences became evident, given how horses embody the core therapeutic principles involved, but the influences appeared so frequently in the data that it was notable, hence being listed as the first ingredient. In addition, this was accompanied by the realisation that my initial understanding of the power of person-centred practice, something I had considered myself to have as a solid foundation at the outset of my research, now appeared to have been relatively limited. This shift in understanding forms part of my learning journey through the research.

Table 17 identifies and discusses the similarities between person-centred conditions and 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'. The latter is in the right-hand column of the table.

Table 17. Comparison of 'The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change' (Rogers, 1957) and 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'.

<p>The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change</p> <p>(Rogers, 1957)</p>	<p>The Horse Course Pocket Universe</p>
<p>1. Two persons are in psychological contact.</p>	<p>This first condition requires two people to be in psychological contact. In other words, in a relationship. The relational approach on 'The Horse Course', deliberately paired up young participants with a volunteer and a horse, with the intention of developing relationships within and between the triad.</p>
<p>Rogers declared that conditions 2-6 define the characteristics of the relationship regarded as essential, by defining the necessary characteristics of each person in the relationship. All that is intended by the first condition is to specify that the two people are to some degree in contact and that each makes some perceived difference in the experiential field of the other.</p>	
<p>2. The first person, who we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.</p>	<p>This describes the client (young person) as being vulnerable or anxious and therefore in a state of 'incongruence', indicating that there is "discrepancy between the actual experience of the organism and the self-picture of the individual" (p.2).</p> <p>This fits the description of both cohorts involved in this study. All of the young participants had been identified as vulnerable and/or as experiencing anxiety due to previous negative life experiences, which led them to become excluded from the mainstream education system.</p>
<p>3. The second person, who we shall term the therapist,</p>	<p>Condition 3 describes the therapist as integrated in the relationship and therefore in a state of 'congruence'. Here we have a</p>

<p>is congruent or integrated in the relationship.</p>	<p>person (or horse) who is genuine, authentic and self-aware.</p> <p>As posited earlier, the therapist or co-therapist could be the volunteer (all were experienced with horses, some had been previous course participants), both myself and the research assistant (as experienced practitioners), myself (as an ethnographer), or the horses (as natural specialists in practising congruence).</p>
<p>4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard (UPR) for the client.</p>	<p>Condition 4 addresses UPR, or “a warm acceptance of each aspect of the client’s experience” (p.4). Here again, the role of therapist could be carried out by the volunteer, the researcher or the horse.</p> <p>The term UPR was familiar to the authors of ‘The Horse Course’, based on their theoretical and practice-based knowledge of horses as entirely non-judgemental.</p>
<p>5. The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client.</p>	<p>In order to explain conditions 5 and 6, “the therapist’s empathic understanding of the client’s frame of reference”, their “unconditional positive regard” for the client and the communication of these back to the client, I refer to the many instances of empathy, including kinaesthetic empathy, evident in the data. These conditions require the therapist to sense the client's feelings, without interference from their own feelings and in turn, the client perceives, to a degree, the acceptance and empathy the therapist experiences for them. Additionally, there is evidence of horses specialising in ‘mirroring’ emotions, energy and behaviours back to humans, which works in a similar way. In relation to ‘The Horse Course’, there is evidence that the young people recognised this.</p>
<p>6. The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved.</p>	<p>In order to explain conditions 5 and 6, “the therapist’s empathic understanding of the client’s frame of reference”, their “unconditional positive regard” for the client and the communication of these back to the client, I refer to the many instances of empathy, including kinaesthetic empathy, evident in the data. These conditions require the therapist to sense the client's feelings, without interference from their own feelings and in turn, the client perceives, to a degree, the acceptance and empathy the therapist experiences for them. Additionally, there is evidence of horses specialising in ‘mirroring’ emotions, energy and behaviours back to humans, which works in a similar way. In relation to ‘The Horse Course’, there is evidence that the young people recognised this.</p>

There are further similarities and comparisons to be made between what occurs in the pocket universe and the core conditions of person-centred therapy. The fact that 'The Horse Course' was established as a safe space with clear expectations and a clear agreement reflects how a therapist would set the boundaries and timescale in order to agree a contract with the client. As mentioned, there had been no conscious intention to 'do' therapy, yet the experience did in many ways meet the necessary conditions identified by Rogers (1957), who goes on to suggest that "conditions 3, 4 and 5, which apply especially to the therapist, are qualities of experience" (p. 6). Rogers argues that they do not necessarily require professional training or diagnostic knowledge, but instead "must be acquired through an experiential training" (p. 6). This is a salient point, because as well as the researchers' combined professional training and diagnostic knowledge, both human and horse facilitators had significant experience of practice in this area.

Rogers (1957) suggests that at least for a time, "many a good friendship can fulfil the six conditions of therapeutic personality change" (p. 1). This can be seen in Adam's description of his bond with the horse and subsequent sense of achievement, as he refers to the horse's therapeutic qualities as those of "a good little friend" (Adam's Single Case Analysis, p.125).

This 'ingredient' acts as a foundation for the consideration of the four other ingredients, all of which have cohesion with person-centred principles, yet can also stand alone as valuable contributions to The Horse Course Pocket Universe.

4.6.2 It is Multi-layered

Rothe et al. (2005) describe how self-esteem promoting interactions between young people and horses are multi-layered. Moreover, Plummer (2014) asserts that "enhancing self-esteem is... a multi-layered undertaking" (p. 50). Thinking about multi-layered-ness is a useful way to set the scene for this section, which begins with some definitions, then goes on to explore useful models of holistic

theories and practices that explain the important concept of multi-layered-ness and its relevance to the findings of this study.

The word 'holistic' relates to "the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole" (Oxford English Dictionary). In medicine, a holistic practitioner would consider treating the "whole person, taking into account mental and social factors, rather than just the symptoms of a disease" (ibid). The term dates back more than 2,500 years to the Greek physician, Hippocrates, who "emphasised the 'need for harmony between the individual, social and natural environment, as reflected in the Hippocratic Oath'" (Kleisiaris et al., 2014, p. 1). In this study, the term is utilised to attempt to capture and explain how the organic nature of 'The Horse Course' influenced the social, emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual and aesthetic elements of young people's resilience, self-esteem and wellbeing.

It was apparent throughout the study that some of the fundamental 'layers' of support that should have been in place for these young people throughout their formative years had been absent or inadequate. Some had been substituted by entirely negative experiences, which in turn had negatively influenced their self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing. Indeed, many of the protective factors identified in the resilience framework and related to school, including regular school attendance, school medicals, supportive empathic teachers, and out of school networks and activities had not been part of their experiences.

Yet while these young people may not always have been able to count on support from the significant people in their lives, with horses as authentic and therapeutic partners, they were guaranteed a different outcome and a different paradigm, in which whatever you give, you will get something affirming in return. This paradigm is depicted beautifully in the (2010) ITV documentary *Horsepower*, in which actor, director and presenter, Martin Clunes, visits an Equine Assisted Therapy Rehabilitation Clinic in Arizona, USA. Under the supervision of therapist Laura Brinkahoff, who begins by affirming horses' ability to recognise incongruence, Clunes agrees to try out a therapy session. He enters a large outdoor pen with a horse unfamiliar to him, and to whom he is

invited to pose the question: "You are the teacher, I am the student, what is the lesson?" After a few minutes of trying every technique he knows to try and engage the horse, his efforts are responded to with casual indifference. At this point, he is asked by the therapist to say what has happened so far, to which he responds:

MC: For a while it was like, he was more interested in everyone else than me. Typical that (*laughs uncomfortably*) and typical of me to want to look at it in that way, because I want his attention and his approval.

Therapist: Where did that come from? Do you know?

MC: It's been around a long time... It's fairly obvious from what I do that I seek approval on a pretty grandiose level, but it, erm... just getting it doesn't stop that search.

Therapist: Right, yeah, because ultimately it's gonna need to come from you.

MC: Oh! My own approval of me? Yeah... yeah... yeah, that would be tough.

Next the therapist invites him to try using the horse's language through the 'join up' technique (Roberts, 1997). To Clunes' obvious delight, the horse quickly becomes interested and responsive. When asked by the therapist what he thought the horse's lesson was for him, he reflects,

MC: I suppose to just try that little, that extra go, and not be too quick to say 'well of course that didn't work, cause that's me. I don't deserve that'. I suppose... (*MC now visibly emotional*) It really is erm, therapeutic isn't it? It really is!

Therapist: Mmmm.

MC: It's funny, it unlocks something (*gestures towards his abdomen*) - some old rubbish in there.

Whilst Clunes is an older adult, the impact of this interaction, in enabling him to explore his emotional state, personal history and sense of self, is as powerful as that experienced by younger people. This was borne out by the qualitative data in this research, when young people described how horses often knew what

they were thinking and how they were feeling. They also considered how their own affirming experiences with horses could positively influence their self-perception and have lasting value, as in the case of Lisa, who described how her experiences with horses made her feel ‘amazing’, ‘smarter’ and ‘tall’.

4.6.2.1 Ecological Systems Theory

Multi-layered or holistic thinking relevant to this study can also be identified in the form of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, later revised in 1994 to the ‘Bioecological Model’. Here, the process of human development is shaped by the interaction between children, their families and all of the individual, relationship, community and environmental systems surrounding them (Hayes et al., 2017). Just as the biopsychosocial model of health has been of considerable value in understanding health and illness (Pilgrim, 2015), Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model has been an influential tool with which to understand and explain social inequality.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) identified five different, yet interrelated and bidirectional systems that influence child development. These have commonly been depicted in concentric circle diagrams, as depicted here:

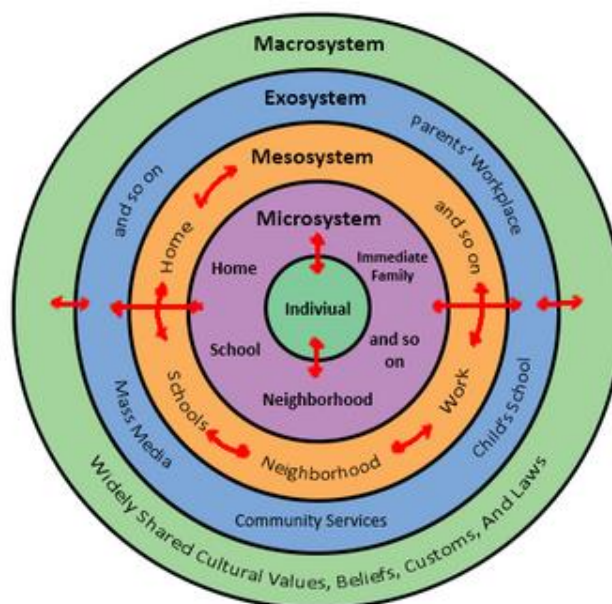


Figure 61. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bing Images).

The microsystem includes immediate relationships. These can be with family and caregivers and may include those in care and education settings. It could therefore be suggested that 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe' was part of the young people's microsystems, or even a microsystem in its own right. The young people's development was influenced by their horse-human and human-human interactions, connections and relationships within a safe context. Although relational issues are addressed elsewhere, it is important to note that the nature of the relationships made within microsystems is likely to be influenced by, and influence, attachment behaviours. This was evident in The Horse Course Pocket Universe, in the ways in which both Mark and Rose needed one to one time and support in order to feel safe and ready to participate.

The mesosystem is the space where the microsystems interconnect, interact and influence one another. It is conceivable that microsystems of The Horse Course Pocket Universe, the family or care circumstances, and The Agency the young people were recruited from, made up the young people's mesosystems.

The exosystem incorporates other structures or microsystems in which the child has no involvement, but which may influence them indirectly through their influence on one or more of the microsystems. These could include circumstances or environments that affect their peers, parents or caregivers. In 21st century society, this also includes social media. The Horse Course Pocket Universe offered a space in which the young people were, for a brief period, apart from those circumstances, environments and technologies, giving distance and allowing reflection.

The macrosystem includes the cultural and sociological beliefs that impact on the beliefs and perceptions of individuals. It also includes socioeconomic status and geographic location. In this study, I suggest that it could include the beliefs underpinning constructs of childhood and youth in policy and legislation, which in turn have impacted on the sample participants' self-esteem. The geographical location of 'The Horse Course' and the fact that it largely took place away from the young people's everyday worlds, outdoors, in the riding

arena, the fields, the stables and the woods, will also have been influential. As mentioned in the Literature Review, the natural outdoor environment can also have a positive impact on holistic development and wellbeing.

