



Evaluation of an Equine Assisted Learning Programme for School  
Children and Young People

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## **Abstract**

Equine-Assisted Learning Programme (EALP) was delivered by Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company to promote the development of life skills using an experiential learning approach. The EALP focussed on activities that would improve confidence, communication, resilience, achievement, teamwork and relationships.

The project aimed to evaluate the experiences of teachers and programme trainers of an EALP delivered by Equitots Lanarkshire.

The research questions were:

RQ1: What aspects of the programme work (or not)?

RQ2: What changes in cognitive, psychomotor or social skills were witnessed during and/or after the EALP in the children or young persons?

RQ3: What experiences do teachers and programme trainers report about the EALP?

The intervention involved 25 sessions with 5 schools, with 4 children per school attending 5 sessions each. Primary schools were from two local authority areas in Scotland, UK. The intervention involved a variety of activities designed with and without the pony for primary school children (aged between 8-11). Ethical approval was gained through University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel GUEP509, and management approval was granted via the Head of Education in both Local Authorities.

Sample: Seven teachers from 5 schools and one programme trainer volunteered to take part in the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time and refuse to answer any questions.

Audio-recorded face-to-face or telephone interviews using a semi-structured set of questions, approximately 60-90 minutes in length, were used to collect data from participants. Data were held securely using General data Protection Regulation guidelines. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The main findings of the research are described within each research question:

RQ1: Travelling to the facility, working directly with the pony (such as riding, grooming, and understanding equine behaviour), as well as craft activities (such as making a coat of arms) were cited as being active ingredients of the intervention that teachers felt worked really well for children within the EALP. There were no negative aspects of the programme identified, apart from the further availability of such a programme to children within each council area.

RQ2: There were examples of immediate impact for the children, and this was often carried on for months after the intervention. Positive changes in social skills such as those associated with positive behaviour (e.g. building relationships with the teacher



and other children), as well as improvement in the children's confidence and communication skills, were provided as examples throughout every interview. Cognitive skills, such as maths, were improved by carrying out applied work during the sessions.

RQ3: Interview data revealed that teachers' experiences of EALP was viewed as an excellent means of engaging children in learning. It was generally more difficult to engage children within the classroom than within the outdoor environment with ponies. Teachers noted areas where they were proud of their children's achievements both at EALP, and also in the months after the intervention.

In conclusion, this qualitative exploration of the impact of the EALP intervention found that it was positive in terms of the positive influence it appears to have on the cognitive, psychomotor, and social improvement seen in children both during and after the intervention. More evaluative research is needed before the impact is fully understood. Early evidence would suggest that it may have the potential to have a significant impact on the way the child learn, as well as having longer-term benefits.



## **Background, aims of project**

The approach taken is a “carefully designed, holistic Equine Assisted Learning programme (EALP), which benefits children physically and improves cognitive and sensory, emotional, social and psychological development.” Equitots Lanarkshire, established in 2016, provides “an experiential learning approach that promotes the development of life skills for education, professional and personal goals through equine-assisted activities.

The EALP provided by Equitots Lanarkshire focussed on activities that would improve confidence, communication, resilience, achievement, teamwork and relationships. There were 25 EALP sessions in total: 5 schools in two council authorities who received 5 sessions each with 4 children per school. The programme provided to primary school children (Appendix I) was created to link to the local Authorities’ vision, and the Scottish policy on Getting it Right for Every Child Indicators (2017) (Appendix II). In summary, these policies and vision included raising achievement and attainment for children, as well as keeping children safe, nurtured and healthy.

Equitots Lanarkshire is keen to build the evidence base for EALP and evaluate the impact of this equine assisted intervention on children who require an alternative approach to learning. Longer-term, Equitots Lanarkshire wishes to commission further evaluation that will demonstrate impact and effectiveness of this approach in how and why it improves (or not) confidence, communication skills, relationships, trust, resilience and teamwork.

For this study, it was important to understand what teachers had experienced when a group of pupils had attended EALP at Equitots Lanarkshire. For example, what skills had the children gained as a direct result of this programme? It was important to qualitatively understand the impact the intervention had on children when they returned to school – that day, the rest of week, time in school and after the programme had completed.



## **Research Aims and Questions**

The project aimed to evaluate the experiences of teachers and programme trainers of an Equine Assisted Learning Programme (EALP) delivered by Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company.

