

# **The Inclusion of an Equine Facilitated Educational Programme into the Educational Curriculum of Young People affected by Socio Economic Disadvantage Presenting with Social, Emotional and/or Behavioural Difficulties Final Abstract**

**By Siofra Moriarty Hayes**

## **Introduction**

There is considerable evidence highlighting the importance of social and emotional well-being for young people affected by socio economic disadvantage (Keating & Lamb, 2004). The importance of early interventions in this area has been extensively reported (Aber et al., 2002; Spencer et al., 2002). O'Brien (2004) argues that social and emotional well-being can be as important – if not more important than academic qualifications for young people transitioning into and succeeding into adult life. This small scale mixed methods study examined the impact of an Equine Facilitated Educational Programme (EFEP) on the social and emotional well-being of a group of young people (n=9; male =1; female = 8) between 9–11 years of affected by socio economic disadvantage.

## **Methodology**

EFEP sessions were delivered between September and December for 3 hours each day for 4 groups of young people (n=12 sessions per group). A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare teacher's responses to Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) total and total subscales between T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub>. Qualitative data were gathered from focused discussion groups with the teachers and young people and analysed using thematic analysis. Both data sets were integrated and interpreted.

## **Results**

Whilst there was a *decrease* in the mean of the SDQ total and sub-scale scores for Conduct Problems, Emotional Symptoms, Hyperactivity and Peer Relationship Problems, and an *increase* in Prosocial Behaviours mean scores, these results were not significant. Qualitative findings from teachers identified improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem, behaviour, awareness and expression of emotions and relationships with teachers and peers. The young people's self-reports suggest participation in the EFEP is associated with feelings of being reenergised, teamwork and EFEP representing a favourite part of the week. Superordinate themes included sense of calm, improved sense of responsibility, empathy, focus and concentration.

## **Conclusion**

Study findings suggest participation in the EFEP may be associated with a number of social and emotional competencies and as such may play an important role in equipping young people affected by socio-economic disadvantage with an important set of life skills. Longitudinal comparative studies will further help the understanding of equine facilitated programmes.

Figure 1: Key themes emerging from interviews with teachers and young people