The chronosystem refers to how significant events, such as environmental changes and life transitions influence development over the human lifetime. This is particularly significant in the cases of the young people who had had more than the normal amount of expected life transitions, for example, those who had been in and out of the care system, excluded from, or moved between families, homes and schools.

I return to this model shortly, given its influence on HighScope (Table 18) and consequently, its relevance throughout this study.

4.6.2.2 A psychosocial model

Another holistic and multi-layered approach was identified through the way that the research sits comfortably within the psychosocial domain, given that it involved physical, psychological and social wellbeing factors. This section begins by looking at relevant aspects of Erikson's (1950) eight stages of psychosocial development (Figure 62) before looking more closely at the relationship between The Horse Course Pocket Universe and one variant of the psychosocial model used in practice, the HighScope approach.

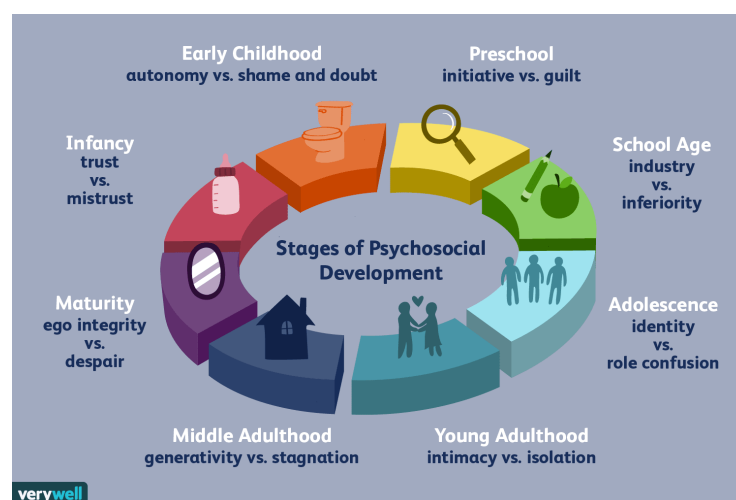


Figure 62. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (verywellmind).

Erikson proposes eight stages of development, each characterised by a crisis or a developmental issue which, if not resolved before the next stage begins, will inhibit developmental progress. The stages most pertinent to this study are those from infancy to adolescence. However, in relation to 'The Horse Course' where the young people involved did not typically share narratives about their early childhood, no definitive conclusions can be drawn about experience and development in the earlier stages, although various behaviors and responses were indicative of inhibited developmental journeys.

While all the stages are cumulative, some are more immediately relevant to The Horse Course Pocket Universe. Erikson describes the school years (six to 11) as the stage of 'industry vs. inferiority', believing that the child becomes increasingly self-conscious and compares their own skills and attributes with those of peers. This is particularly evident in school, where there are many new academic and social challenges. Inadequate support or learning problems, which result in a lack of skills that can lead to feelings of inferiority or inadequacy. Positive encouragement leads to positive comparison with peers and to a sense of competence, and arguably positive self-esteem. Although the young people on 'The Horse Course' were older, they often reported issues related to their experience of education, and the programme was explicitly designed to address issues about peers and their sense of self.

Adolescence in Erikson's model is the period spanning 12-19 years old. It is defined as the stage of 'identity vs. role confusion'. The young person continues to develop a sense of self, as well as a sense of identity. These are the years where they are under pressure to make important decisions about their future studies and careers, while at the same time testing out rules and boundaries. Successful and supported transition through this stage leads to a greater sense of self-worth, which Erikson considered an important influence on the ability to form intimate relationships. Conversely, unsuccessful support and understanding can lead to role confusion and a weaker sense of self. In this study, in terms of actual age, as well as the particular crisis or developmental

issue Erikson describes, the young people were thinking about their futures, and this space enabled them to explore self-worth.

Turning to an application and useful example of a psychosocial model from practice with children, young people and families, the HighScope approach (Schweinhart et al., 2005) was one of the first advocates for meeting the ‘non-educational’ needs of children in education settings. Interestingly, prior to this, in 1964, Bronfenbrenner’s perspectives on child development influenced a United States federal panel to support the development of Head Start, an initiative that aimed to address issues of inequality for children living in poverty. The HighScope approach has its origins in the Head Start initiative. Thus, there are direct links between the Bronfenbrenner and the HighScope approaches. Currently in the UK, young people are expected to be in the education system from the year they turn five until the age of 18. The pressure of regular testing and assessment from an early age has been shown to have a negative impact on many children and young people (Bradbury, 2019). It compounds the effects of educational and social inequalities, which previously highlighted research has shown can endure throughout the lifespan, negatively impacting school achievement, employment, and the capacity for secure relationships.

Young people’s long-term wellbeing and ability to make good decisions in life depend on having opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and to develop dispositions, such as independence, curiosity, initiative, trust, problem solving and divergent thinking. Horses’ potential to facilitate the development of such dispositions was evident in ‘The Horse Course Pocket Universe’, as Table 18 shows:

Table 18. HighScope and The Horse Course Pocket Universe

The HighScope Approach (Schweinhart et al., 2005)	The Horse Course Pocket Universe (Graham, 2020)
The HighScope Approach is underpinned by two principles:	In The Horse Course Pocket Universe, the young people were actively involved in a variety of supported active learning

<p>1) Children learn best by being actively involved in their own learning (Active Learning).</p> <p>The five ingredients of Active Learning are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials • Manipulation • Choice • Language from children • Support from adults <p>2) Adults are supporters of children's learning. Their role is to understand child development so that they can scaffold learning in developmentally appropriate ways. They get to know children's strengths and interests and build upon them.</p> <p>Factors of Intrinsic Motivation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control • Interest • Enjoyment • Feelings of competence • Probability of success <p>Adults use encouragement strategies rather than a behaviour management system based upon praise, reward and punishment. They work alongside children and communicate with them verbally and nonverbally to encourage and scaffold learning. Sharing power is considered to be the first part of the problem-solving approach, in which everyday conflicts are used as positive</p>	<p>experiences, which accommodated different learning preferences.</p> <p>The Safe Learning Agreement with the young people relied upon the course facilitators' understanding of young people's motivation, their knowledge of how to set up a purposeful learning environment with appropriate materials and resources, and their ability to communicate effectively. A significant element of this activity was about learning to share power, not only between humans but also in the horse-human dynamic or triad.</p> <p>The facilitators adopted a non-directive, strengths-based way of working. There was always choice, whether the choice to participate or not, the choice of how much to participate, whether to ride, whether to contribute, converse or seek support.</p> <p>They instinctively used therapeutic communication techniques and provided positive reinforcements through honest feedback and setting realistic goals. This is discussed in more detail in the next section, in relation to The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978).</p> <p>With appropriate support, the young people learned to do something new, while at the same time recognising their own strengths. Negative feelings about themselves and their abilities, often deeply embedded within their identity, were counteracted by the sense of personal achievement at having managed what they previously considered to be unmanageable tasks.</p>
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<p>opportunities to learn and develop problem solving skills.</p> <p>There is a consistent routine for each day, providing a balance of experiences and learning opportunities to work alone, in pairs, or with an adult as well as in small or large group activities. The most important segment of the day is the plan-do-review sequence, when children are supported to make choices about what they do, then carry out their plan and review it afterwards with adults and peers.</p>	<p>According to Erikson (1963), when young people are encouraged to plan and initiate their own actions and to successfully follow through on their intentions, they are more likely to become independent and self-sufficient.</p> <p>These skills became increasingly evident throughout 'The Horse Course', in the ways in which the participants took the opportunities on offer to engage in problem solving, and to use their experiences of disappointment to recover from setbacks, to move forward.</p>
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This section has illustrated how the multi-layered-ness of The Horse Course Pocket Universe offered an array of opportunities that promoted positive and affirming interactions between young people and horses. The next section looks through the relational lens, to consider how warm and supportive relationships can also provide building blocks to positive self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing.

4.6.3 It is relational

Humans need connection. It is a fundamental part of their basic needs (Bowlby, 1958; Maslow, 1943). As explored previously, the benefits of secure attachments, the need for attuned caregiving, and social and physical contact are well established and can contribute to the development of identity, self-worth and resilience (Music, 2011). In every caring profession, every day, there is a need for practitioners to engage with others through establishing relationships. Some relationships will be personal or social, others purely professional. Some will be straightforward and mutually satisfying. Others may involve difficult interpersonal interactions about complex social, emotional and psychological situations or problems. However, as Helen Harris Perlman argued,

Relationships, no matter how brief, can be catalysts that enable people to engage in their own healing and enact positive and enduring change in their lives (1979 quoted in Konrad 2013, p.2).

Relational practice is about building rapport through authentic, empowering and mutually respectful relationships. This idea was at the heart of 'The Horse Course'. It is also in line with McClusky and Hooper's (2000) definition of psychodynamic thinking, which states that relational practice is,

...an approach informed by attachment theory, psychoanalysis and systems theory, which together offer ways of understanding the complexity and variability of the ways in which individuals develop and relate to each other within particular social contexts, via focus on their past and present relationships (p. 9).

My solid grounding in systemic thinking, and a sound knowledge of systems theory, enabled me to recognise the importance of looking for connections when analysing the data. As illustrated previously, the role of the facilitators on 'The Horse Course', was to be encouraging and supportive. They needed to stay mindful of the previous experiences (as far as they were aware of them) and individual needs of the participants, and use a range of strategies to reach and engage multiple learning styles (intelligences).

4.6.3.1 Multiple intelligences, the human brain and nature/nurture

'The Horse Course' designers were familiar with 'Multiple Intelligences Theory' (Gardner, 1983, 1999, 2000), based on Gardner's belief that I.Q. testing does not do justice to human potential. Instead, Gardner proposed eight intelligences, defining 'intelligence' as, "a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture" (Gardner, 2000, p.28). Of the eight intelligences (considered here as abilities), four were clearly observed during young people's experiences of 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'. The first being: 'Inter-

personal Intelligence’ because of the necessity to communicate and attune with others, humans and horses alike, in one-to-one or group situations. The second was ‘Intra-personal Intelligence’, because of the self-reflective and self-regulatory elements of the course. The third was ‘Bodily-kinaesthetic Intelligence’ because of the physical action and body awareness skills involved in the activities. The fourth (the most recent addition to Gardner’s list) was ‘Naturalistic Intelligence’. This was evident in activities and conversations that required a level of connection with nature and the outdoor environment.

Since Gardner introduced this idea of multiple intelligences, other intelligence theories have followed. Goleman’s work on ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (1996) and ‘Social Intelligence’ (2007) have both influenced the approaches used within The Horse Course. Another theory that intrigues me on both a personal and professional level, and which I believe was also evident in The Horse Course Pocket Universe, is that of ‘Spiritual Intelligence’, not considered here to be something religious, but as something that may take different forms, according to the individual, and as Steven Benedict (1997) suggests is about the wellbeing of the whole universe.

Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall (2001) propose that:

...all our possible infinite intelligences can be linked to one of three basic neurosystems in the brain, and that all of the intelligences Gardner describes are actually variations of the basic IQ, EQ and SQ [Intelligence Quotient, Emotional Quotient and Spiritual Quotient] and their associated neural arrangements (p. 4).

Interestingly, Gardner chose not to include spiritual intelligence as one of his list of eight, instead suggesting the idea of ‘existential intelligence’, defining it as “a concern with ultimate life issues” and describing it as,

...the capacity to locate oneself with respect to the furthest reaches of the cosmos—the infinite and the infinitesimal—and the related capacity to locate oneself with respect to such existential features of the human condition as the significance of life, the meaning of death, the ultimate fate

of the physical and the psychological worlds, and such profound experiences as love of another person or total immersion in a work of art. (1999, p. 60).