The research questions were:

RQ1: What aspects of the programme work (or not)?

RQ2: What changes in cognitive, psychomotor or social skills were witnessed during and/or after the EALP in the children or young persons?

RQ3: What experiences do teachers and programme trainers report about the EALP?

## **Sample**

Primary schools (n=5) in North and South Lanarkshire were approached to take part in the evaluation via the headteacher. Programme trainers within the EALP were also approached to take part. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time, refuse to answer any questions and that no follow up interview was required. Seven teachers from five schools, and one programme trainer took part in this research.

No children were involved in this study, but it is anticipated that further evaluation work will collect data from children and young persons.

## **Ethics**

Each teacher, headteacher, classroom assistant or programme trainer was provided with an information sheet (Appendix IIIa) and time to consider their participation in the research. Each participant was individually consented (Appendix IIIb) to take part in the study once they had indicated their willingness to take part. Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel GUEP509, and management access to primary schools was granted via the Head of Education within North and South Lanarkshire Councils.

Audio-recorded face-to-face or telephone interviews using a semi-structured set of questions (Appendix IV), approximately 60-90 minutes in length, were used to collect data from participants (n=8). Data were held securely using General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines. Due to the small sample group, no demographic data from participants and their associated schools, were taken due to the risk of identifying participants. Teacher/headteacher/classroom assistant participants were identified as Participant 1 [P1]- Participant 7 [P7], and one participant was the Programme Trainer [P8].

The research data were kept anonymously as soon as the interview recording was transcribed. Participants were aware that direct quotes were used within this report. Personal data (i.e. name and school) were kept for 6 months and then securely destroyed. The anonymised interview transcripts and consent forms were retained for 10 years in line with University of Stirling's data retention policy.

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcript data. The steps involved are summarised in Textbox 1.

1. Familiarise yourself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcript
2. Assign preliminary codes to the data
3. Combine codes into overarching themes across different interviews
4. Review themes
5. Define and name themes
6. Produce report

Textbox 1: Steps in Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019)

The findings described below were grouped into four themes: communication and confidence; relationships and trust; achievement; teamwork and participation.

## Key Findings

### Relationships and trust

Participants reported that children interacted more, either at the time of the EALP session and/or afterwards:

*"...he's trying to socialise...trying to interact..." [P1]*

At other times, participants reported more detailed examples of interaction, including the non-verbal communication common within the EALP session as well as afterwards:

*"He will come and say, they are standing with their arms closed, does that mean that they are not happy? He is starting to link behaviours - someone's nonverbal communication..... it's about trying to work out what they are communicating [through non-verbal communication]." [P1]*

Another participant described that one participant was *"...now looking and saying, are you sad? And [he is] looking at people's faces and looking at what they are doing, which is definitely gained from when he has been going to the horses."* [P1].



For some children, particularly those with autism, making eye contact can be difficult. The Programme Trainer [P8] explained that:

*“Quite often children with autism find it actually painful to make eye contact; its physical pain they experience. So, a horse doesn’t demand eye contact. Probably the horse doesn’t look you direct in the eye because the horse’s eyes are at either side of its head. So, it doesn’t seek out eye contact whereas humans, if you want to engage with somebody, you seek out eye contact deliberately, which can make that person [with autism] feel uncomfortable. So, I think it is one reason why children with autism can gravitate towards the horse.”*

The opportunity for small group learning as well as one-to-one time provided some children with a “...wee bit time away in a smaller group situation... getting the space and time [they] need to maybe chat through the home situation, you know, things that are going on that [they] wouldn’t normally do in a big, busy school day.” [P5]. Some participants noted that after the sessions, children were “more open to coming forward to speak about [their] feelings” [P5].

Instant feedback that is provided by the pony to the child was reported by a number of participants. The physical care of the pony is one of the key aspects of the programme, and while learning about grooming, cleaning out the pony’s feet, the children appreciate that the pony is “...responding to what you are doing. To get that actual response from another live thing that’s not a human being, for kids, its priceless!” [P7]. One participant gave an example of the love between the child and the pony:

*“It is the fact that the pony will love you if you treat it nicely. It will love you no matter what you are doing or how bad your day has been: that they are there to support you. I think that massive for the kids, ‘cause that might not always be their experiences at home.”* [P4]

One activity that the participants reported as greatly significant to the children was that children were asked to make a coat of arms, identifying who and what was important to them in their lives. The importance of making and maintaining relationships is an area that participants spoke of throughout the interviews, and the benefits children had from it. Participant [P2] explained that her group of children would talk to each other during the craft hut time (see Appendix I) and would disclose things about their home life to each other, and it made them feel that “... other people can have a difficult time at home too ...”, and she stated that this continued well after the sessions were finished.

