



## The M. Bernard Hanks Equestrian Center

### Equine Assisted Psychotherapy Program How It Works and What It Does for Children

The M. Bernard Hanks Equestrian Center is a state-of-the-art equine and therapeutic riding facility made possible by a grant from the Shelton Family Foundation of Abilene, Texas. The center features a riding arena, 10 stalls, horse showers, medical station, tack and feed rooms, office, and a classroom. The classroom facilitates the Home's Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) program, designed to help children heal from emotional traumas, leading to healthy adult lives.

EAP is a collaborative effort between a licensed therapist and a horse professional as they work with children and horses to address treatment goals. EAP addresses a variety of mental health and human development needs, including behavioral issues, attention deficit disorder, substance abuse, eating disorders, abuse issues, depression, anxiety, relationship problems and communication needs.

EAP is experiential in nature. Participants learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses, and then they process (or discuss) feelings, behaviors, and patterns. This approach has been compared to the ropes courses used by therapists, treatment facilities, and human development courses around the world; but EAP has the added advantage of utilizing horses, who are dynamic and powerful living beings.

The focus of EAP is not riding or horsemanship. The focus of EAP involves setting up ground activities involving the horses which will require the child to apply certain skills.

Non-verbal communication, assertiveness, creative thinking, problem-solving, leadership, work, responsibility, teamwork, relationships, confidence, and attitude are several examples of the tools utilized and developed by EAP.

Hendrick Home for Children full time employees Mr. David Perkins, LCSW, a certified EAP therapist, and Lora Jones, a 30 year horse professional who is also EAP certified, direct the program. The M. Bernard Hanks Equestrian Center is designed to provide services for up to 150 children in both the Basic Care (long-term child care) and Family Care (single parent with children) programs as part of Hendrick Home's 2020 Vision Strategic Plan.