Another form of intelligence relevant here, developed in response to Gardner, is that of 'Conversational Intelligence' (Glaser, 2013). This connects with how neuroscience may inform thinking and expertise when managing relationships. As explained by Glaser (2013), the brain can be considered not as one, but five brains:

1. The Reptilian Brain (amygdala) alerts us to physical and psychological threats;
2. The Limbic Brain (or Emotional Centre) is all about safety and survival and helps with discerning friends from enemies;
3. The Neocortex (or Knowledge Centre) manages data from memories, experiences and senses, and helps us understand reality through language, critical thinking and problem-solving;
4. The Heart Brain works together with the Prefrontal Cortex to deal with the biochemistry of our bodies to help us connect to others; and
5. The Prefrontal Cortex (or Executive Brain) helps us to engage with our outer world and our future, to have empathy, to make judgements and anticipate the future.

This led me to consider how the five brains that inform Conversational Intelligence might function for adolescents, whose brains are still under construction. In some ways, immaturity will be an advantage, since we know that while the brain stops growing in size during adolescence, it continues to mature into the mid to late 20s. Neuroscience tell us that this plasticity offers opportunity for new learning and change. It is impossible to predict, however, if, and when change, if not handled sensitively, may be less advantageous. If a young person has a history of trauma or abuse, they may be more vulnerable to stress and mental health issues. Although full histories of the young participants' experiences were not requested prior to their inclusion in 'The Horse Course', the facilitators and others involved were acutely aware of the

potential types and amounts of negative experiences that these young people may have been exposed to in unstable families and inappropriate or inequitable education settings. The researchers' underpinning knowledge of child and adolescent development, and their professional training and skills were utilised in every session. As the work of Rogers (1957) reminds us, however, unconditional positive regard and an empathic understanding of the client's frame of reference, are acquired through experience, something that the adults involved all had knowledge of. For the horses, these ways of working came naturally.

I now offer some examples of relational approaches that were evident in The Horse Course Pocket Universe. In the early sessions, some of the participants were understandably hesitant to fully engage. According to Glaser (2013), a resistance to engage suggests that the reptilian brain is switching into 'protect' mode. There were clear examples of this in both cohorts, such as Rose's reluctance to make eye contact and (initially before trust was established) to climb on a horse, and Gillian's nervous giggling. In these situations, the participants clearly needed more time and space.

Because the brain is hardwired for protection, when negative or stressful events occur, the amygdala instantly responds to prepare us to 'fight, flight, freeze or appease' (Glaser, 2013). The amygdala is basically 'hijacked', which means that the ability to think clearly, take in information and relate to others is flooded by emotion, leaving the individual unable to function adequately. Conversely, and as mentioned in the literature review, the neurotransmitter, dopamine which is increased by physical exercise and being outdoors, triggers optimism and motivation, whilst dampening fear (Kalter, 2020). Also, the use of both verbal and non-verbal encouragement strategies to make authentic connections and build inclusive relationships can increase oxytocin levels and promote the desire to bond or be close with others. In turn, this inhibits stress and fear, and increases courage.

During 'The Horse Course', both of these processes were observed in action among the young people. For example, when Susan suddenly and dramatically

withdrew from the group halfway through a session (flight), reporting “illness”. When she returned the following week, she said she was “furious with [her]self” because she had missed out. Another example was when Ash announced that he had “lost [his] bottle” (freeze) during a riding session, which was out of character, but he returned the following week with a renewed determination to conquer his fears from the previous session. The relational and so oxytocin-generating aspects of ‘The Horse Course’, and the ‘tend and befriend’ (Taylor et al., 2000) strategies employed by both humans and horses scaffolded the young people’s learning and enabled them to re-engage by making meaningful connections. The neuroscience behind the ‘Tend and Befriend’ theory suggests that while stress can lead to defensive or angry behaviour, it can, depending on other variables, also make us more caring, through activating systems in the brain that produce feelings of hope and courage. Likewise, health psychologist Kelly McGonigal (2015) suggests that stress can drive people towards seeking support, contact and help from others, and that caring for others can in itself create resilience.

The nature / nurture discourse also has significance here. Although it is broadly agreed that nature and nurture are inseparable, both ‘positions’ remain visible in some of the key child development theories that influence current practice. The nature position assumes that behaviour is shaped by both genetic and biological factors, and is directed by internal processes and unconscious feelings. This suggests that children and young people need others to help them express and deal with their emotions, a belief that is evident in various psychodynamic child development theories that refer to parts of the ‘self’ and suggest that neuroses originate in childhood. The nurture position assumes that behaviour is shaped by external societal influences. Here, adults in particular shape children’s behaviour so that they will conform to the expectations and conventions of the culture in which they grow up. These theories are based on behaviourism and social cognitive theory, including the work of Bandura (1997), in social cognitive learning theory, which proposed that people learn from one another, either through observation or instruction.

Reassuringly, a combined nature / nurture discourse is most influential on current practice. It concentrates on the two-way processes of feelings and relationships between children and people who are close to them. The position includes evolutionary theory (Darwin, 1859) social evolution theory, (Dawkins, 1976), and social constructivist theory which proposes that learning is a social process (Lev Vygotsky, 1962 and Colwyn Trevarthen, 1999). More recent research into behavioural epigenetics explores the influence of nurture on nature or how early life experiences can influence behaviour later in life (Miller, 2010). This is exemplified in the work of Robin Balbernie (2001) and Rima Shore (1997) who highlights three important conclusions from brain research:

First, an individual's capacity to learn and thrive in a variety of settings depends on the interplay between nature (their genetic endowment) and nurture (the kind of care, stimulation, and teaching they receive). Second, the human brain – across all ethnic and racial groups – is uniquely constructed to benefit from experience and from good teaching, particularly during the first years of life. And third, while the opportunities and risks are greatest during the first years of life, learning takes place throughout the human life-cycle (Shore, 1997, p. 252).

Steven Pinker (2004) concurs, stating that “Genes are affected by their environments, and learning requires the expression of genes, so the nature-nurture distinction is meaningless” (p. 8). This links well to ‘The Horse Course’ which recognises adolescence as a period of neurological plasticity. The person-centred, relational, multi-layered, eudaimonic and inter-species approach is sensitive to epigenetics, gene expression and the propensity for renewal and healing through viewing each individual young person holistically. Repeated experiences of feeling safe, secure and validated in relationships with horses and humans have the potential to alter previous negative patterns of thought and behaviour. As Plummer (2014) argues, “When we are able to be in tune with another person’s concerns and dilemmas, through our own

mindfulness, then we have greater potential to strengthen rapport, build trust and increase the possibility for long-lasting change” (p.50).

‘The Horse Course’ design took into account the relational aspect of the role of the facilitator as a ‘scaffolder’ of young peoples’ learning. Scaffolding is a term Jerome Bruner (1976) used to describe how adults or more capable peers can provide support for children, in order to enrich their learning. This also aligns with the idea of ‘The Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD), defined by Vygotsky (1978) as:

The distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development, as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).

In effect, the human facilitator and the horse guided, and through doing so, expanded the potential level of development, as young people interacted and engaged with the programme. Underpinned by the core conditions of the relational approach, both species naturally ‘tuned in’ to one another, just as the movements and vocalisations of infants have been observed to be in time and rhythm with communication from their parents (Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009). This non-verbal tactile communication, also recognised as ‘kinaesthetic empathy’ (introduced in section 2.3.4 and addressed more in 4.6.5), became a central focus of the research.

4.6.4 It is Eudaimonic (and also hedonic)

Huta and Waterman (2014) offer a useful definition of eudaimonia, stating that, “...the most common elements in definitions of eudaimonia are growth, authenticity, meaning, and excellence” (p. 1448). This foundation has been built upon by a number of researchers, including Joar Vitterserø (2016), who claims that eudaimonia is the most important idea in the world and that “given the right

circumstances, humans can deliberately develop into beings that both act good and feel well" (p. 1).

Making sense of the complex terminology associated with eudaimonia was challenging and as I reflected on this, I recognised the limitations of my earlier thinking. The theories of eudaimonia and, by association, hedonia, are not new, but they were new to me. Remaining briefly with the Greek language, my discovery of their existence was a 'eureka' moment. It made me realise that I needed to once more revisit my understanding of self-esteem, resilience, wellbeing and associated terms in relation to my analysis of the elements of 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'. My initial assumption had been that the pursuit of hedonic wellbeing was negative and meaningless, perhaps the opposite to eudaimonia, but on further reflection, I began to see that this was not a simple binary.

The discourse of eudaimonia suggests a way of living that is driven by intrinsic motivation, with eudaimonic wellbeing coming from within and leading to a sense of flourishing. It is essentially the pursuit of what feels right (Huta, 2015), closely aligned to Maslow's (1943) theory of self-actualisation.

To say that the context of 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe' enabled the young people to self-actualise may be too great a claim, but there were certainly numerous indications that it provided the safe space in which participants could experience meaningful interactions and develop authentic relationships with both humans and horses. There was also evidence that as the participants acquired new knowledge and practiced new skills, they began to flourish. In other words, they experienced 'personal growth', felt 'authenticity', made 'meaning' and achieved 'excellence', all aspects of eudaimonia, as identified by Huta (2015).

In contrast, the discourse of hedonism alludes to temporary 'fixes' of pleasure, enjoyment, comfort or satisfaction, and the absence of distress (Huta and Waterman, 2014). It is essentially the pursuit of what feels good (Huta, 2015), driven by extrinsic motivation or reward, rather than something that comes from

within. Hedonism can involve participation in thrilling, energising, risky activities, some of which may be shared with others and therefore offer opportunities to bond socially. Potentially, it may involve participation in activities that become addictive or are not conducive to good physical and mental health.

However, despite their differences, the long-standing theoretical literature on eudaimonia and hedonia, the empirical findings, and the clarification of complementarities all point to the importance of having both in life. Huta, (in Joseph, 2015) suggests that both eudaimonia and hedonism are central to discussions of wellbeing, stating that,

...they are by no means mutually exclusive, and that they often co-occur. Indeed, some of the most fulfilling pursuits are the ones where eudaimonia and hedonia are so seamlessly blended that they become one (p. 161).

The arguments made by Huta (2015) about the contrasting and linked nature of hedonia and eudaimonia are usefully summarised by Nico Rose in Table 19.

Table 19. Differentiating Eudaimonia and Hedonia.

Hedonia is about	Eudaimonia is about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction; • the absence of distress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>authenticity</i>: clarifying one's true self and deep values, staying connected with them and acting in accord with them; • <i>meaning</i>: understanding a bigger picture, relating to and contributing to it. This may include broader aspects of one's life or identity, a purpose, the long term, the community, society, even the entire ecosystem; • <i>excellence</i>: striving for higher quality and higher standards in one's behaviour, performance, accomplishments and ethics; • <i>personal growth</i>: self-actualisation, fulfilling one's potential and

	pursuing personal goals; growth, seeking challenges; and maturing as a human being.
Hedonia is associated with:	Eudaimonia is associated with:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical and emotional needs; • desire; • what feels good; • taking, for me, now; • ease; • rights; • pleasure; • self-nourishing and self-care; taking care of one's own needs and desires, typically in the present or near future; personal release and peace, replenishment; energy and joy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cognitive values and ideals • care; • what feels right; • giving, building, something broader, the long-term; • effort; • responsibilities; • elevation; • cultivating; giving oneself, investing in a larger aspect of the self, a long-term project or the world; quality, rightness, context, the welfare of others.

As I continued to reflect on the differences between eudaimonia and hedonia, as outlined in Table 19, I could see that both were experienced by the participants on 'The Horse Course', and visible in the qualitative data. For example, the degree of enjoyment generated by the young people's shared experiences with the horses, the other participants, the volunteers and the instructor was palpable. There was often an atmosphere of fun and an element of playful humour during the sessions, which presented as both an expression of the collective experience and as a form of communication. Humour and the ability to see the funny side of testing events is a subsidiary element of resilience, demonstrating openness to the sense of vulnerability generated by the experience. Following focus group five in Cohort 1, both of the workers from The Agency commented on how much laughter and explicit enjoyment had been shown by the participants in every session. The workers had regular contact with the group in The Agency centre and were able to compare their behaviour there to how they were at 'The Horse Course'. One of the workers commented that she had never seen them laugh and joke with each other as much at The Agency centre. She described the atmosphere on the minibus on

the return journeys from each Horse Course session as “buzzing”. These observations by The Agency staff suggest that there was a more relaxed atmosphere in the later sessions compared to the tension and anxiety of earlier ones. One of the volunteers, Carla, who had been a participant on an earlier iteration of ‘The Horse Course’ also remarked upon this in her interview (see Section 4.4).