Participants reported a range of activities that children could participate in and gain immediate benefit from in other themes.

## **Communication and confidence**

The Programme Trainer [P8] explained her thoughts around the programme design:

*“Quite a lot of children don’t understand social norms in the playground but they start to see through the ponies, who are very big and visual, that social acceptance.... How close you can be to someone or how heavily you can touch somebody without a reaction. Horses either bring their ears back, or move a leg, or swish their tail.”*

Participant [P2] gave an example of a child who *“...doesn’t follow instructions, is disengaged at school, he pushes the boundaries, he runs away...but the interesting thing about him is that actually he is very affectionate towards the ponies, ...and cares about how the pony views him.”* When asked to explain why that is, the Programme Trainer explains:

*“I think the ponies don’t put pressure on the children. They treat everyone equally and sometimes, because the children appreciate something or someone [i.e. pony], that they can connect with, that actually isn’t making a noise; that is not speaking.”*

The use of ponies to provide “instant feedback” was seen as such an advantage within the EALP. *“Kids got instant feedback without it being, sort of, harsh, verbal.”* [P8]. Participant [P5] explained that the children talked of the pony not approving or liking their behaviour as it would make the pony step away. This encouraged children to think about their non-verbal behaviour and verbal approach to making relationships that did not have the other person moving away from him/her. Participant [P1] explained that she could think of several instances where the children had referred to their learning even after months had passed since their last event at EALP.

The benefit of working and learning with ponies was explained by P4 who said that *“...there was loads of learning ongoing on in terms of how to be safe around it [the pony] and as soon as they went near the pony they had to be a bit more confident in themselves but they had to be gentle too... I think that was important for that boy as he had issues associated with attachment.”*

Another teacher reported a feeling of fear with one child initially, but during the EALP her confidence improved, as well as her communication:

*“...she was really anxious to the point that sometimes she is not able to speak. She would remember from week to week the name of the equipment and was able to answer questions really clearly and the confidence was amazing. The first week she was terrified and now she actually attends horse riding lessons and she is doing really well.”* [P6]





Participants reported that the children used their experiences, and talked about them, long after their EALP had finished. The confidence the children showed to get involved in activities at school was a clear benefit to completing EALP, with participant [P6] explaining that “... *[the child] would normally hang back a lot and now he is not. He’s quite confident now and he is getting involved in a lot of things.*”

### **Teamwork and Participation**

The EALP programme is designed around the GIRFEC model. One of the areas that the participants address in their responses is the development of a nurturing environment within the EALP.

Outdoor environment, with no artificial light or sounds, provides a completely different environment to school. One participant described that there was “...*a benefit of taking those boys out of class for a short time and doing something active with them ... [and] they formed a wee social group, where they discuss things. The school have become aware of issues in the children’s homes that we weren’t aware of. Those children have built enough trust between each other.*” [P3]

For other children, they develop cognitive skills such as spelling, identifying letters, and maths skills. For example, children work out the perimeter of the horse arena: “...*when we do distance and measuring activities, there are children that wouldn’t necessarily demonstrate [those skills] in class, like problem-solving skills too.*” [P8]. This was emphasised by teachers as an important learning activity, as exemplified by:

*“In week three we moved onto literacy and numeracy work. We looked at the weight of the horse, and the distance around the horse arena and stables. It is the work like that where the children seem unaware that they are engaging in skills like that. For most of these children they would never engage in these activities in classrooms.”* [P7]

The focus on the pony’s physical needs and care requirements is intended to provide the child with an understanding of the need to be active and healthy. The children are taught, for example, to identify and use the correct brushes on different parts of the pony’s body. “*That relates to self-care, whenever they’re at home, and understanding that you need to wash skin for your skin to be healthy.*” [P8].

