



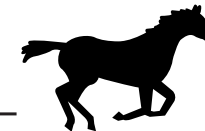
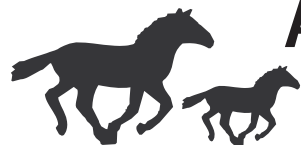
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At Flying Change, Horses Help Heal and Empower Clients



BY NANCY KENNEDY

In horse training, there is a movement known as a "flying change," when a horse changes leads at the canter, in between strides. It is an advanced and skillful movement, switching the lead leg while literally in mid-air, and it takes considerable effort from both horse and trainer to master. A flying change is a moment of time briefly in suspension, a moment of balancing, when choices are considered and decisions made; a flying change signifies that a transition is taking place and a new direction is being pursued.

Flying Change is also the name of a pioneering Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) Program, founded here in Atlanta in 1996. It is a fitting metaphor for the personal growth experienced by clients whose interactions with horses help them develop the emotional and social skills that lead to behavioral change. Utilized in conjunction with conventional psychotherapy, EAP is an exciting, innovative and growing specialty based on the premise that human relationships with horses can graphically reflect and reveal the issues that thwart personal fulfillment and mental health. Working with horses with specially trained equine therapists can lead to new insights, learning, recovery and healing. At Flying Change, clients also change leads, so to speak, by pulling back, balancing and moving forward in a new direction in their lives.

Lissa Corcoran, Founder and Executive Director of Flying Change, describes EAP as a form of therapy in which activities and experiences with horses are custom-

designed for each client, in order to elicit their emotional and behavioral problems. "EAP is a valid and highly effective form of therapy. Working with the client's therapist, our treatment teams set up the experience, exposing the client to situations with the horses that bring their personal dynamics to the surface. These experiences also provide the opportunity to resolve those issues. For example, they reveal relationship problems, but also allow the client to change the way they relate to others. EAP allows the client to project onto the horse; it tells us how they view things, deal with boundaries, express emotions or approach conflicts. It opens a dialogue and lets you see things in a very visual, graphic way that often has a profound impact and leads to faster progress in therapy. Experiences with the horses enable people to see things they might not otherwise see about themselves."

Powerful, intense and highly creative, EAP can provide breakthroughs for clients who feel "stuck" or for those for whom traditional counseling lacks appeal. Jessica S.



Lissa Corcoran



found that EAP at Flying Change gave her the courage and motivation to seek recovery from an eating disorder. "I have come away with countless lessons about setting boundaries, adapting to situations and trusting relationships. Though I had no previous exposure to horses, I wanted to try working with the graceful, beautiful creatures. When I started, I found the idea of boundaries terrifying. I believed

that if I set limits on anything or said no to anyone, I would have no friends. However, I learned how to be safe around the horses and to make myself visible when Leo, my horse, was running around. I had to practice moving out of the way and spreading my arms so he would notice me. I learned about boundaries in a way I can never forget. The horses at Flying Change helped me heal."

Flying Change was one of the first EAP programs in the nation and has gained national recognition as a prototype. It began with a single facility, but the program has been so successful that it has expanded to three locations, all convenient to metropoli-

tan Atlanta. Flying Change offers individual counseling for children, teens and adults, plus group, family and couples counseling, and is now providing corporate team building programs. The organization has contracts with a variety of agencies, including mental health clinics, group homes, recovery programs and others. Future endeavors include weekend retreats and a program that incorporates EAP into 12-step programs. Ridership is not a requirement; in fact, riding is rarely part of the Flying Change program.

"When paired with traditional psychotherapy, EAP speeds results so that the client reaches goals more quickly. Agencies that work with us report that their collaboration with us makes them more effective and helps them achieve better outcomes," says Corcoran, who is a former board member of the international Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association and a highly sought speaker and consultant in the specialty. "Emotional skills developed in relationships with horses can heal and enrich human lives. We encourage professionals in mental health services, social services and human development to contact us to learn more about our programs and services."

To learn more about Flying Change, visit the website at www.flyingchange.org or call (404) 512-0834. To learn more about Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, visit www.eagala.org. To contact Lissa Corcoran, e-mail her at lissa@flyingchange.org or seelisgo@yahoo.com.