This shared sense of wellbeing is compatible with self-determination theory, which “assumes people are inherently prone toward psychological growth and integration, and thus toward learning, mastery and connection with others” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.68). Support is required for the three innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and if any are thwarted, it can “lead to diminished motivation and wellbeing” (ibid).

The young participants’ positive experiences of wellbeing were down to the horses, who with their unique personalities, strengths and talents, unconditionally accepted each young person. In this context, their achievements were not measured against national standards; they were not assessed against a behaviour management policy, nor judged by their perceived failure in school. The nature of these inter-species connections is explored in the next section.

4.6.5 It is inter-species and about multisensory reciprocity

Humans have an ancient and unique bond with horses and, as Maurstad, Davis and Cowles argue, “Horses are soul mates, but also body mates to many humans, and the relationship is one that affects and defines both parties” (2013, p. 322). Further, as indicated in the Literature Review, there is research that confirms my practice-based supposition that successful inter-species interactions involve multisensory reciprocity. This includes elements of mindfulness, often described as ‘being in the moment’ or ‘being present’. Alistair North Whitehead (1926) suggests that while we may think in generalities, we experience life in the detail. Being ‘in the moment’ and noticing the detail in

these multi-species encounters, where normal social conventions do not apply, offered each participant the opportunity to relax, and to find and re-encounter their self through an 'other'. It involved multiple aspects of physical touch and movement, sound and smell, which I refer to elsewhere as 'attunement', a recurring theme in the emerging field of human-animal communication.

Rich descriptions from interview and focus group transcripts, field notes and photographs highlight the significant impact of attunement between young people and horses, revealing strong evidence of 'kinaesthetic empathy' (i.e., empathy *with*, as well as *for* one another). This transmission of emotional states without words is "a choreography encompassing 'vitality affects' and is equally present in animal-human relationships" (Carlyle and Graham, 2020, p. 3). This relates to Sapir's (1927) description of non-verbal communication, which states,

We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness, and one might say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known to none and understood by all (p. 556).

The horses' naturally curious personalities often reflected and replicated young people's behaviour during 'The Horse Course' (Hallberg, 2008). Often, no words were needed at all. The horses were instinctual and sensitive to the young people's feelings, as demonstrated in all ten of the Single Case Analyses. These amazing creatures just seemed to 'know' how to respond to the young people, their fears, their excitement and their affection. Each interaction and relationship was unique to each partnership. The levels of connection were mutually agreed between each horse and young person. There was a deep realm to their communication and relationship building behaviours once the silent ground rules of congruence and emotional resonance were understood and established. This kinaesthetic, entangled, enactive, bodily empathy leads towards a more 'common world' understanding (Taylor and Giugni, 2012). Further, as I have argued elsewhere, "This is not just imagined, but actually a process of real-life enactive kinasthetic empathy in which we feel what another feels" (Carlyle and Graham, 2021). In addition, as

Rhys Evans and Alexandra Franklin (2010) suggest, for horses and humans alike, their respective everyday “rhythms of life” can affect the nature of, and opportunities for, attunement. They extend their argument through citing Henri Lefebvre (2004), who argued that “Everywhere, where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is *rhythm*” (p.15), and who further argued,

Everyday life remains shot through by great cosmic and vital rhythms: day and night, the months and the seasons, and still more precisely biological rhythms (p. 73).

Furthermore, whilst the differing *umwelts* (Von Uexküll, 1909) of horses and humans mean that they do not comprehend or experience the world in the same ways, they can come together through encountering and re-encountering one another to become one entity. The close proximity of human and horse, and the ways in which they interacted during ‘The Horse Course’, offered many shared sensory experiences and a deeper understanding of more-than-human ways of knowing and communicating. This is akin to the ‘contact zone’, which Haraway (2008) deems to be integral to companion species and how we connect in shared spaces of ‘becoming with’ one another (Carlyle and Graham, 2020, p. 4).

Physical touch is a vital human need and “key to the enhancement of human development and well-being” (Carlyle and Graham, 2020, p. 4), yet is largely discouraged, even disallowed, in practice with children and young people today. As mentioned in the Introduction, horse riding can offer therapeutic benefits through intimate physical and social connection. It involves experiencing deep muscle pressure and rhythm, both of which can comfort, soothe, calm and aid self-regulation of the body and the mind. Section 2.3.1 of the Literature Review explores some of the underlying biological processes that explain this satisfaction, including the generation of oxytocin. The benefits of such multi-species entanglements to young people’s wellbeing can potentially address the imbalance caused by the deficiency of touch elsewhere in their lives, including supporting those who are withdrawn or averse to touch as a result of negative

previous experiences. As described in Rose's single case analysis, touch was a significant aspect of her relationships with horses and humans, offering her unspoken comfort and reassurance when she most needed it. This was particularly evident when Tilly seemed to sense Rose's fear and understand the importance of staying perfectly still next to the mounting block for an extended period of time until Rose was calm.

There is something humbling about blocking out the inner voice and tuning in to nature – in this research study, becoming one with the horse. In many respects, we live in a world where we have lost touch with nature and the inclination to protect one another. As Kohanov argues, “ancient wisdom such as demonstrated in the herd is all but lost in humanity's increasingly insulated, highly specialised, city-based, sedentary life style” (2016, p. 14). For some, the response is an innate need to connect with nature, as in ‘biophilia’ (Fromm, 1973); for others, it is a deep appreciation of God's creation, Chi energy, Zen or flourishing. It is also in line with Darwin's conclusions in 1871 that “there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties”, and that “the lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery”. It is the experience of a scientific and spiritual energising force that positively boosts our sense of wellbeing. When exploring the synchronicities of the human-equine world, we experience fascinating and different ways of communicating. These mutually beneficial interactions can enhance wellbeing in both species, and can help children and young people on the road to wellbeing and to a life where they can flourish.

In many practices, the horse is used as a medium or tool that facilitates therapy or learning. In the ‘pocket universe’, the horses confirmed themselves as authentic therapeutic partners, capable of far more than assisting the human. Human-animal interactions are fundamental to both species, and the activation of caregiving skills in the young people by the horses is a noteworthy beneficial outcome for both species (co-constitution). As Kohanov (2016) reflects:

Caring for others is a part of nature that has taken on a life of its own, moving far beyond parenting direct offspring. Evolution has a heart. It's much more than a fleshy pump. We ignore its vast connecting wisdom at our peril. And we evolve in direct relation to how consciously we embrace it (p. 35).

The potential of horse human interactions to therefore increase empathy in children and young people could have an impact on their personal self-esteem and wellbeing. This correlates with what primatologist Jane Goodall highlighted, regarding how crucial it is to empathise with other species and how empathy can contribute to multi-species wellbeing. Similarly, the question posed by Donna Haraway, “whom or what do I touch when I touch this dog?” could equally be applied to other species, in this case, horses. Perhaps it is our own ‘animality’ we touch, through our experiences of advanced, entangled and kinaesthetic empathy.

Whilst kinaesthetic empathy, especially between species, is largely seen as an enigmatic concept (Carlyle and Graham 2020), it was physical and palpable in this study. Through my use of thick descriptions, deep immersion and using visual materials, the data reveals the unfolding phenomena of kinaesthetic empathy. The social constructions of both humans and horses involved in the study had been shaped by their unique personal histories and previous individual biographical life experiences. This, combined with the methodology, set the context for a number of unique demonstrations of kinaesthetic empathy that avoided anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism (Shapiro, 2019), thereby showing the key role it can play in both human and animal wellbeing.

Figure 63 illustrates how the components of the ‘safe space’, depicted in Figure 1, came to light as the ingredients of a ‘pocket universe’. As such, it identifies the core findings of the study, which I also regard as the factors that created the ‘magic’.

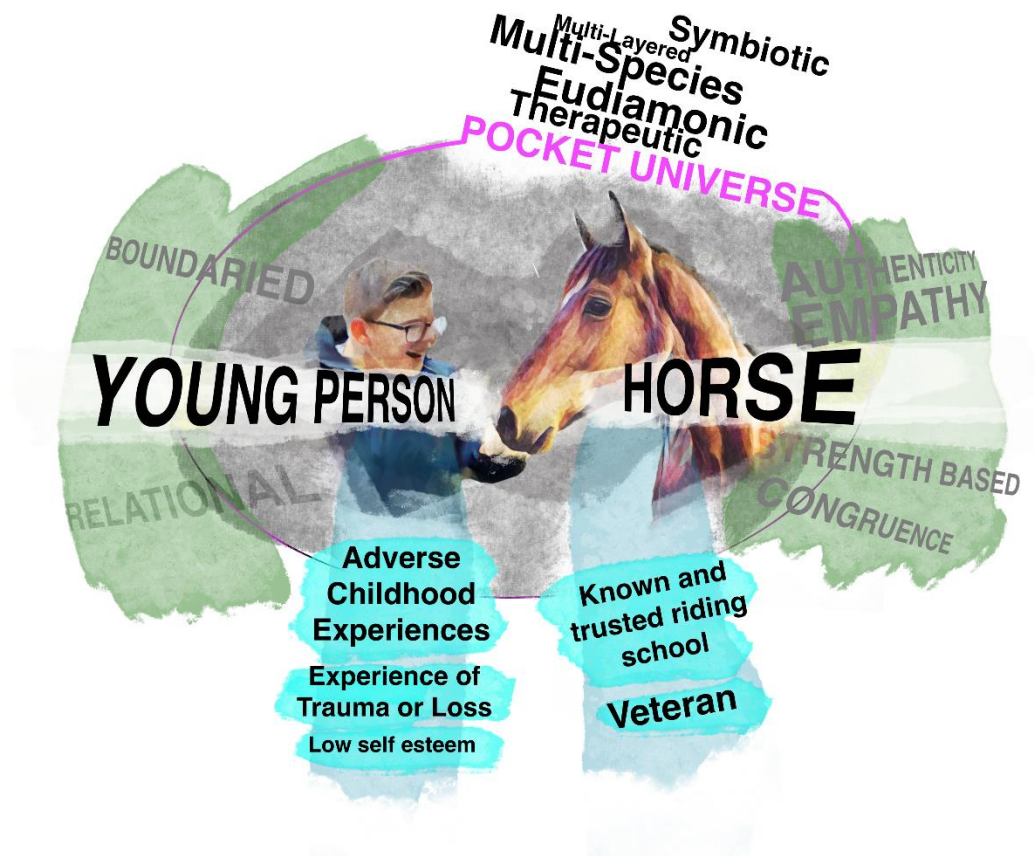


Figure 63. The context for 'The Horse Course' version 2 (artwork created by Dr Ian Robson).

The 'magic' of 'The Horse Course', as I initially thought of it in relation to my practice and volunteering, was difficult to describe, as it seemed to take place in fleeting moments that I could catch only a glimpse of. This research has enabled me to capture and unpack that effectively, shifting my instinctive grasp of the potential of human-horse interactions regarding wellbeing into an academic understanding supported by data and analysis. However, I believe it is not wholly possible to count, measure, categorise or codify such experiences fully, and I am aware that they cannot be fully represented in figures or diagrams. Nevertheless, this ethnographic study has allowed me to both experience and witness enactive kinaesthetic empathy happening between young people and horses. As a result, I am convinced that these encounters enrich young people's self-esteem and wellbeing, and that this is a key area in the field of human-animal interaction, which invites further exploration.

In concluding this chapter, I feel deep gratitude towards the participants for sharing their insights into how they made sense of their experiences with horses. I endeavoured to represent the data as accurately and objectively as possible, while being mindful of the responsibility I held in relation to how I have generated meaning from these insights. As Walker (2016) reflects,

...our actual and complete lived experience is only known fully by those present at that specific and individual moment, and beyond this, the generation of meaning is forever a partial construction (p.265).

Chapter 5

Conclusions, reflections and recommendations

In the previous chapters, I outlined the context for this research and reviewed the literature on the influence of person-centred practice and horse-human relationships on young people's self-esteem and wellbeing. I explained the methodology and the rationale for the study. I analysed the data and presented the findings thematically, statistically and visually. This final chapter draws together my reflections on my ethnographic journey; I summarise and revisit the key themes and the most up to date research in relation to the findings and I identify the limitations of the study, crystallising where I think there are contributions to be made to existing bodies of knowledge. On reflection, I can see that the research was not just about trying to enhance self-esteem through being person-centred or empathic, nor was it simply about providing an experience of horses for young people with adverse experiences. Instead, it was a multi-layered story of entanglements between horses and young people, between theory and practice, and between the ingredients of 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe'.