Making the wrong choices in life is what we all do at some point in our lives. Using the ‘brushing the pony’ example, “...*horses are good at telling us when we’ve made a mistake*” and if the children brush the horse on a sensitive part of the body with the wrong brush, the pony will “...*swish its tail or stamp its leg or put its ears back ...so it’s about transferring those skills of if you make a choice that other people are not going to appreciate, there’s a consequence. And it’s all non-verbally.*” [P8].



Participant P4 said that the pony reacted negatively to the child while she was brushing the pony, and “... *the child then was more gentle [when grooming], and talked about learning to be kinder to others*”.

One aspect of using the pony was the instant forgiveness that the child perceived. For example, the child would approach the pony in a caring way [despite a poorer experience previously] and the pony would respond in the same way: “*The child can get a sense of ...they begin to understand that if you do make bad choices it doesn't mean the end of the world.*” [P8]. Some children helped others to understand the pony's behaviour as Participant P3 explained:

*“One child was explaining to the other how to approach the pony so that he didn't think you were going to be cruel to him... and it was important that the pony understood your body language so that you were going to be kind and caring to him. I don't think either child was used to someone being as caring to them and it was good to see that they had picked up this life skill.”*

## **Achievement**

The Programme Trainer stated that teachers reported to her that behaviour within the session was transferred back to the classroom. Teachers reported that pupils were more focussed, generally more able to concentrate, and better able to participate in class. This was borne out in participants verbatim statements below:

*“... they're nicer to each other ...”*[P3]

*“One boy did not like the noise of a pen on a board. Then the other kids started saying to each other that he did not like that noise: stop doing it, because remember he doesn't like that. They were showing that they really...cared about each other, which I hadn't seen before.”* [P4]

In the same scenario, the participant reported that the teacher had changed the way that noises were used within this boy's classroom, and that they had seen a difference, for the better, in his behaviour. While another teacher reported that the child was “...*definitely still been a lot more open and coming forward to speak about his feelings and things like that.*” [P5]

No one reported any negative aspects of the EALP, and one participant [P3] explained that “...*every time they [the children] were happy: so, they've always got something to take home... they're proud of themselves.*” She noted that the children would “...*chat, chat, chat, chat and they were having really good conversations either about the session, or about what they were looking forward to next time.*” [P3]



Children were also presented with a Youth Scotland Hi5 Award, and participant feedback was particularly strong about the achievement children felt when receiving the award.

*“...they were delighted and felt that they really achieved something that was different to their peers as well. ...some of them that were going together initially we had slight reservations over how well they would mix. It is only 4 of them and its quite an intense period of time that they were up there. ...But even the car journeys to and from, and as the weeks progressed, you would come back to school and say, what a difference! Even in their ability to start conversations with each other.” [P4]*

One child reported to her teacher [P5] that she *“... had never received a medal for anything”* and that she *“... had never been good at anything before.”* The teacher remarked:

*“Oh, my goodness, that’s how low her confidence is... so it’s a wee stepping stone ...that wee encouragement to go and take on something that is new and different. That sense of achievement.” [P5]*

Teachers concluded that children appeared to have a sense of pride and enjoyment and sense of achievement from the EALP.

## **Discussion**

Evidence from other equine assisted work cites the use of ponies as an effective therapy animal for a number of reasons. The stature of the horse alongside a child usually solicits respect for the animal, and when the person can ride the pony, there are feelings of pride and achievement (Melson 2001). Existing evidence, although on different sample groups (e.g. adolescents) and outcomes (e.g. depression, anger) and experiences (e.g. ability to make friends) and referral to the intervention as ‘therapy’ or ‘programme’, does suggest that the equine learning approach could be useful. In early studies of an equine facilitated therapy approach to adolescents, Bowers and MacDonald (2001), found a decrease in depression and was able to foster life skills, such as communication, and proper use of power and control. In 2004, Kaiser et al, concluded that a 5-day therapeutic riding program showed significant decrease in anger among able-bodied children. Ewing et al (2007) demonstrated that a 9-week equine-facilitated learning program on 26 participants, aged between 10-13 years, did not support any statistically significant results with regards to measurement of children’s self-esteem, empathy, control, depression or loneliness.



