

4th Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

Category: ISC#6 Tier 2
Innovations In Services to Customers

Project Title: Equine Assisted Therapy

- 1. Project/Program Summary:** Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget. Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) was founded in 1999. EAP provides a safe, yet dynamic forum to explore various issues related to emotional expression and interpersonal skills via specifically designed activities with horses. This is a therapeutic intervention being used nationwide in the private sector, in residential treatment facilities and within the Department of Juvenile Justice. To our knowledge this is the first time this tool has been utilized by a Department of Social Services in the state of North Carolina. The purpose is to augment any existing services or goals already in place and to provide therapeutic intervention to adolescents that are difficult to treat. In April 2005, EAP was presented to Orange County DSS (OCDSS) and the service began in September 2005. The services were provided as part of the LINKS program and were funded by the High Risk Special Funds allocated to the county's LINKS program. Adolescents in need were identified by the LINKS coordinator.
- 2. Innovation:** Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects? The program is unique because it is the first of its kind offered specifically to youth in DSS custody through collaboration with an EAP program. This project is different because the children are in a natural setting (barn or a ring) with horses, an equine psychotherapist and an Equine Professional. The child/ren are asked to complete a task (100% of tasks are on the ground). The therapist watches the interaction between the child and the horse. The equine professional watches the horse's responses to the child. Both practitioners work together to help the child see the real time results of their behavior or actions.
- 3. Project Success and Impact:** What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project/program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? Describe the outcome of the collaboration. The objectives included improving communication and problem solving skills, addressing emotional issues and behaviors, identifying the strengths and needs of each child, and developing teamwork skills and body language expression. These goals were met successfully as evidenced by the clinical notes the therapist provided on each child and by the agency's enthusiasm about providing this service to the next LINKS program. The long-term impact is encouraging due to the numerous anecdotal experiences of many of the children. The project was successful because of the level of communication and collaboration between foster care social workers, privately owned farms, the LINKS coordinator, EAP therapist, DSS finance and DSS administration.
- 4. Project Effort and Difficulty:** How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done? Excellent interagency communication minimized obstacles or challenges. The agency used existing resources to provide the service. High Risk Funds were used for payment. Social workers and foster parents provided transportation. The sessions were scheduled at least a month ahead of time.
- 5. Ability to Replicate Project:** Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems? This project can be replicated. There are certified EAP professionals in many counties that can be accessible to every county

in the state. N.C. has a prominent and well-organized equine community. There is a willingness and openness to explore equine activities, such as with: the developmentally disabled; those who need physical therapy; substance abuse treatment facilities; and sexual offenders programs. Other counties could use existing documents and a creative usage of funds allocated to their county to arrange an in-service training with an EAP provider. Be patient and communicate with each other!!!