

## Look—Then LEAP

By Pamela Roberts

**T**HE FIRST TIME SOMEONE suggested to psychologist and rider Kathleen Broughan (then based in Knoxville, Tennessee) that she might use horses as part of the therapeutic process, she listened politely but gave the idea short shrift. Her sessions with clients were for work, not recreation. Besides, for her personally, horses were a respite from the intense emotional outpourings of her private clients. The closest she'd come to combining her two passions was the time she'd spent as a credentialed equestrian sport psychologist at the 1999 European Championships in The Netherlands and with Team Israel in their bid for a spot in the 2000 Olympics.

As a horse-crazy kid in California, Kathleen had grown up riding Western. But at a Knoxville barn she'd become fascinated with the discipline and dance-like quality of dressage. Training with international riders Elizabeth Lewis, Michelle Gibson, and Oded Shimoni, she was soon an avid competitor.

As Kathleen continued up through the levels of dressage with her two horses—reaching Prix St. Georges with *Aperitif* and earning her USDF silver medal in 1998 with *Alpkonig*—the idea of Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy, or EAP, kept coming up. Reluctantly, she attended a training workshop offered in Alpharetta, Georgia, by the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), which uses horse-related activities (90 percent of them on the ground) as a catalyst for clients to learn about themselves and others. There she observed that the presence of horses seemed to allow therapist and patient to break through barriers that impede progress in more traditional therapies.

Kathleen returned to Knoxville with plans to establish her own Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy practice. Her reason: "Patients could work through their issues and objectives much more rapidly." A horse's size and potential power can intimidate or entrance even people with the toughest facades. Overcoming dys-

functional emotions to accomplish a task with a horse helps individuals develop confidence. Additionally, horses, like people, are sensitive, have defined roles within the herd, and have distinct personalities; what works with one does not always work with another. Their behavior can provide therapy clients with insights into human behavior.

"Horses are extremely intuitive, responsive, and honest," says Kathleen. She describes a session with "John" (not his real name), a very withdrawn young boy whose assignment was to lead a horse named *Promise* around a course including some low crossrails. When *Promise* stopped at the first rail, she says, "John's response was to haul on the lead rope, yell at *Promise*, and call

*Horses' greatest asset in therapy may be their ability to mirror the emotions humans project through body language and speech.*

him names. The more anger John exhibited, the more *Promise* balked." When she asked why he chose to use this method, John responded that it was the way his father communicated commands. "Try doing what you'd prefer your father to do," she suggested. John's demeanor changed; he petted *Promise* and reassured the horse that he could accomplish the task at hand. *Promise* relaxed and followed John docilely around the rest of the course.

Soon after Kathleen and her husband, Nick, relocated to Charleston, South Carolina, she developed a new goal: finding a way to make EAP available to children and families without the resources to obtain therapy. In 2005, she joined forces with fellow psycholo-

gist Julie Lipovsky of The Citadel (Charleston's famous military college) to develop nonprofit Lowcountry Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (LEAP).

It was an ambitious vision, but community members' combined efforts soon began making it a reality. Private donors provided land, Citadel cadets and friends helped fence the ring, and a local construction company provided materials and labor for a small building. Horse owners offered horses to work with clients. Funds were raised for needed supplies and to provide "scholarships" for clients with financial hard-

ships. Enthusiasm ran high as LEAP began seeing clients in May.

LEAP now has two facilities, ten horses, and a growing number of clients from a wide referral base of private and agency providers. Its first client, a fourteen-year-old girl with ADHD/bipolar disorder, recently "graduated." Hugging her therapists goodbye, she said, "You and the horses have changed my life."

And riding? In her "spare time," Kathleen works with her new equine pal, *Joey*, a fifteen-year-old Dutch Warmblood. They are already successfully showing at Intermediaire I and have set their sights on Grand Prix. **PH**

To learn more about LEAP, please visit [www.leapinsc.com/home.htm](http://www.leapinsc.com/home.htm).



Kathleen Broughan and *Joey* relaxing at home (left) and competing at the 2005 North Carolina Dressage & Combined Training Association show (right).