

Final Research Results from 2008 Autism Study

The HHRF-funded study entitled "The Effects of Equine Assisted Activities on the Social Functioning of Children with Autism", led by Margaret M. Bass, Ph.D. and Maria Llabre, Ph.D. has been completed. A portion of the discussion from their final report:



"The results of this study indicate that EAA activities may be a

valuable therapeutic option for children with autism spectrum disorders. More specifically, compared to wait list control participants, autistic children in the experimental group improved in critical areas such as sensory seeking, emotional reactive, inattention/distractibility and sensory sensi-

tivity. The experimental subjects also demonstrated improved cognition, communication as well as motivation following the intervention. Both parents and teachers observed treatment effects at the first posttest. Although there was a significant difference following the initial posttest for the experimental group, these effects had subsided for most of the subscales except for three scales of the SP completed by parents.

"The principle of this study was to further investigate the effects of EAA on children with Autism. Using a larger sample size and additional controls, we duplicated our 2006 pilot study to further investigate the effects on the research subjects. The objective of this study was to identify if equine assisted activities improved the social function and attention of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, as well as to evaluate if the effects sustained two months after the intervention was completed.

"We are very grateful to HHRF for allowing us the opportunity to implement this much needed research. The results of this study will provide the industry valuable evidence for the effectiveness of Equine Assisted Activities in assisting children diagnosed with Autism. This study is the second of its kind to evaluate and quantify the impact of EAA on the social functioning of children diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). Our results indicate that EAA services are a beneficial intervention for this population. Additional studies are needed to further assess its therapeutic effects, as well as to identify why the EAA activities provide individuals with ASD such positive results. We are very excited about sharing these results with the professional community and will notify you as soon as our paper has been accepted by a juried publication."

The full report is posted at horsesandhumans.org.

ANNUAL GRANT PROPOSAL DEADLINE: MAY 15

2010-2012 Planning Meeting

The HHRF Board met in Lexington, KY in January to undergo a strategic planning process. The weekend was busy, including events with the equine community, committee and board meetings, and, of course, the planning meeting.

Lorrain Garkovich generously volunteered to facilitate the planning meeting. The process considered the external and internal environment in addition to recent history and challenges. The four strategic initiatives that resulted from the meeting, to be implemented in the coming years, include:

- **Initiative I:** Increase and diversify income sources
- **Initiative II:** Enhance external communications and awareness
- **Initiative III:** Increase the number of quality research applicants and funded projects
- **Initiative IV:** Enhance the efficiency of Board operations

Our thanks to the entire planning team for their valuable contributions to the process. Contact us to receive a copy of the full-plan.



The HHRF Board took a break from strategic planning to visit the Man-o-war statue at Kentucky Horse Park.

President's Perspective

Spring is in the air and with it new hopes and dreams for growth and development. Despite the global financial difficulties of 2009, HHRF managed to increase donations and add still more new people to our family of donors and supporters.

The HHRF Board of Directors had a very productive and enjoyable annual retreat in Lexington KY in January 2010, where we conducted planning for the next few years.

We met with Ray Paulick, the man behind the Paulick Report during that meeting, which resulted in a feature article about HHRF in his 'Good News Friday' column.

Executive Director, KC Henry, represented HHRF on an Arizona radio show and we were featured in Canadian newspapers and on Ohio Regional TV. We will have a presence at the World Equestrian Games, with Board Member Cindy Ruiz doing a presentation in the ALLTECH sponsor's tent. The National Institute of Health, NIH, has a growing interest in the human/animal bond and this year included HHRF's call for proposals in their outreach. Other national associations such as the American Hippotherapy Association included our CFP in their newsletters. Members of the Scientific Committee have developed an outstanding presentation on research, with a focus on mental health that we hope to present at the NARHA Conference. All of this outreach develops more friends for HHRF who help fund research and gets the word out to a broader group of researchers.

Plans are developing at HHRF for a conference of international leaders of Equine Assisted Activities/Therapies, (EAA/T), to assess the present state of the field and identify the best Research strategies that will guide EAA/T's future.

And most importantly, initial results are in on HHRF's funded research, The Effect of Equine Assisted Activities on the Social Functioning in Children with Autism at the Good Hope Equestrian Training Center in Miami, FL. Not only are the results highly significant but there are important statistics on what holds over time and what does not.

I thank all of you who have supported HHRF because it takes all of us working together to promote the validity and power of the horse to influence people, from physical and mental health focuses to recreational and learning based activities.

Molly Sweeney
March 25, 2010

Board and Advisory Transitions



Renee Taylor

The HHRF Board of Directors welcomed founding member Judith Lightfoot back onto the board, along with Scientific Committee member Renee Taylor, who will continue with dual roles in both groups.

We reported a few other changes

in the last email newsletter of 2009:

Tess Schmalbach joined the board of directors at that time, and Laura Lubbers and Emily Southgate joined the scientific committee.

Full biographies of the board of directors, advisory council and scientific committee are available at horsesandhumans.org.

Stay up to date on board and advisory transitions by joining the email newsletter. Sign up for the mailing list at horsesandhumans.org.