5.1 Reflections on my ethnographic journey

My ethnographic journey has been both reflective and reflexive in exploring the impact of 'The Horse Course' experience on young people, inter-species communication, and the ingredients for authentic interactions and relationships between young people and horses.

As discussed earlier, my own presence had an influence on the dynamics of 'The Horse Course'. While I may or may not have been disadvantaged by class and gender, I was resilient in the sense that I had personally experienced (and had observed others experiencing) the magic of the horse-human connection. These were the instincts that led me to carry out the research. Now, I believe I can explain the connection.

The research has enabled me to move from the observations I made as a volunteer and practitioner, where I knew at a deep level that there was something meaningful going on for the young people as they engaged with the horses, to developing research questions in 'the ivory tower' of academia and testing them out in the 'swampy lowlands of practice' (Schön, 1983). In doing

so, I began to see the research from a more post-structuralist perspective, as I was part of the research after all, as an ethnographer, and I could write into, as well as about the subject.

5.2 Revisiting the key concepts in relation to the findings

As stated in the introductory chapter, the key concepts at the beginning of this study were **self-esteem** (as a building block to **resilience**) and **wellbeing** in adolescence. These were considered alongside **the potential of horses as authentic and therapeutic partners**. In order to 'book-end' the thesis, I now reflect upon how my findings relate back to these concepts. Further, based on the findings, I highlight potential messages from the study about the key concepts for researchers and young people who may be interested in 'The Horse Course' approach. I also suggest that the findings have something to say to parents, policy makers and practitioners in social work, education, health and social care about the importance of finding alternative and inclusive ways to meet the needs of vulnerable young people.

Self-esteem

I began my journey by considering self-esteem as one of the building blocks of resilience and while I still hold to that, I recognise that I extended my knowledge and broadened my perspective as the study progressed. Self-esteem is boosted by achieving valued goals and receiving equally valued recognition. 'The Horse Course' programme had a series of incremental goals embedded within each session, goals that were explicitly outlined at the beginning of each one. The participants' commitment to 'The Horse Course', combined with this structured approach, meant that at each session, the goals were valued objectives, with success in riding and horse care linked to the riding instructor's recognition of achievements. This equation was highly effective in generating a desire among the whole group to manage the riding challenges. The young participants' 'desire to achieve' was particularly evident in the ways in which they persisted in their tasks and challenges, for example, trying to achieve a complicated riding skill and then perfect it in the subsequent sessions. The effort involved in

persisting was also recognised and encouraged by the riding instructor. The balance of challenge and recognition produced a positive, supportive culture that enabled the participants to value not only their own achievements but also the achievements of others. Being able to give recognition of achievement to others depends to a great extent upon confidence in one's own standing within a group, a feature of good self-esteem. Therefore, it is arguable that the experience of achieving the sessions' goals had a direct effect upon the participants' self-worth.

The young people evaluated their own experiences throughout the study, demonstrating, experiencing and extending their reflexivity. Their self-reported increases in self-esteem and confidence, their new coping strategies and personal insights, along with their improved self-esteem scores illustrate how young people who have been through adverse experiences can benefit from positive experiences and opportunities for growth and change. The data reflects positive changes in the young participants' attitudes towards themselves.

Resilience

Many of the protective factors identified in resilience theory and practice, and those identified in ACE research (Felitti et al., 1998), are related to regular school attendance and supportive empathic teachers. The care-experienced young people in the study had limited and/or negative experiences of these protective factors. The positive experiences provided on 'The Horse Course', as documented in the data, may have compensated for some of this, albeit in small ways, by providing alternative positive experiences that had lasting benefits.

In the early stages of the study, my thinking about resilience had already begun to change as I explored the concept in more depth. My findings further confirmed that resilience is far more complex than bouncing back from adversity and is reliant on a range of other factors. Masten's (2014) idea of the 'everyday magic' of resilience, and Hart's (2014) assertion that 'resilient moves' can change the direction of travel for young people at crucial/critical points in their lives, resonated deeply with the data from the young people who described how

they carried the feelings of strength and success generated by positive interactions with horses into other areas of their lives.

Wellbeing (including eudaimonic wellbeing, multi-species wellbeing and kinaesthetic empathy)

As I engaged with the concepts of eudaimonic wellbeing (the science of happiness), multi-species wellbeing and kinaesthetic empathy, the concept of wellbeing became more central and nuanced. Defined for the purposes of this research as ‘a state of being or condition of existence that characterises an individual realising their full potential through their own prosperity, welfare, life satisfaction, health, eudemonia (human flourishing) and happiness’ (Sutherland and Mukadam, 2018, p. 25), as the research developed, I gained a deeper understanding of the wider concept of ‘wellbeing’, increasingly recognising how the physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive became closely aligned within it. This alignment was apparent in the young people’s reports of the value of their interactions with horses. Their reports indicated that because of the ingredients present in ‘The Horse Course Pocket Universe’ (THCPU), they had opportunities to see themselves differently, altering their sense of self and increasing their physical wellbeing, through their interaction with the horses and their awareness of the horses’ perspectives. These brief human-animal relationships acted, then, as catalysts that facilitated young people to change their self-perception and to reencounter themselves as their motivation developed into a sense of eudaimonia. This holistic experience can also be seen as related to spirituality – the sense of recognising there is something greater something more to being human than sensory experience and the idea of being part of something cosmic or divine in nature (Spencer 2012). Horses are known to connect with humans and to reflect their emotional state. This process was visible in observational evidence from the data. There were clearly demonstrated instances where an agitated or anxious young person became calmer because the horse was calm. Their whole demeanour showed changes in posture and breathing. This process worked in the opposite direction too, as horses visibly relaxed once a young person relaxed with them. This suggests benefits to the horse as well as to the human, reflecting their more-

than-human ways of knowing and communicating (Carlyle and Graham, 2019), where bodies are caught up together in mutual threads of entanglement (Ellingson, 2017).

Touch is a fundamental element of human-to-human communication, and in this research is key to human-to-horse-to-human communication. Here, my research addresses the debates around horses (and other animals) as sentient beings that feel empathy and their therapeutic influence on young people whose needs are not met by mainstream education systems or children and family support services. As such it moves beyond the physical aspect of interacting with and riding horses towards a more instinctive, emotional and spiritual experience.

Finally, Evans and Franklin's (2010) description of the art and science behind horse and rider becoming one and communicating through their bodies to achieve 'floating harmony' is linked closely to the concept of kinaesthetic empathy which again was a strong theme in findings especially in relation to eudaimonic wellbeing.

The potential of horses as therapeutic partners

The transformational value of interaction with trusted horses in a safe environment (The Horse Course Pocket Universe) using a person-centred, strengths-based relational approach as highlighted in Figure 63 offered social and psychological benefits.

That the research spanned disciplines enabled me to make connections to and between differing perspectives on theories of learning, adolescent development and person-centred, strengths-based relational practice alongside the potential of horses as therapeutic partners in work with socially and educationally disadvantaged young people. I believe that the findings contribute to wider debates around young people's self-esteem, resilience and wellbeing and as well as to the growing body of research on human-equine relationships.

There is clear evidence that 'The Horse Course' was a powerful and positive experience for the participants. The potential of horses as therapeutic partners

was about interaction and communication via smell, sound and sensation. These were tactile and calming experiences, including synchronous breathing and adaptations to rhythm, that offered emotional mutual comfort, warmth, and mindfulness.

The research has acted as a source of inspiration and motivation for me as I can now confidently explain this unusual research topic to my more scientifically inclined peers and colleagues. Additionally, I feel more equipped to question and challenge some of the long held 'truths' in our society, myths based on deficit models of adolescence, where socially disadvantaged young people are misunderstood by adults unwilling to look at a range of possible explanations for their 'challenging behaviour' and what it is telling us. I can also respond to those who argue that 'airy fairy' therapeutic interventions reward 'bad behaviour' as my findings demonstrate the benefits of horse-human interaction to wellbeing in adolescence without the need for any behaviour modification interventions. At last, I have data that I can use to respond to those who refuse to see animals as sentient beings able to feel emotion and communicate in incredible powerful and effective ways.

As the young people learned to recognise horses' body language, they came to appreciate the ways in which horses communicate their emotions or intentions. This provided opportunities for them to reappraise their own ways of communicating and enabled them to respond sensitively. Together, the horses and young people learned how to coordinate their experiences, feelings and signals, in order to form a partnership, thus demonstrating insight and understanding in relation to human-to-horse-to-human communication.

One of the measures of the effectiveness of 'The Horse Course' lay in the participants' abilities to transfer the benefits and gains made from the course to their everyday worlds. The participants' personal circumstances, and care and education experiences were expected to have a bearing upon the level of change possible. Therefore, it was significant that each one recorded

appreciable improvement in both their self-esteem and their resourcefulness, as represented in the anecdotes they shared from their everyday lives.

The outcomes, as cited above, were additional positive experiences of self, a greater sense of contentment and a realistically grounded, optimistic view of the world linked to other planned goals. The clearest examples of these were illustrated in the participants' expressions of improved self-image, linked to their abilities to achieve horse care and riding skills far in excess of their original goals. These key findings and outcomes also indicate the potential for rolling out 'The Horse Course' beyond this study, in terms of aiding the development of young people's self-esteem and wellbeing.

The challenge to current practitioners to meet the mental health needs of young people is very real. Against a backdrop of cuts to services, increasing professional regulation and pressure to demonstrate 'measurable outcomes', there is additional pressure to prove that interventions work. But if young people had opportunities to make choices about engaging in self-esteem enhancing activities, both within and outside of the mainstream education system, rather than relying on charity from others, the results would speak for themselves and the picture could look very different. Opportunities to participate in activities like 'The Horse Course' rarely come along for the majority of children and young people. Yet, the growing concern for young people's mental health (DoHSC, 2018) and the ensuing debates about the 'rise in therapeutic education' (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2019) highlight the importance of finding alternative and inclusive ways to meet the needs of vulnerable young people in the education system.

The availability of resources within the community to sustain these elements is obviously essential. The important thing is that the young person is supported and empowered to identify the resources they need and to gain access to them in ways that do not generate a feeling of failure. Genuine resourcefulness is the ability to recognise when one needs help, identify the appropriate resources, and utilise those resources creatively to achieve the desired (or a satisfactory)

outcome. Clearly, putting this into practice would be a challenge for both policy makers and service providers, but given the frequent news narratives about the decline in young people's mental health, especially in the current pandemic, it is clear that radical changes need to be made. As John Law (2004) reflects,

If the world is complex and messy, then at least some of the time we're going to have to give up on simplicities. But one thing is sure: if we want to think about the messes of reality at all, then we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know in new ways (p. 2).

As I conclude this work, the country is in the midst of the third Covid-19 lockdown. While truly troubling, this surely also presents an opportunity to reflect on current education and the way it serves all young people, especially those like the participants of 'The Horse Course', who are considered vulnerable. Schools have been under immense pressure with the challenges of online teaching delivery and the forthcoming changes to examination procedures. Parents have been under immense pressure with the challenges of home schooling. Children and young people continue to be under immense pressure to 'perform' and to conform to ever-changing rules and circumstances, whilst still in the most crucial, formative stages of their development. Working with the young people on 'The Horse Course' and understanding that school, for whatever reason, was unable to support them, led to a reflection on how the current situation may have exacerbated issues around protective factors for young people. Therefore, this is a timely opportunity to reconsider how we might begin to reshape our currently inequitable education system into one that is truly inclusive and better suited to the needs of all children and young people. As Agnieszka Bates (2019) argues about education, it should,

...shift from instrumentalist practice, which sees children as 'means' to the ends predetermined by adults to educational practice, which is more sensitive to children's needs and capabilities 'here and now' (p. 424).

