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SASKATCHEWAN'S OLDEST CONTINUING WEEKLY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED SINCE 1893

Horsing around to improve personal development skills

Local Equine Learning Centre targets at-risk, special needs and corporate staff

BY DONNA BEUTLER

It's a different approach to learning but it's one that Ellen Thompson-Frick of Sabre Quarter Horse's Equine Learning Centre is confident will make a difference in the lives of those who participate in the program she now offers at her ranch.

Frick and her husband Greg run about a hundred horses on their ranch overlooking the Qu'Appelle Valley north of Whitewood and she, along with her assistant Leanne Perrin-Bear, as well as facilitator Sherrie Bergman, are excited about their new venture, one that involves people and horses in an environment where the horses do the teaching.

"Our first session went well," Frick told the Herald of the group of students who were at the learning centre last Tuesday. "This particular group will be coming for one hour a week for an 8-week period."

Student participants of the program have the opportunity to love and care for horses, and in the process learn some life-skill lessons such as positive communication, problem solving and conflict resolution. It also explores alternatives to participating in negative activities or behaviour.

The Equine Learning Centre is not just for children or youth; it's also for adults and Frick offers corporate sessions that would typically

be held as an afternoon and supper session. "We have a different program for adults," Frick explained, where teamwork and communication skills are covered.

Hope and healing is offered to participants, whether young or old, who suffer from such things as substance abuse, behavioural issues, attention deficit disorder, anxiety problems.

Frick has had a life-long love of horses and is a Western Riding Coach as well as an Equine Assisted Learning Coach in the nationally certified program, 'Building Program.'

Program Coordinator Leanne Perrin-Bear says that she got involved in the idea after she was approached by Frick because of her background in social work. "I enjoy this more than the mainstream ways where there's more paperwork and policy. This focuses more on helping."

The next step, according to Frick and Bear, is to get the word out to the corporate sectors as well as education and health-based sectors and let them know about the program. "We have some focus groups coming in," Bear explained, "that are coming from the corporate sector, health sector, and so on." These sessions will give businesses, health and education based professionals a chance to see what the Equine Learning Centre is all about.



Learning the ropes

The newly opened Equine Learning Centre provides an opportunity for participants to learn not only about horses and how to handle them, but also learn life skills such as respect, teamwork and communication.

Photo by Donna Beutler