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A horse, a child with a disability and a student – how the three helped each other

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1865) once wrote:

"All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme."

As I understand it, each one of us plays a role in changing the lives of people we come into contact with, sometimes by making a large contribution but sometimes only by something small. I think any person needs to sometime during their life mean something to somebody else. How wonderful is it not that that someone else may be a total stranger and that your contribution, small as it may be, can make a massive difference? This year I made a difference by being part of the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State's Community Service Learning Project, namely horse riding therapy at Equistria. Horse riding therapy affords you the opportunity to address the above mentioned need. A person gets the opportunity to work with children with disabilities thereby seeing the world through their eyes.

I was originally rather scared to become involved in the horse riding therapy project. Despite the fact that I have previously worked with children with disabilities, it was a new challenge. It was different in the sense that you can, through horse riding therapy, stimulate these children to soften the effect of their disability in their lives. The medium used to handle these children is therefore different than carrying out normal daily activities. These children are exposed to sensorymotor as well as cognitive stimulation. This stimulation has various psychological, social as well as physical advantages. The therapy empowers these children as they get the opportunity to learn socially acceptable behaviour as well as being accepted by other individuals

in the community. Despite all the advantages, the most important aspect is genuine, innocent pleasure.

It is only natural that a person is a bit selfish and wants to know what you can get from the horse riding therapy project. Well, as a human being I have really grown this year; horse riding has made me realise again how lucky I am to have so much in my life. I have discovered again how much pleasure a person derives from giving to others, by contributing in alleviating somebody else's fate. Because a person is often scared to work with children with disabilities, I have gained confidence with the knowledge that I play a role in these children's lives and that I was able to work with them. I have learned that I used to avoid situations because I was afraid of failure. I further learned that making a contribution and accepting people, already have a great influence and failure does not happen that easily.

A child with a disability is still a child and has the same needs as someone without a disability. The longer a person works with these children the more you learn to look beyond their disability and rather recognise what they can teach you and not so much what you can teach them. They are also wonderful individuals with a gift to adapt to unfamiliar situations. The horse riding therapy project empowers children through support and acceptance to be themselves. By daily finding fulfilment in unconditional acceptance, I learned to only be myself and accept myself, despite others' ideas and opinions. E.E. Cummings (1958) wrote: "To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else - means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting."

Bronnelys

Cummings, E. E. (1958). A Poet's Advice to Students. In G. J. Firmage (Ed.), *A Miscellany* (p. 13). NY: Agrophile Press.

Longfellow, H. W. (1865). The Builders. *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Complete Edition*. George Routledge and Sons, London.











