



BRIDGEPOINT
CENTER FOR EATING DISORDERS

MEDIA RELEASE

Horses As Teachers in Innovative Provincial Eating Disorder Program

April 30, 2019 (MILDEN, SK) — BridgePoint Center for Eating Disorders

Being an innovative program isn't new for BridgePoint Center for Eating Disorders. When opened in 1997 as a provincial eating disorder program, the center was the first holistic residential eating disorder centre in Canada. BridgePoint has continued to grow and evolve over the last two decades. At the end of April, BridgePoint successfully launched a new pilot program that included pairing Equine Assisted Learning into existing core programming. This modality uses equine partners as teachers to facilitate healing.



Equine-Assisted Learning is a powerful, professional and effective approach that is proven to have a positive impact on individuals of all ages. Ten participants from all across Saskatchewan had the opportunity to be a part of this pilot program that incorporated the use of horses into a BridgePoint-style retreat to begin trauma-informed healing of eating disorders. The focus of utilizing horses in a therapeutic process is not about riding or horsemanship, although horse care is sometimes involved.

Equine Assisted Learning is a highly effective, interactive modality involving certified equine assisted learning coaching, a multi-disciplinary team, participants and horses. During this retreat, the participants were engaged in activities with the horses and given an opportunity to explore and process their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. This was a unique opportunity for growth in ways that other methods and modalities haven't been able to achieve.



"For the first time, I've been able to thrive instead of survive," recounted a participant in the program.

The goal of the program was to increase the participants' quality of life by providing enhanced trauma-informed programming and recovery from eating disorder behaviours. Participants left this program with tools to increase health outcomes and quality of life. Participants were able to attend the program free of charge and stayed onsite at the eating disorder recovery center in Mildren, Saskatchewan.

Program outcomes were measured by using coherence data, formal evaluations, qualitative feedback and facilitator observations. Coherence is an optimal physiological state shown to prevent and reduce stress, increase resilience, and promote emotional wellbeing. All participants demonstrated and reported positive outcomes from the pilot program. The participants who have previously attended all existing stages of BridgePoint's current programming appeared to experience the biggest shifts in their discovery and recovery journey.

One participant said, "The horses were a huge part of me opening up to talk about stuff I haven't said out loud and allowed myself to feel."

Another participant reported, "I wouldn't trade this experience for anything in the world, and I feel more equipped to deal with my trauma."



"I have learned a lot about myself by looking into the eye of the horse. There is something about the horse that touched my soul", shared a participant.

"Less than a year ago adding equine into our program at BridgePoint was just a dream," says Executive Director Carla Chabot. "This became reality this weekend after a lot of dreaming, training, planning, fundraising and collaboration. I'm so proud of my BridgePoint team and the hard work of our participants. We look forward to connecting with funding partners to ensure that we are able to include equine assisted learning into more of our programs."

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BridgePoint Center for Eating Disorders is a provincially approved community based organization that works with the Saskatchewan Health Authority as part of the continuum of health care making a difference in the lives of people in Saskatchewan with eating disorders by opening a path for a process of discovery and recovery. The center is the only residential eating disorder program in Saskatchewan and is a hidden gem in the quaint setting of Mildred, Saskatchewan. Programming is free of charge with a valid Saskatchewan health card. For more information, visit www.bridgepointcenter.ca.

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