A randomized control trial involving 26 adolescents enrolled in a 5-week equine assisted learning program, increased levels of hope and decreased depression within that timeframe (Frederick et al 2015). In a Norwegian study involving 49 adolescents aged 12-15 years who undertook a 4-month equine-assisted therapy program, found that there was a significant increase in perceived social support than the control group. There was no difference in self-esteem or general self-efficacy (Hauge et al 2014).

The existing evidence is based on small sample sizes for quantitative studies, and therefore, the results should not be over-interpreted due to the risk of biases. In a review of the efficacy of equine-assisted interventions on psychological outcomes, Kendall et al (2015) concluded that equine-assisted interventions hold much promise in terms of child/adolescent social and behavioural issues. However, they conclude that the evidence does not allow definitive conclusion of the efficacy of equine-assisted interventions, and that further research is required, such as randomised control trials.

The qualitative reporting within this study provides insight into the potential benefits (as there were no negative aspects identified) of EALP, and the impact it had on the children who took part.

## **Conclusions**

Participants reported:

- Positive changes in children and young people's behaviour during and after the EALP particularly in relation to building relationships and communication, and in the children's confidence
- That there was instant non-verbal feedback to children from the pony that teachers said was vital for learning about communication, relationship building and trust.
- There appears to be cognitive, social and psychomotor learning for children which are described within the four themes: relationships and trust; communication and confidence; achievement; teamwork and participation.
- Participants described children's excellent active engagement in EALP, for example, there were more positive relationships between the children within the group, and teachers could provide examples of improved engagement in class.
- Changes were noted in the children's behaviour, particularly in terms of improved interaction with their peers and teachers, as well as the pony.
- Long-lasting effects of the EALP were cited as an important benefit of EALP with teachers reporting that they had witnessed improved behaviour and engagement in class, as well as in forming positive relationships with classmates.



- The only negative aspect of the EALP was the short timeframe (5 sessions), and that participants would have liked to have been able to access more of this type of learning for children.

In answering the Research Questions (RQ), the main findings can be summarised as:

RQ1: Travelling to the facility, the work directly with the pony (such as riding, grooming, and understanding equine behaviour), as well as craft and other learning activities (such as making a coat of arms and measuring the horse arena) were cited as being active ingredients of the intervention that teachers felt worked really well for children within the EALP. There were no negative aspects of the programme identified, apart from the further availability of such a programme to children within each council area.

RQ2: There were examples of immediate impact for the children, and this was often carried on for months after the intervention. Positive changes in social skills such as those associated with positive behaviour (e.g. building relationships with the teacher and other children), as well as improvement in the children's confidence and communication skills, were provided as examples throughout every interview. Cognitive skills, such as numeracy, were improved by carrying out applied work during the sessions.

RQ3: Interview data revealed that teachers' experiences of EALP was viewed as an excellent means of engaging children in learning that was generally more difficult within a classroom than they found in the outdoor environment with ponies. Teachers noted areas where they were proud of their children's achievements both at EALP, and also in the months after the intervention.

## **Recommendations**

Further research, both qualitative and quantitative, with a larger and more diverse geographical spread of participants, could add to the evidence base for this type of learning for children. The evidence base for this type of activity should be strengthened, and there appears to be positive benefits to the child and their life within and out with school.

Longer-term benefits that were described were reported 2-3 months after the EALP sessions were completed. Additionally, participants were volunteers and not every school/teacher involved in EALP volunteered for the study: therefore, there is a chance of responder bias. Further evidence over a longer timeframe with a larger sample of participants would help add to the strength of evidence for this type of intervention.



There were no negative comments in relation to the intervention and the programme of learning. This means that this may be an intervention that is personalised enough for each child, while providing a group-based intervention programme that is responsive to the needs of children who learn in different ways.

This study provided a qualitative exploration of the impact of this intervention, and more evaluative research is needed before the impact of the intervention is fully understood. However, early evidence would suggest that it may have the potential to have a significant impact on the way the child learns, as well as having longer-term benefits.

## Funding

Research was funded through Grant Award from One Family Social.

