

The Epona Project

“Strengthening the Spirit of Young Women”

The Epona Project is an equine facilitated learning (also known as equine facilitated psychotherapy) program offered at SHHRC for girls aged 14-18 who are at risk academically. Equine facilitated learning (EFL) partners teenage girls with horses to promote emotional growth and learning.

EAL is experiential, meaning that participants learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses and then processing their feelings, behaviors, and patterns. Participants in EFL do not ride, instead they partner with the horses in various activities on the ground designed to help the participants better understand themselves.

The activities with the horses are intended to challenge the participants in various ways. Obstacle courses are often metaphors for the challenges the participant faces in their life, in school or in their relationships. Participants are given tasks to complete with the horses, alone or as a group that influence them to seek creative solutions and use their own strengths to guide them and the horse to success. EAL promotes experiences and situations for discussion, analysis and learning.

Horses are very much like humans in that they are social animals. They have distinct personalities, attitudes, and moods. They are large and powerful beings, yet they are extremely sensitive to the environment around them. They communicate non-verbally using body language and are non-judgmental. Horses respond to the handler’s personality and can mirror the behavior they see in handler, often challenging the handler to make changes in their approach or demeanor in order to be successful with a task. At the same time, the “quiet” moments spent grooming or just being with the horses promotes a strong emotional bond that can have a powerful impact on the participants. This partnership, or relationship, with the horses can foster beneficial emotional, social and psychological growth.

Participants meet weekly at Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center in Oldwick for ten weeks. Epona addresses the following areas: communication, assertiveness, creative thinking, problem-solving, leadership skills, empowerment, boundaries, inner strength, teamwork, relationships and confidence.

Along with the horses, the Epona team consists of a licensed mental health practitioner and two NARHA certified instructors/equine specialists who have been trained in equine facilitated learning/psychotherapy.

The Epona Project is funded by a generous grant from the Elizabeth and Baretts O. Benjamin Charitable Foundation. The Foundation was developed in part to provide women access to programs that support their independence and academic future. This program is free to young women who are at risk for not completing their education and who desire support in actualizing their true potential.

If you know of a young woman between the ages of 14-18 who is at risk academically, has low academic achievement expectations for herself, has limited family involvement and or group support, or has feelings of isolation this may be the program that can make a difference in her life.

If you would like more information on the Epona project please contact:

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