This research has generated strong evidence to suggest that the experience of 'The Horse Course Pocket Universe' has potential lasting value for young people. As with earlier participants, those involved in this research had some powerful relationship building experiences, which, along with their newly acquired knowledge and skills, will stay with them, perhaps in reserve, until needed. This brings back to mind the Head Start research, mentioned earlier, where the group of young children who participated in a high-quality early years intervention began school with a 'head start' on their counterparts. However, by age seven, this gap appeared to narrow. It would have been easy at that point to accept that the intervention did not have a lasting impact. But the most interesting finding, which I believe is directly relevant to this study, was that in adolescence, the gap between the study participants and their counterparts widened again. The strengths and dispositions that had been evident in the early stages were still there to draw upon when needed in making important life decisions about careers, relationships and lifestyles.

5.3 Revisiting the most recent research in relation to my findings

I have been captivated by the diverse range of approaches, theories and perspectives on the horse-human relationship. It was inevitable that my work would investigate areas where others hold the expertise, and I want to give credit and respect to these authors, researchers and practitioners and to acknowledge that their work merits more discussion than I could carry out within the boundaries of this study.

Over the period of the study, the body of literature pertaining to anthrozoology and more specifically, horse-human encounters expanded, and a growing number of empirical studies show noteworthy benefits to children and young people. Reassuringly, there is also more of an interest in the application to practice than before – but aside from the proven physiological benefits, there is relatively little research about what children actually say about the benefits of their relationships with animals. This work makes a useful contribution to the field in this respect, as well as in how the approach can be developed as both theoretical framework and practical guidance.

As explained in sections 1.4.3.2 and 2.3.3, equine-human interactions and activities take various forms and encompass a range of specialist and non-specialist, physical, psychological, educational and social approaches with horses and humans of all ages.

Reflecting on the last twenty years, and particularly the period from 2010 onwards, it is evident that there has been significant growth in the amount of research and practice guidance appearing in relation to the psychosocial, educational and therapeutic benefits of horses for disadvantaged young people (for example, Ewing, 2007, Maujean et al., 2013, Carlsson et al., 2014, Carlsson, 2017, Kendal et al., 2015, Wilson et al, 2017). To an extent there appear to be positive outcomes irrespective of the approach used by the human facilitator or whether they regard the horse as a learning medium, an assistant, a co-therapist, a facilitator or a therapist in their own right.

Whilst there are many variables involved in this body of research and practice guidance, the key ones tend to revolve around the aims of the facilitators regarding the potential outcomes for young people and how the facilitators regard the horse(s) involved. For example, some approaches are designed to provide specific outcomes for traumatised, disabled or abused young people. Others are clearly therapeutic interventions, whilst some have more of an educational or behavioural goal, and others again are a combination. The key variables about the horses are reflected in the terms used to describe their role. For example, the terms 'equine-facilitated' and 'equine-assisted' place different emphases on the role of the horse in the activity. However, whilst in some studies it is clear what the approach is, in others it is less so. So, for instance, whilst activity may be categorised by the facilitator as 'equine assisted', the horse may become more of a therapist than an assistant to the human, depending on the experience of the relationship building process. Similarly, Therapeutic Riding, which tends to target physical treatment goals, can also provide a multi-sensory experience which stimulates social and psychological responses in adolescents (Ward et al, 2013). It could be argued that whatever the intent, it is impossible to predict results entirely as the horse-human power dynamics may shift or grow during any relationship or interaction.

This uncertainty continues to be reflected in current debates around the wide range of terminology applied to the inclusion of horses in interventions and activities. Burgon et al (2018) acknowledge this and helpfully use the umbrella term 'equine-assisted therapy and learning' (EAT/L) to refer to the growing number of equine-assisted interventions that 'address mental, social and emotional difficulties and/or offer learning support' (p.3). This is also reflected by O'Hanlon (2020), who highlights the need for detailed descriptions of interventions and shared understandings of key components (p.17).

Whilst Burgon et al. (2018), help to describe the breadth of the field, O'Hanlon's (2020) prompt leads to a specificity about my own research where the horse was regarded as an authentic partner. The focus is on horses and young people as attuned bodies in kinaesthetic empathy (Carlyle and Graham, 2020). It sits clearly in the psychosocial area and is underpinned by person-centred principles. Of the increasing body of work in this area comparatively few studies consider horses as therapeutic partners, or as therapists in their own right, when working with vulnerable young people. Some examples do have some similarities to my research, however and this is encouraging as it indicates an area where my work can make a useful contribution.

The closest examples to my approach are to be found in Burgon's (2013, 2018) work, which although described as EAT/L, is person-centred and considers many of the same key concepts. Further, Törmälehto and Korkiamäki (2020) consider the potential of human-horse attachment in a 'therapy and care' work with adolescents and their findings complement the claims made by Scopa et al., (2019) and Hatten et al., (2020), about how horses can attune to human body language, facial expressions and emotions.

In addition, the Norwegian study by Hauge et al (2014) has similarities with my work as it focused on the relationship between basic psychological mechanisms and horse assisted activities, examining the impact on adolescents perceived social support, self-esteem and general self-efficacy. Their findings suggest that 'offering stable work and riding to adolescents in an environment with a supportive adult and peers may benefit their psychological development' (p.17)

Finally, Craig et al., (2020) discovered in their study how a strengths-based, horse-human relationship-building approach can foster resilience in adolescents who had been identified with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).

This recent works helps to locate my work with a body of international literature covering practice and theory. However, whilst there are commonalities, as outlined above, as well as significant differences, this thesis makes a distinctive contribution through the specific context and approach, as noted above.

5.4 Research limitations and future studies

One of my original aims was to understand the potential for rolling out The Horse Course beyond this study. From a social justice perspective, I was challenged by my awareness that horse riding is not an activity that is affordable or accessible to many young people, especially those facing additional layers of social and educational disadvantage. This ethical dilemma is highlighted in the Methodology chapter. In order to - at least partially - address this, the riding school provided the horses and the necessary facilities at a greatly reduced cost. Some costs such as insurance and safety equipment were unavoidable but The Horse Course activities, including the riding instruction were facilitated by volunteers. I sought support from contacts in the equine industry and approached local equine related businesses to request donations and discounts to purchase equipment such as riding boots and gloves. I have subsequently set up a small charitable community interest organisation called 'HorsePowered' in order to organise fundraising activities such as 'fun and games' days with horses, with the aim of continuing to support more young people to access future iterations of The Horse Course.

In hindsight, I wish I had chosen or created a simpler and more bespoke tool to 'measure' the young people's self-esteem. At the planning stage, esteemed colleagues, who are also experienced therapists, recommended the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale based on its longstanding reputation. During the research, however, it became evident that the reverse scored questions were

causing confusion for the young participants. This resulted in some significant contradictions between the quantitative and qualitative data. Furthermore, the tools were not wholly suitable for adolescents, whose brains are still developing. In addition, based on the participants' self-disclosures and the background information supplied by The Agency, it is reasonable to assume that these young people had all been subject to developmental trauma, albeit at differing levels, which according to Sebern F. Fisher (2014), also has a significant negative impact on every system of the developing brain.

Finally, as with any Likert-type (1932) or rating scale, there may be reliability and validity issues in relation to mood influence. The qualitative data certainly indicated that a young person's negative mood often depended on a range of influences external to 'The Horse Course'. On the other hand, it may be that the supportive environment this intervention provided, with calm horses, quiet surroundings and a supportive Instructor and volunteers, might have positively influenced the young people's mood.

The employment of a range of other qualitative methods redressed this issue by capturing the young people's sense of achievement, enjoyment and wellbeing. This can also be seen in the following figure, where the comments from the young people on the back of the card clearly articulate their pleasure in the experience.

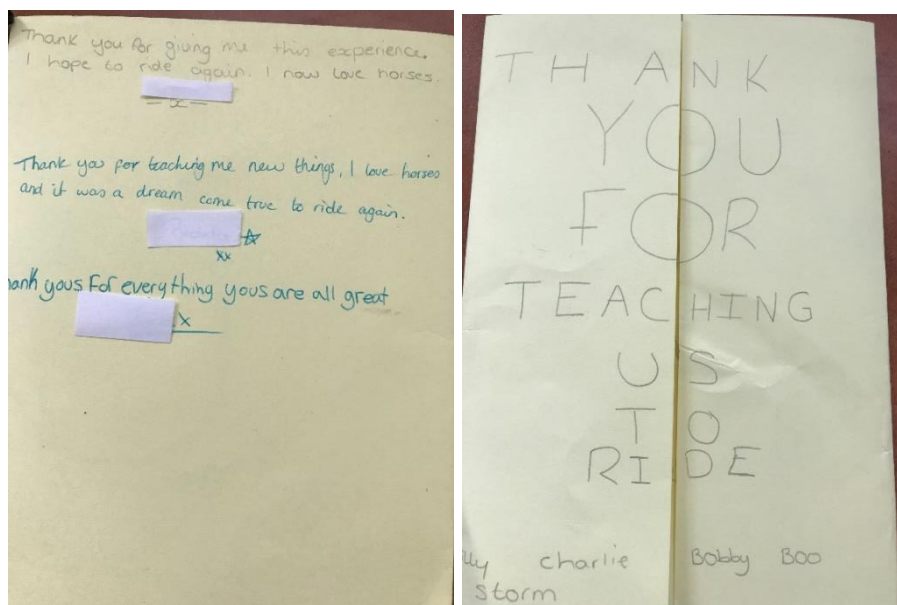


Figure 64. Thank you card from Cohort 2

It can be seen as both a limitation and a strength that through the process of interpretation, I realised that, to an extent, the findings are what they are because of who I am, who the young people are and who the horses are. The research is tied to a specific context, although I believe that the thesis indicates that 'The Horse Course' can be replicated elsewhere with similar results. I also realised that my own positionality and self-esteem as a researcher was caught up with this. This is in line with Geertz (2000), who identified how his ethnographic work "changed as the plot thickened" and that he was "caught up in it", in a "study of a particular instance of meaning-making and the complexities that attended it" (p. 15).

One potential future application of this research could be the development of a theoretical framework and methodology for practitioners, so that the project and results are fully replicable. Whilst the creation of such a framework was beyond the scope of this study, there are nonetheless professional implications for

those working in the field, regarding communicating authentic approaches and their potential influence on the development of young people's self-esteem.

To conclude, the findings from this research highlight the significant benefits of equine-human communication to the fields of human wellbeing, multi-species wellbeing and human-animal studies. Undertaking this research has offered me an opportunity to make a unique contribution to knowledge in three distinct fields of enquiry. Firstly, it contributes to the field of Human-Animal Interaction as I believe that interactions between humans and horses, where horses themselves are potential therapists, have been under-researched. Secondly, it adds to the field of young people's developmental research, where there is a lack of understanding on the contributions horses can potentially make to human flourishing. Thirdly, it contributes to the body of research on self-esteem and resilience regarding its analysis of how these qualities might exist and develop in the entanglements that occur between young people and horses and their social surroundings rather than only being located in the young people.

Considering these concepts together, as I have attempted to here, could prove a major step forward in strengthening these connected fields. Any potential lasting benefits could be explored further, through future research in and across a range of disciplines including education, health, allied health, social care and human-animal studies

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Programme Design and Information - The Horse Course

Appendix 2. Volunteer Information Pack - The Horse Course Research Study:
2.1 Research Information, 2.2 Letter, 2.3 Consent Form and 2.4 Example
Interview Questions

Appendix 3. Young Person Information Pack - The Horse Course Research
Study: 3.1 Research information, 3.2 Invitation letter, 3.3 Consent form and 3.4
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Appendix 4. Gatekeeper Information Pack - The Horse Course Research
Study: 4.1 The role of the gatekeeper and 4.2 Gatekeeper agreement form

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Appendix 6. Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Appendix 7. Interview Outline - Young People

Appendix 8. Focus Group Outline

Appendix 9. Article: 'Bodies of Knowledge, Kinetic Melodies, Rhythms of
Relating and Affect Attunement in Vital Spaces for Multi-Species Well-Being:
Finding Common Ground in Intimate Human-Canine and Human-Equine
Encounters'. (Published in November, 2019 in the Journal 'Animals' as part of
the Special Issue: 'Animal Assisted Therapies and Interventions').

Appendix 10. Article: 'Bearing witness to the beauty of kinaesthetic empathy
across species in canine-human and equine-human interactions: Participant
observation ethnographies'. (Published in February 2021 in 'People and
Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice').