Tess Schmalbach



In the News

HHRF Board member Michael Kaufmann was recently interviewed for Barbara Walters' show 20/20 in ABC studios in Manhattan. "They are doing a piece



HHRF Board member Michael Kaufmann with Elizabeth Vargas at ABC Studios in Manhattan, NY.

about a child who had some traumatic history and now is doing Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy as part of her recovery," said Kaufmann.

HHRF Executive Director

KC Henry was also interviewed in February by Jim Solomon on the Xplor the Outdoors Radio Show in Phoenix, Arizona.

Helping Hands, an Ohio-based television program, also aired a feature spot about HHRF recently.

See the President's Perspective letter at left for other recent outreach successes.

Tips for Writing a Research Grant Proposal

By Tess Schmalbach, MD, PhD, HHRF BOD

Horses and Humans Research Foundation is committed to funding rigorous research that will impact the strength of the Equine Assisted Activities of the future. Here we have presented detailed information a few elements of the HHRF proposal, and some suggestions and questions to keep in mind as you develop your proposal. **Visit the HHRF website for full discussions on every element of the proposal.**

Scientific abstract/Research narrative

This is the overview of the project and provides the reviewers with an overarching perspective of the proposed research. A thorough review of relevant literature establishes how the proposed research 'fits' with the available, prior data and publications. Does this extend the field? Break new ground? Build on current hypotheses? Explore current techniques in a different population of subjects? A thoroughly researched and clearly written review of the prior literature demonstrates the applicant's mastery and fluency of the field of interest as well as offering a perspective on the relevance and significance of the proposed research. The goal and hypothesis of the research should be focused, achievable, and pertinent to the HHRF mission. A detailed description of the design of the interventions and/or methodology used in the research is critical to the reviewers' assessments. The use of validated, objectively measurable, controlled and scientifically accepted tools and instruments in the population to be studied provide confidence that the data generated will contribute to advancing the acceptance of the results and conclusions. Statistical grounding in hypothesis testing, study design and

numbers of subjects enables the reviewers to determine the scope, ambitions, and focus of the research. Is this a pilot study that may be followed later by a larger study, and therefore the budget, timelines and personnel involved reflect this scope? Is this a rigorous study supported by the inclusion of many subjects allocated into several intervention or treatment groups? The clarity, completeness and attention to detail exemplified in the literature review, hypothesis to be tested, testing procedures and rigor of the scientific design is heavily weighed in the review process.

Proposed Budget

Who doesn't look at the budget in this day and age?! The reviewers scrutinize the budget to assure costs are realistic, comprehensive and cover the proposed research. Including 'nice to haves' such as a relaxing weekend for the participants, during which no study data is collected, suggests the research proposal has strayed from the HHRF goals. Yet compensation for subject transportation, remuneration for a statistician, and fees for therapists are reasonable expenses that reviewers accept especially if costs are placed in perspective for the geographic location, special equipment required for the research, etc. (e.g., parking in a large city or travel from rural areas may result in significant budget expense). Costs that are missing from the budget again suggest lack of thoroughness, expertise and appreciation for the complexities of the proposed research and send signals that the project may not achieve the stated goals.

Investigator and staff background

The very act of submitting a proposal for

funding suggests that the investigators and their staff are committed. This is supported by letters from ancillary staff, equine centers, and, if indicated, university or patient-based groups that may be involved in the research. The scientific reviewers assess the qualifications and availability of the investigators and their commitment to publication and presentation with an eye toward ensuring the research will be completed in a timely and high-quality manner with contribution from appropriate personnel. Additionally, experience in publishing data strongly supports the application. While conducting a study does not guarantee publication, keep in mind that dissemination of data, and advancing the field are major goals of HHRF. Assurance of appropriate treatment facilities, data handling and analysis, and a potential subject pool are scrutinized. The inclusion of and application by investigators new to the field is encouraged especially if mentors and experts provide advice and oversight of the research. Raising awareness and increasing the expertise of researchers is important to the Foundation.

Full text of this article available at horsesandhumans.org. Email info@horsesandhumans.org to learn more about contributing to the HHRF newsletter.

New at www.horsesandhumans.org:
WEBINARS

Tess (the author of the above article) facilitated several very successful informational webinars in March for prospective grant applicants. More of them will be offered in the future. Visit the website to learn more.

Please consider making a donation to support this critically needed research.

As a public foundation, we depend on contributions from individuals, businesses and foundations in order to operate.

Enclosed is my donation of: \$50__ \$100__ \$300__ \$500__ \$1,000__ Other: \$__

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Horses and Humans Research Foundation is dedicated to facilitating universal understanding and appreciation of the significant influence of horses on humans.

HHRF's funds and promotes research that will:

- 1) Benefit special program participants by improving equine assisted activity best practices;
- 2) Educate the public, including professional affiliates, regarding the value and benefits of horses and equine assisted activities.

Check us out online:

www.horsesandhumans.org

Blog, research results, application guidelines, copies of awarded proposals, archived newsletters and press releases, Q&A Section and much much more!