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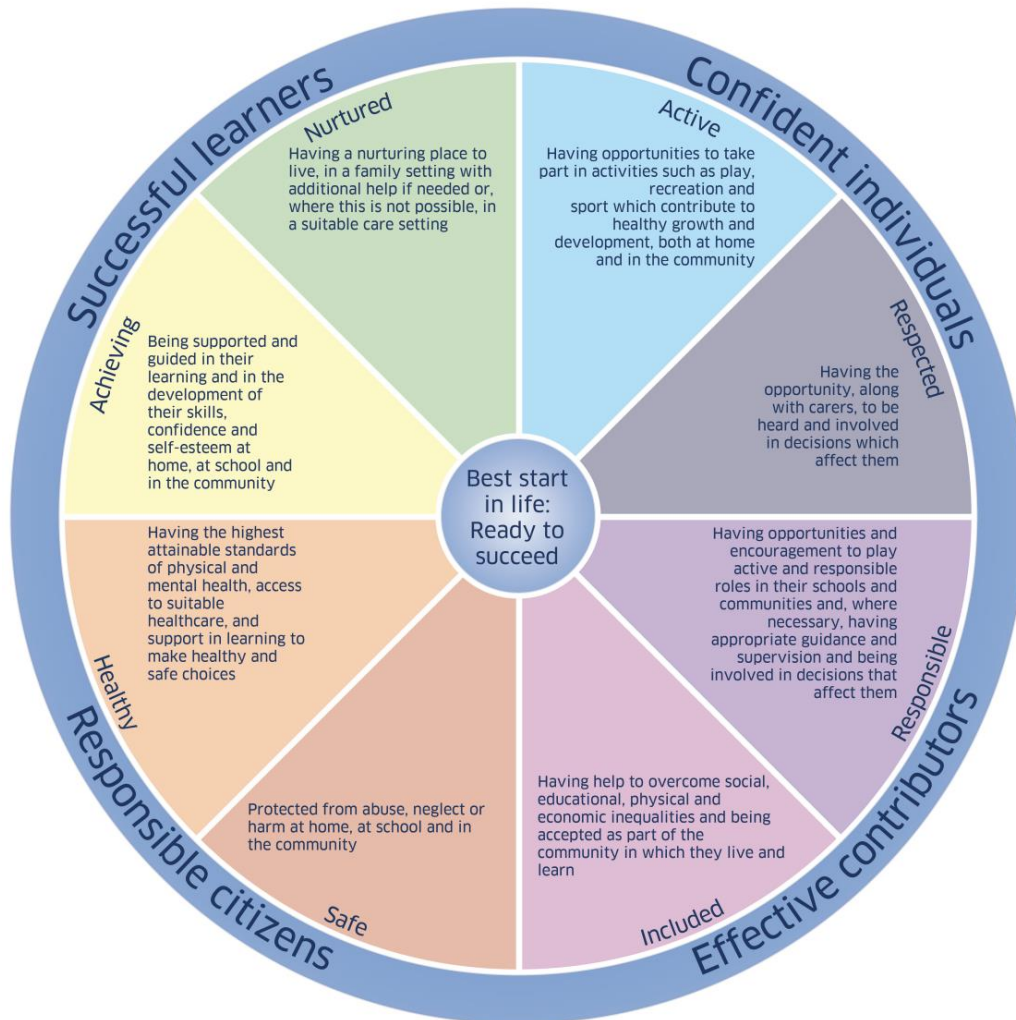
Appendix I

Programme outline





Appendix II



SHANARRI indicators – Wellbeing Wheel (Getting it Right for Every Child, Scottish Government 2017)



Appendix IIIa

Information sheets for teachers and programme trainers



## Participant Information Sheet (Teachers)

**1. Research Project Title:** Evaluation of an Equine Assisted Learning Programme for School Children and Young People

**2. Background, aims of project**

We are carrying out an independent evaluation of the Equine Assisted Learning Programme (EALP) delivered by Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company and would like to invite you to take part. The project aims to evaluate what aspects of the programme you feel works (or not), what changes in cognitive, psychomotor or social skills you witnessed during and/or after the programme in the children or young persons, and your experiences of using the programme.

**3. Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because you are a Teacher who has had contact with children and young people who are or have undertaken the EALP.

**4. Do I have to take part?**

No. You do not have to take part and this will not affect your school's participation in the programme.

If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw your participation at any time without needing to explain and without penalty by advising the researchers of this decision. You can also withdraw your data before April 2019.

You will be given this information sheet to keep and if you wish to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

**5. What will happen if I take part?**

The researcher will contact you to make arrangements to carry out an interview either face-to-face or via telephone. The interview should take approximately 30-60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. If you do not want the interview audio-recorded, the researcher will take notes on the



conversation. The interview will be arranged at a mutually convenient time either with the researcher coming to your workplace or contacting you at work via telephone. There are no follow up interviews.

