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Glenys Woolcock
President
Horse Whispering Youth Program
Via email: glenys@hwyp.com.au

Re: Testimony in support of Horse Whispering Youth Program

I welcome the opportunity to provide this testimony to Horse Whispering Youth Program (HWYP) in support of their future grant applications and fundraising endeavours.

I support HWYP's unique approach to addressing the diverse needs of youth & families. Their equine-assisted programs enhance the personal growth, well-being, and overall development of participants in a safe, natural, and outdoor environment. Moreover, the program is evidence based which means its effective in helping children who are at risk.

I am writing this testimony to highlight how valuable the Horse Whispering Youth Program has been to our children and families. I am an allied health professional working at Robina Hospital in a school for disadvantaged and unwell adolescents. These children are at risk of disengagement from school, getting involved in youth crime, and are at high risk of suicide and severe mental health difficulties. Our program aims to support their mental health and re-engagement back into school. We have been lucky enough to have been attending the HWYP for a year. In that time, we have had numerous children from our program engage in the program with amazing results. We have tracked our children's progress whilst in the HWYP with a series of psychometric assessments that were completed pre-and-post intervention to assess how engaging in the HWYP impacted the psychological wellbeing of our children who participated. Results identified that:

- All children demonstrated an increase in overall self-esteem whereby their perceptions of self-competence and self-liking significantly improved.
- 85% of the children identified a reduction in depressive, anxious, and stress symptomology, such that post-intervention all children fell below clinical assessment thresholds on these factors.
- Over 60% of the children who completed the HWYP also identified reduction in anxiety symptoms related to panic disorder, somatic symptoms of anxiety, generalised, separation, and social anxiety.
- All children identified a decrease in their school avoidance post-intervention.

We also capture qualitative data regarding our children's involvement in the HWYP. Our children said;

- *"The program taught me to regulate my emotions. They (the horses) would be chilled if we were calm, if we weren't calm, they would feel the same."*
- *"I love the horses, the people there and the fact that they (horses) can get your emotions like a mirror."*
- *"I look forward to it every week"*

The HWYP was also highly valuable for our staff who attended with the children. Our staff reported:

- *“Equine therapy is my reset for the week. It is my chance to get out in the fresh country air, recharge and reconnect with my patients in a different setting that is not clinically stifling”*
- *“I am so proud that I have been able to witness a program like this. One of our children on the autism spectrum went from being petrified of horses to standing up tall leading a horse through an obstacle course head held high shoulders back, ear to ear smile all within a term of equine therapy”*
- *“The experience itself is great, but also the drive there has been great to witness. During this time, the children can relax, have fun, laugh and connect”.*
- *“I have never seen such a profound effect on our children’s social and emotional development as I’ve seen at equine therapy. The horses do more in 2 hours a week than what I feel I could do as a clinician in a clinical setting in a month!”*

In my experience, the 10-week early intervention program has proven crucial in helping us to help the children in our care. It gives our children a glimmer of hope and adds joy to their lives, which is a big thing for children with severe mental health difficulties. These children also largely come from low socio-economic backgrounds so they would never be able to afford this type of therapy. To see how much the children love it, how much it benefits them, and how thankful they are that it is government funded and helps change their trajectory in life is something that I (and we) as an organisation are so grateful for. It is for this reason that I strongly advocate for the program to continue to receive these funding grants because without it, these disadvantaged children will further be at risk of disengagement from school, getting involved in youth crime, and further significant mental health difficulties.

I trust that you find this testimony useful and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further testimony.

Yours sincerely,



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