



Meet our Professionals

Andy Miritello, who lives in Queen Creek AZ, is the Certified EAGALA Equine Specialist. His combination of 35 years of horse experience and 18 years working with at-risk youth, and the past 12 years with youth in the Native American Community, provides him with unique background. This relationship with horses and youth has drawn him to partner in Equine Spirit: Equine Assisted Growth & Learning Adventure.

Mary Sims Gerdes is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a private practice in Tempe, AZ. She also partners in Equine Spirit. She is the Certified EAGALA Mental Health Professional. Her specialties include: corporate leadership, teambuilding, counseling individuals and couples, and Equine Assisted Psychotherapy. Her experience includes accomplishments as a businesswoman, speaker, facilitator, mediator and therapist.

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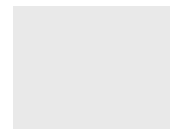
KAHV'YOO SPIRIT
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KAHV'YOO SPIRIT



Equine Assisted Growth
and Learning Adventure





EQUINE ASSISTED GROWTH & LEARNING ADVENTURE

Program Description

The Kahv'yoo Spirit program provides participating students an increase in their perceptions of social connectedness, self-confidence and sense of belonging. A professional team comprised of a Mental Health Professional, an Equine Specialist and one or more horses facilitate this program.

The program is based on the concept that human beings are inherently motivated to grow and learn and become better selves. It is an experiential process where student groups participate with horses in assigned ground activities. There is no riding in the program.

Horses are uniquely suited to participate in these activities. Unlike humans, and our common family pets, horses are prey animals. They have survived by being alert, ready to run at the first sense of danger. Horses tune in to the feelings more than the behaviors of people near them. In the arena, they are free to move away from or near to students as their natural responses dictate. In this process, the horses become “mirrors” of the authentic feelings of those around them.

Program Outcomes

Students are consistently changed during their participation in the program. They grow in knowledge of self, bond with others and connect to their community outside the arena. They are challenged by the experiential process to find ways to solve their own problems, make decisions and take responsibility for how their behaviors impact others. Many students learn to ask for help. Many learn to offer their skills and talents for the good of the group.

Some will experience success for the very first time; and some, failure. Sometimes students choose to be observers, watching the action from a distance. Surprisingly, they too learn valuable information about themselves and how they relate to the world around them.

The Mental Health Professional and Equine Specialist provide a safe and adventurous environment for participants. They are able to observe interactions and patterns of behavior as they are developing. These two team members construct the experiential exercises. They continuously demonstrate the dynamics of healthy relationships in communication, boundary setting, and respect for one another. They articulate how the activities and dynamics in the arena are metaphors for what goes on in the world at-large.

The Kahv'yoo Spirit program offers an opportunity for youth to develop healthy coping strategies, resilience and self-esteem. Our hope for these young people is that they grow in their confidence and potential, that they develop friendships and healthy bonds that will last a lifetime, and that they will be invested in their Community in mind, body and spirit.

Program Format

Each program for student groups consists of 12 sessions for a group of 6 students. Equine Assisted Therapy is listed as a Best Practice in the First Nations Behavioral Health Association Catalogue of Effective Behavioral Practices for Tribal Communities.

With acknowledgement to the Gila River Indian Community Employment & Training Department and Gila River Healthcare Corporation, and made possible by a suicide prevention grant from SAMHSA, serving youth in the Gila River Indian Community.



When a person, young or grown, enters the arena with a horse, transformation occurs. That place is sacred space—peace and hope are renewed.

~Andy Miritello & Mary Sims Gerdes