**6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?**

The risks involved in taking part is that of you or your school being identified within the research. Care will be taken to use direct quotes where there is no risk of you or your school or any child being identified.

The data we collect from you will be held securely using General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

**7. Are there any benefits in taking part?**

This research will help to build the evidence base for the use of EALP for school children with challenging behaviour and/or developmental and or/support needs.

There will be no payment for taking part in this project.

**8. Legal basis for processing personal data**

As part of the project we will be recording personal data relating to you (i.e. your name and place of work but those will be anonymised within the research findings). This will be processed in accordance with the GDPR. Under GDPR the legal basis for processing your personal data will be public interest/the official authority of the University.

**9. What happens to the data I provided?**

The research data will be kept anonymously as soon as the interview recording has been transcribed. This means that your name and school details will be anonymised and will not be shared with a third party.



Your personal data will be kept for six months and then will be securely destroyed. The anonymised interview transcripts and consent forms will be securely retained in line with the University of Stirling's data retention policy for a period of 10 years.

We will ask all participants for their permission to use direct quotes.

#### **10. Will the research be published?**

The research will be published in academic journals and conferences. You will not be identifiable in any report/publication. All schools taking part will be provided with a copy of the research findings via the Head teacher.

The University of Stirling is committed to making the outputs of research publically accessible and supports this commitment through our online open access repository STORRE. Unless funder/publisher requirements prevent us, this research will be publicly disseminated through our open access repository.

#### **11. Who is organising and funding the research?**

Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company is sponsoring/funding this research.

#### **12. Who has reviewed this research project?**

This project has approved via The University of Stirling ethics committee [General University Ethics Panel Ref number: GUEP509].

#### **13. ESSENTIAL IF COLLECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION: Your rights**

You have the right to request to see a copy of the information we hold about you and to request corrections or deletions of the information that is no longer required.

You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time without giving reasons and without consequences to you. You also have the right to object to us processing relevant personal data however, please note that once the data are being analysed and/or results published it may not be possible to remove your data from the study.



**14. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?**

If you would like to discuss the research with someone, please contact Dr Angus Hunter, Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, Tel: 01786466497 email: [a.m.hunter1@stir.ac.uk](mailto:a.m.hunter1@stir.ac.uk)

You have the right to lodge a complaint against the University regarding data protection issues with the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>).

The University's Data Protection Officer is Joanna Morrow, Deputy Secretary. If you have any questions relating to data protection these can be addressed to [data.protection@stir.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@stir.ac.uk) in the first instance.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

**Thank you for your participation.**



## **Participant Information Sheet (Trainer)**

**15. Research Project Title:** Evaluation of an Equine Assisted Learning Programme for School Children and Young People

**16. Background, aims of project**

We are carrying out an independent evaluation of the Equine Assisted Learning Programme (EALP) delivered by Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company and would like to invite you to take part. The project aims to evaluate what aspects of the programme you feel works (or not), what changes in cognitive, psychomotor or social skills you witnessed during and/or after the programme in the children or young persons, and your experiences of using the programme.

**17. Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because you are a Programme Trainer who has had contact with children and young people who are or have undertaken the EALP.

**18. Do I have to take part?**

No. You do not have to take part and this will not affect your role at Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company.

If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw your participation at any time without needing to explain and without penalty by advising the researchers of this decision. You can also withdraw your data before April 2019.

You will be given this information sheet to keep and if you wish to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

**19. What will happen if I take part?**

The researcher will contact you to make arrangements to carry out an interview either face-to-face or via telephone. The interview should take approximately 30-60 minutes. If you do not want the interview to be audio-recorded, the researcher will take notes on the conversation. The



interview will be arranged at a mutually convenient time either with the researcher coming to your workplace or contacting you at work via telephone. There are no follow up interviews.

**20. Are there any potential risks in taking part?**

The following risks are involved in taking part is that of you being identified within the research.

Care will be taken to use direct quotes where there is no risk of you or any child being identified.

The data we collect from you will be held securely using General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

**21. Are there any benefits in taking part?**

The research will help to build the evidence base for the use of EALP for school children with challenging behaviour and/or developmental and or/support needs.