Appendix 1

Programme Design and Information - The Horse Course

Programme Information – The Horse Course

The programme in which the research took place is based on the British Horse Society (2003) Progressive Riding Test Syllabus. It covers the basic practical elements of caring for, riding and staying safe around horses, yet it is more than that. With horses as both therapeutic and educational partners, young people have opportunities to become active participants in a stimulating process through which they can reframe their perceived limitations and personal capabilities. The programme came to be named 'The Horse Course' by some of the young participants. Designed by experienced professionals from social work, education and the equine industry, it is a tried and tested programme, which over the past few years has shown favourable outcomes for many young participants.



The activities involving horses allow young people to develop their sense of responsibility and to become more confident and more independent as they learn, develop and apply a range of skills. They learn to express themselves in a novel environment with people who had no associations with any other aspect of their lives) and who could therefore provide a boundary to the experience. This focused approach - in terms of the activity, the people and the site - creates a context of therapy.



The horses involved are riding school veterans: they have been selected on personality and because they are well known to the researcher and volunteers, they are trusted. They have previously demonstrated that they enjoy human contact and have established individual reputations for being positive influences in the lives of many young people.



The six consecutive sessions combine selected elements of the BHS syllabus with opportunities to have fun, share experiences with other participants and bond with horses. Young people work individually or in pairs and are teamed up with a horse and a volunteer. Large group/teamwork creative games/challenges are also built into the programme. The activities are designed to be enjoyable and satisfying in themselves, but also an additional medium through which young people may access supportive relationships. Achievement and performance (but without great pressure) in activities which the young person enjoys are key ways of building self-esteem.



Example of session format:

Meet in the coffee shop for welcome, catch up time, drinks and information about the session. Allocate groups and horses for:

Meeting up time with horses

Stablework and yard activities

Grooming and tacking up

Riding lesson and/or hack out

Large group session with teamwork activities

Meet in coffee shop for reflection, drinks and chill time



Examples of (transferable) skills evidenced by previous cohorts of young people, key workers, parents and carers:			
Intellectual	Physical	Social-emotional	Communication
Knowledge and understanding of: horse anatomy and psychology riding equipment feeding and exercise routines (involving weights and measures) all aspects of care and riding from BHS health and safety issues equine terminology equine welfare and wellbeing	Developing: sensory and spatial awareness, mobility and physical fitness co-ordination and muscle tone correct posture and balance relaxation techniques enjoyment of being outdoors and in the countryside	Developing: self-esteem self-awareness self-discipline confidence social skills empathy and trust responsibility assertiveness independence teamwork skills care translation concentration problem-solving skills	Learning to follow instructions and to understand the importance of: body language tone of voice shared control Developing: patience understanding sensitivity attention to detail turn-taking persistence



Appendix 2

Volunteer Information Pack. The Horse Course Research Study:

- 2.1 Research information
- 2.2 Invitation letter
- 2.3 Consent form
- 2.4 Example interview questions

Appendix 2: Volunteers Information Pack – The Horse Course Research Study

2.1 Invitation letter

Date

Dear [name of volunteer],

I am writing to ask if you would like to help with some research about whether interacting with horses, learning to take care of them and ride them, has an impact on how young people feel about themselves (their self esteem). As a volunteer, you spend time with the young people so are likely to have some useful insights into this topic.

The research would take place during the course at _____ Riding School on ____ and end on ____ [dates and times to be inserted here].

At the end of the final session on ____ date, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview. We will only ask for general information on your experiences rather than details about you or about individual young people.

The focus group is designed to be to be as relaxed and enjoyable as possible. Taking part is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to and you do not have to explain your decision.

To help you decide whether or not you would like to take part, there is an information sheet about the research attached to this letter. If you would like to take part, please sign the attached consent form and return it to Pam or [REDACTED]

If you would like any more information, our contact details are included in this pack.

Kind regards

Pamela Graham

2.2 Research information

Q. What is this research about?

A. This research is about young people's experiences of being with horses, learning to understand them, take care of them and ride them. We are interested in learning more about how young people feel about themselves (their self-esteem) and whether being with horses has an impact on this.

Q. Who is doing this research?

A. Pam and [REDACTED]. They have both worked with children, young people and horses and are very interested in young people's ideas about the course. They both work as volunteers at the riding school but are also academic researchers who plan to write about the course afterwards.

Q. What happens to what I say?

A. Some of what is said will be written down or digitally recorded. Some will be included in a written report. All of it will be securely stored. Names will not be used so no-one can be identified.

The only time one of the researchers would pass on information would be if they thought that someone was being harmed or thought to be at risk of harm. Then they will follow the riding school's safeguarding guidance.

Q. What happens at the end of the research?

A. The researchers will write a draft report. The report will not identify any of the people who took part in the course by name. Once the draft report is ready, the young people and volunteers will be invited to a celebration of the course where you will have the opportunity to check what the report says before it is finalised and make sure it is accurate.

Q. What if I have a question or want to speak to a researcher?

A. You can contact Pam Graham:

[insert contact email and telephone number]

2.3 Consent form

Please read the following information carefully and tick the boxes if you agree with the statements.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information leaflet about the above named study.	
I confirm that I have had enough time to think about taking part in an individual interview.	
I have had the chance to have all my questions about the research answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my involvement is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and that my wishes will be respected.	
I understand that any information or opinions I give to the researchers will never be used in a way that will identify me by name.	
I understand that all information given by me to the researchers will be kept safely and confidentially.	
I have been given the name and details of the researchers, who can be easily contacted.	
I understand that I can withdraw at any time without having to explain why and that if I decide to do so I will not be disadvantaged.	
I understand that there is no payment for taking part in the study.	
I agree to take part in the study.	

Participant's name _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____

I the researcher, confirm that I have explained the information and we have talked about any queries arising from our conversation.

Researcher's name _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____

2.4 Example interview questions

1. What has been your experience of being with horses and your riding experience?
2. What has been your experience of volunteering?
3. What do you think the Horse Course is about?
4. Can you tell me your impressions of the young people on the course?

Appendix 3

Young Person Information Pack. The Horse Course Research Study:

2.1 Research information

2.2 Information leaflet

2.3 Invitation letter

2.4 Consent form

3.1 Research information for: [Name of young person]

Q. What is this research about? A. This research is about young people's experiences of being with horses, learning to understand them, take care of them and ride them. We are interested in learning more about how young people manage new experiences, in this case being with horses, and what impact this has upon how they feel about themselves.

Q. What do you mean by 'research'? A. Research helps us understand things better. It's a bit like doing a jigsaw when there is no picture on the box. Even when you don't know what the whole picture looks like, you might be able to sort out some of the pieces and work out how to put most of it together. After a bit, when most of it is done, you may be able to guess what the rest is like. Researchers will look at the picture and try to think of questions to ask people that will help finish the picture so that we can understand more about the topic.

Q. Who is doing this research? A. Two people: Pam and [REDACTED]. They have both worked with children, young people and horses and are very interested in your ideas about this Horse Course. They both work as volunteers at the riding school but are also academic researchers who plan to write about the course afterwards so that other people can learn from it.

Q. What happens to what I say? A. Everything you say will be kept safely. Some of it will be written down and some of it digitally recorded. Some of what you say might be included in a written report, but your name will never be used, so your identity will be protected.

The only time one of the researchers would tell someone else what you said is if you tell her that someone is harming you or another person. Then she will need to take appropriate action so that you or the other person can be protected.

Q. What happens at the end of the research? A. The researchers will write a draft report. The report will not identify any of the people who took part in the course by name. Once the draft report is ready, you will be invited to a celebration of the course where you will have the opportunity to check what the report says before it is finalised and make sure it is accurate. You will also meet the researchers, volunteers and (most importantly) the horses again before being presented with a rosette and a certificate to say that you have completed the course.

Q. What if I do not want to participate or if I say that I do then change my mind?

A. You can withdraw from the course at any time without having to explain why. No-one will mind and you will not be put under any pressure to continue.

Q. What if I have questions or want to speak to a researcher? A. Email Pam or ring her up. Her contact details are:

Pam Graham [insert contact email and telephone number]

THE HORSE COURSE



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

PAM GRAHAM

Social Work and Communities
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
Northumbria University
NE7 7XA

T: 0191 2156410

E: pamela.graham@northumbria.ac.uk





Q. What is this research about?

This research is about young people's experiences of being with horses, learning to understand them, take care of them and ride them. We are interested in learning more about how young people manage new experiences, in this case being with horses, and what impact this has upon how they feel about themselves.



Q. What do you mean by 'research'?

Research helps us understand things better. It's a bit like doing a jigsaw when there is no picture on the box. Even when you don't know what the whole picture looks like, you might be able to sort out some of the pieces and work out how to put most of it together. After a bit, when most of it is done, you may be able to guess what the rest is like. Researchers will look at the picture and try to think of questions to ask people that will help finish the picture so that we can understand more about the topic.



Q. Who is doing this research?

Two people: Pam and XXXX. They have both worked with young people and horses and are very interested in your ideas about this Horse Course. They both work as volunteers at the riding school but are also academic researchers who plan to write about the course afterwards so that other people can learn from it.



Q. What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part in the research?

Pam or Peta will invite you to take part in three interviews at different stages of the horse course. At the end of each session of the Horse Course, you will also be invited to take part in a discussion group with everyone else involved.



Q. What happens to what I say?

Everything you say will be kept safely. Some of it will be written down and some of it recorded. Some of what you say might be included in a written report but your name will never be used, so your identity will be protected. The only time one of the researchers would tell someone else what you said is if you tell her that someone is harming you or another person. Then she will need to take appropriate action so that you or the other person can be protected.



Q. What happens at the end of the research?

The researchers will write a draft report. The report will not identify any of the people who took part in the course by name. Once the draft report is ready, you will be invited to a celebration of the course where you will have the opportunity to check what the report says before it is finalised and make sure it is accurate. You will also meet the researchers, volunteers and (most importantly) the horses again before being presented with a rosette and a certificate to say that you have completed the course.



Q. What if I do not want to participate or if I say that I do then change my mind?

You can withdraw at any time without having to explain why. No-one will mind and you will not be put under any pressure to continue.



Q. What if I have questions or want to speak to someone about the research?

You can email Pam or ring her up. Her contact details are (insert email and telephone number). If you have any concerns about the Horse Course Research Study that you would like to discuss with someone who is not involved, you can contact Professor XXXX. (insert email and telephone number).

3.3 Invitation letter

Date

Dear [name of young person],

I am writing to ask if you would like to take part in a horse-riding course and help with a research study. The research study is looking at how young people manage new experiences, in this case being with horses, and what impact this has upon how they feel about themselves. It will take place at _____ Riding School (British Horse Society Approved).

The course will begin on and end on [dates and times to be inserted here]. During the course you will have opportunities to learn to understand horses' behaviour – how they think and act. You will learn how to care for them and how to ride them.

During the course – at the end of each session you will be invited to take part in a group discussion. You will also be invited to talk to the researchers individually, once at the start of the course, once part way through and once more after the course finishes. We are interested in your experience and will ask questions about how the course is going for you. We will also ask you to rate your experiences.

The course, the discussion groups and the individual conversations have been designed to be as relaxed and enjoyable as possible. Taking part is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to and you do not have to tell anyone why.

