

# **An Exploratory Study aimed at Measuring the Impact of a Horse Retirement Programme on the Self-worth and Personal Responsibility of a Group of Men and Women with an Intellectual Disability**

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## **Introduction**

People with intellectual disabilities evaluate themselves through their participation in activities that are accepted as the social norm (Zetlin & Turner, 1988) with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) proposing that people have a drive to evaluate themselves with others. People *with disabilities* are cited as making comparisons with people with *no disability* which can motivate a stigmatised group to improve their status (Miller & Kaiser, 2001) (Wolfensberger 1983). Meaningful participation in society by people with an intellectual disability has been shown to be low and challenging (Central Statistics Office [CSO] 2012; Cøbigø and Hall 2009; Hall 2005), though current worldwide policy is moving towards changing this (United Nations [UN] 2006; Jackson 2011; Tøsserbro et al., 2012; Bigby, 2012). Festina Lente has developed a Horse Retirement Programme (HRP) where a group of men and women with an intellectual disability ensure the welfare of the retired horses. This research explores the impact of this programme on the *self-worth* and *personal responsibility* of the participants.

## **Method**

This qualitative study involved data collection through a series of focus discussion groups and interviews with the participants (N=7). Interviews were transcribed as text for thematic analysis providing the flexibility of allowing the process of coding to occur naturally in the absence of a pre-existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Video footage was also taken and analysed to support emerging themes. This research was conducted in line with best ethical practice (Sociological Association of Ireland [SAI]).

## **Results**

Findings suggest that participation in the HRP correlated not only with the emerging themes of confidence, achievement, respect and fulfilment which map onto the domain of *self-worth* but also with the theme of accountable, which maps onto the domain of *personal responsibility*.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the importance of a meaningful activity for adults with an intellectual disability in making a valued and valuable contribution to society – in this context the management and welfare of a herd of retired horses. It also adheres to key requirements in new and current policy surrounding disability services worldwide and in Ireland and necessary for providing societal involvement for people with a disability.