There will be no payment for taking part in this project.

**22. Legal basis for processing personal data**

As part of the project we will be recording personal data relating to you (i.e. your name is the only piece of personal data we will hold and this will be anonymised within the research findings). This will be processed in accordance with the GDPR. Under GDPR the legal basis for processing your personal data will be public interest/the official authority of the University.

**23. What happens to the data I provided?**

The research data will be kept anonymously as soon as the interview recording has been transcribed. This means that your name will be anonymised and will not be shared with third party.

Your personal data will be kept for 6 months and then will be securely destroyed. The anonymised interview transcripts and consent forms will be securely retained in line with the University of Stirling's data retention policy for a period of 10 years.

We will ask all participants for their permission to use direct quotes.





#### **24. Will the research be published?**

The research will be published in academic journals and conferences. You will not be identifiable in any report/publication. Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company will be provided with a copy of the research findings.

The University of Stirling is committed to making the outputs of research publically accessible and supports this commitment through our online open access repository STORRE. Unless funder/publisher requirements prevent us this research will be publicly disseminated through our open access repository.

#### **25. Who is organising and funding the research?**

Equitots Lanarkshire Community Interest Company is sponsoring/funding this research.

#### **26. Who has reviewed this research project?**

This project has been ethically approved via The University of Stirling [General University Ethics Panel Reference number: GUEP509].

#### **27. ESSENTIAL IF COLLECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION: Your rights**

You have the right to request to see a copy of the information we hold about you and to request corrections or deletions of the information that is no longer required.

You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time without giving reasons and without consequences to you. You also have the right to object to us processing relevant personal data however, please note that once the data are being analysed and/or results published it may not be possible to remove your data from the study.

#### **28. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?**

If you would like to discuss the research with someone, please contact Dr Angus Hunter, Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, Tel: 01786466497 email: [a.m.hunter1@stir.ac.uk](mailto:a.m.hunter1@stir.ac.uk)



You have the right to lodge a complaint against the University regarding data protection issues with the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>).

The University's Data Protection Officer is Joanna Morrow, Deputy Secretary. If you have any questions relating to data protection these can be addressed to [data.protection@stir.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@stir.ac.uk) in the first instance.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

**Thank you for your participation.**



Appendix IIIb

Consent Forms

**Participant Consent Form**

Study Number [Insert]

Participant number [Insert]

**Research Project Title:** Evaluation of an Equine Assisted Learning Programme for School Children and Young People

Please initial box	
I confirm that I have read and understood the Participants Information Sheet dated [insert date] explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and withdraw my data within before April 2019 without giving a reason, and without any penalty. I understand that after April 2019 it will not be possible to remove my data from the study.	
I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous and I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.	
I consent to being audio recorded and those with be passed to a professional transcribing using a GDPR compliant data processing agreement with an authorised transcription service as per University of Stirling data management procedures.	
I understand how audio will be used in research outputs. I am aware that I will not be named in any research outputs.	
I give permission to be quoted directly and anonymously in the research publication	
I agree for research data collected in the study to be given to researchers. I understand that any data that leave the research group will be fully anonymised so that I cannot be identified.	
I agree for my personal data to be kept in a secure database so I can be contacted about future studies.	
I agree to take part in this study	

**Name of Participant**

**Signature:**

**Date:** [Click here to enter a date](#)

**Teacher/Programme Trainer [delete one]**

**Name of Researcher**

**Signature:**

**Date:** [Click here to enter a date](#)



## Appendix IV

### Interview topic guide

1. Introduce self and reason for the study, participant information sheet and consent form
2. What is your role within the school/Equitots? How long have you been doing this role?
3. Describe your experience in using EALP
4. What do you think works well for the children/young people? Please provide examples.  
Prompt: can you think of examples where this has helped with challenging behaviour?  
Can you think of examples where this has helped with developmental or support needs?
5. What does not work so well for the children/young people? Please provide examples.
6. When the intervention works, why do you think this is happening?
7. Can you describe any changes you see in the child/young person during each session or whole programme? Prompt: such as manual dexterity, psychomotor skill, cognitive or social skills
8. Can you describe any changes you see in the child/young person after each session or whole programme? Prompt: such as manual dexterity, psychomotor skill, cognitive or social skills
9. Thank participant for providing the time to take part