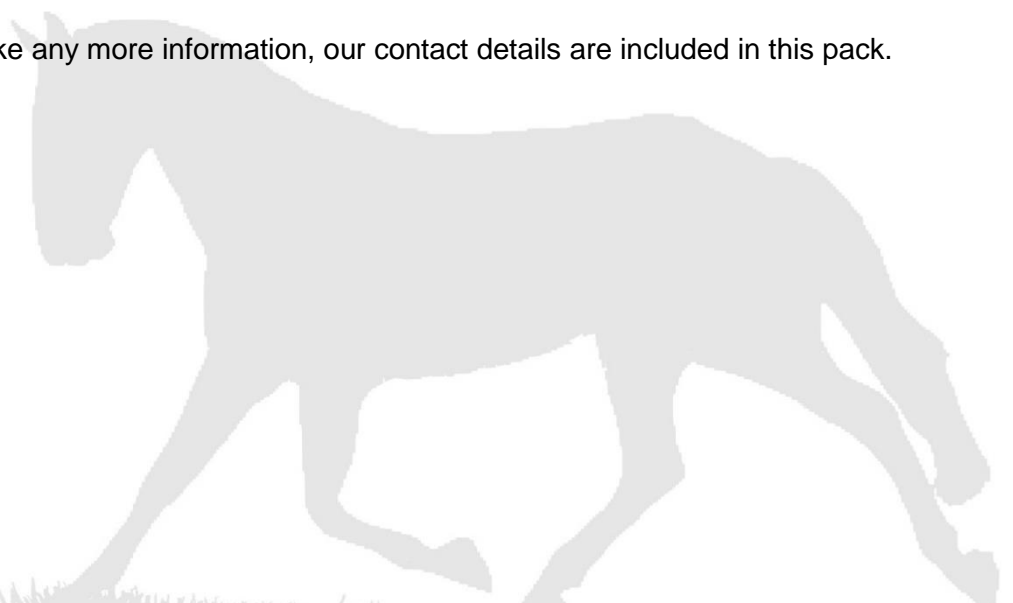
To help you decide whether or not you would like to take part, there is an information sheet about the research attached to this letter.

If you would like to take part, one of the researchers, Pam or [redacted] will talk you through the form and if you are still happy to take part you can both sign it.

If you would like any more information, our contact details are included in this pack.

Kind regards

Pam Graham



3.4 Consent form: Please read the following information carefully and tick the yes or no boxes.

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information leaflet about the above named study.		
I confirm that I have had enough time to think about taking part in focus groups and interviews.		
I have had the chance to have all my questions about the research answered satisfactorily.		
I understand that my involvement is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and that my wishes will be respected.		
I understand that any information or opinions I give to the researchers will never be used in a way that will identify me by name.		
I agree to the interviews and focus group discussions being audio recorded and understand that all information given by me to the researchers will be kept safely and confidentially.		
I have been given the name and details of the researchers, who can be easily contacted.		
I understand that I can withdraw at any time without having to explain why and that if I decide to do so I will not be put under any pressure to continue.		
I understand that there is no payment for taking part in the study.		
I agree to take part in the study.		

Participant's name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

I, (the researcher), confirm that I have explained the information and we have talked about any queries arising from our conversation.

Researcher's name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 4

Gatekeeper Information Pack. The Horse Course Research Study:

4.1 The role of the gatekeeper

4.2 Gatekeeper's agreement form

4.1 The Role of the Gatekeeper

For the purposes of the research, you as the gatekeeper will be the main line of contact between the parents/carers and the researchers. As the key worker, you have first-hand knowledge of the young people and their family situations and status, and as a neutral party within the research process you are in a position to consent to the researcher approaching the young person. The Parent/carer Information Pack is for you to share with the parents/carers during the process of obtaining agreement for the young people to participate in the Horse Course.

The researchers will ensure that the young people are fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation entails and what risks if any are involved. They will therefore have adequate appropriate information to help them make an informed decision. A copy of the Young Person's Information Pack is also enclosed for your information.

In agreeing to act as gatekeeper, it is important to agree the terms of membership for the young people:

- Full attendance will be strongly encouraged. Attendance will not be dependent upon behaviour outside the riding programme sessions. It will be made clear that being part of the group is not associated with any additional status, whether that is negative or positive.
- Young people will be expected to contribute actively to the group. It will also be made clear that the opportunity to participate in this time-limited experience of being with horses offers experiences outwith their everyday world, thereby promoting their potential to meet novel challenges and develop new and transferable skills.

Also included in this pack:

- A copy of the Programme Information.
- A copy of Parent/Carer's Information Pack (letter and information about the research).
- A copy of Young Person's Information Pack (invitation letter, information sheet, consent form and leaflet).
- An agreement on the role of the gatekeeper in the research.

4.2 Agreement on the Role of the Gatekeeper

Please read the following information carefully and tick the yes or no boxes.

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information contained in the Information Pack for Gatekeepers.		
I confirm that a full risk assessment of the young people's involvement in the 'Horse Course' has been carried out in line with the requirements of [insert name of organisation here].		
I agree to be the first point of contact for the researchers should a critical situation or emergency arise and I have the parent/carer's agreement to act in this capacity.		
I confirm that the parent/carer of [insert young person's name here] is fully aware of the 'Horse Course Research Study Project' and that they have agreed to him/her being approached by the researchers and invited to participate in the research.		
I agree to support the 'terms of membership' for the young people.		
I have had the chance to have all my questions about my role in relation to the research answered satisfactorily.		
I have been given the name and details of the researchers, who can be easily contacted.		
I agree to act as a gatekeeper in this research study.		

Gatekeeper's name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

I (the researcher), confirm that I have explained the information and we have talked about any queries arising from our conversation.

Researcher's name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 5

Parent/Carer Information Pack. The Horse Course Research Study:

5.1 Letter

5.2 Research Information

5.1 The Horse Course Research Study - Information letter for parents

Uni logo

Contact name and address for Pamela Graham

Date

Dear

My name is Pamela Graham and I work at Northumbria University in the Faculty of Social Work and Communities. I also volunteer at -----Riding School (British Horse Society Approved), where we are organising a 'course with horses' for young people. The course is part of a research study looking at how young people manage new experiences, in this case being with horses, and what impact if any, this has upon how they feel about themselves.

The course is free to the young people. It is fully funded by the newly established organisation: 'Horse Powered'. We would like to invite your son/daughter to participate both in the course and in the research and we wanted to let you know that [name of gatekeeper] has agreed to act as the contact person between us [the researchers] and you [the young person's parent/s or carer/s].

The attached information sheet has all the details of:

- The course
- The research project
- Your child's rights

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Kind regards

Pamela Graham

5.2 Research information

Q. What is this research about? A. This research is about young people's experiences of being with horses, learning to understand them, take care of them and ride them. We are interested in learning more about how young people manage these new experiences of being with horses, and what impact this has upon how they feel about themselves.

Q. What is meant by 'research'? A. Research helps us understand things better. It's a bit like doing a jigsaw when there is no picture on the box. We know the picture is there, but it is in pieces. The work of research is to find the right questions to ask so that people that we can see the whole picture and understand more about the topic.

Q. Who is doing this research? A. Two people: Pam and [REDACTED]. They have both worked with children, young people and horses and are very interested in young people's ideas about this Horse Course. They both work as volunteers at the riding school but are also academic researchers who plan to write about the course afterwards.

Q. What happens to what people say? A. Everything young people say will be kept safely. Some of it will be written down and some of it digitally recorded. Some of what they say might be included in a written report but their name will never be used, so their identity will be protected.

The only time one of the researchers would tell someone else what they said is if a young person told them that they (or another person) was at risk of harm or being harmed. Then they will take appropriate action so that your son/daughter or the other person can be protected.

Q. What happens at the end of the research? A. The researchers will write a draft report. The report will not identify any of the people who took part in the course by name. Once the draft report is ready, your son/daughter will be invited to a celebration of the course where they will have the opportunity to check what the report says before it is finalised and make sure it is accurate. They will also meet the researchers, volunteers and (most importantly) the horses again before being presented with a rosette and a certificate to say that they have completed the course.

Q. What if I or my son/daughter has a question or want to speak to a researcher?

A. The contact details for Pamela Graham are: [insert contact email and telephone number]

Appendix 6

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Instrument: Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE)

Scale/Subscale Name: Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

Source: Instrument cited by the CYFAR Life Skills Project at Texas A&M.

Developers: Morris Rosenberg (1965)

Target Audience(s): High school youth (6-item version also available for younger children)

Language other than English available: The RSE translates into 28 languages.

Type: Attitudes

Data collected: Quantitative **Data collection format:** Self report – Pre/post

Reading Level: No information available

Existence of test/technical manuals, user guides, supplemental materials: None

Level of training necessary for administration/scoring/interpretation: None

Widespread Use/Professional Endorsements: A widely-used self-esteem measure in social science research. Recommended by the CYFAR Life Skills Project at Texas A&M.

Cost of Use: No costs associated with the use of this instrument.

Description: This 10-item scale assesses an individual's feelings of self-worth when the individual compares himself or herself to other people. The scale is an attempt to achieve a one-dimensional measure of global self-esteem. It was designed to represent a continuum of self-worth, with statements that are endorsed by individuals with low self-esteem to statements that are endorsed only by persons with high self-esteem. The scale can also be modified to measure state self-esteem by asking the respondents to reflect on their current feelings.

Psychometrics: *Information on reliability and validity are provided below. If information on a particular psychometric was not found, it is indicated as "no information provided." It should be noted that this is not necessarily an indication of a lack of reliability or*

validity within a particular scale/instrument, but rather a lack of rigorous testing, for various reasons, by the developers or other researchers.

Reliability: *A correlation of at least .80 is suggested for at least one type of reliability as evidence; however, standards range from .5 to .9 depending on the intended use and context for the instrument.*

Internal Consistency: Ranges from .77 to .88.

Inter-rater reliability: No information provided

Test-Retest: Ranges from .82 to .85.

Validity: The extent to which a measure captures what it is intended to measure.

Content/Face Validity: No information provided

Criterion Validity: .55

Construct Validity: Correlated -.64 with anxiety, -.54 with depression, and -.43 with anomie.

CONSTRUCT: Self Esteem

Response Categories:

Anchored scale from 4=strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree

1. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all. (R)
3. I think that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (R)
6. I certainly feel useless at times. (R)
7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. (R)
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. (R)
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Scoring:

Reverse scoring (4=strongly disagree to 1=strongly agree) for items indicated with (R).

Sum all item ratings together.

A higher score indicates greater self-esteem.

References: Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Appendix 7

Interview Outline - Young People

Interview guide – Young people (3 interviews)

Questions/prompts

- Tell me what you think about horses?
- How are you feeling about horses today?
- Was there anything you especially liked about them today?
- Was there anything you didn't like?
- Tell me what you think about the course?
- How are you feeling about the course today?
- Was there anything you especially liked about it?
- Was there anything you didn't like?
- Is it (the course) what you expected?
- How would you finish a sentence that began with: ' The thing about horses is that they...'

Rosenberg Self-esteem rating

Interviews 2 and 3 only

- Has anything changed in your daily life since you were last interviewed? or
- Has anything out of the ordinary/exceptional happened lately/since you started the course?

Interview 3 only

- Would you recommend this course to a friend?
If yes – how would you describe it to them?
If no – why?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about The Horse Course or about your experiences with horses?

Appendix 8

Focus Group Outline - Young People

Focus Group Guide - The Horse Course

Example questions:

- What did you like best about today? Why?
- Was there anything you didn't like and if yes - why?
- What would have made today a better experience for you?
- Can you think of anything you learned anything today (about your horse/about yourself/about other people/about anything at all)?
- Reflect – how are you feeling/what have you achieved/what would you like to achieve/

Example Activities:

- Graffiti wall (flip chart paper)
- Horse anatomy activity: place the correct label on the correct part of the horse and choose the next question
- Quiz on activities covered to date e.g. horse care (grooming, tacking up etc.)
- Bran tub: box in the middle – young people invited to randomly select a question and read it out for ask one of the researchers to read it out
- Jig saw activity – giant horse jig saw with picture questions on the reverse of the pieces
- Team Quiz - outdoors in the paddock over cross country jumps or in the arena over show jumps – a question on each obstacle
- If your horse was a pop star which one? What kind of person would s/he be? If you were a horse, which one would you be/like to be?
- Use of photographs to analyse and discuss the body language of horse/rider/partnership, using questions like: What do I see here? What does the horse see? What was I thinking? What might the horse be thinking? How was I feeling? How might the horse be feeling? What am I thinking and feeling now?
- Q/A with the instructor/researchers

Appendix 9

Article: 'Bodies of Knowledge, Kinetic Melodies, Rhythms of Relating and Affect Attunement in Vital Spaces for Multi-Species Well-Being: Finding Common Ground in Intimate Human-Canine and Human-Equine Encounters'. (Published in November, 2019 in the Journal 'Animals' as part of the Special Issue: 'Animal Assisted Therapies and Interventions').

Appendix 10

Article: 'Bearing witness to the beauty of kinaesthetic empathy across species in canine-human and equine-human interactions: Participant observation ethnographies'. (Published in February 2021 in 'People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice').

