

The Helping Horse:

How Equine Assisted Learning Contributes to the Wellbeing of First Nations in Treatment for Volatile Substance Misuse.

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Introduction

This study examines if and how the Saskatchewan-based Cartier Farms Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) program contributes to the wellbeing of First Nations youth in treatment for Volatile Substance Misuse (VSM) at the White Buffalo Youth Inhalant Treatment Program (WBYITP) at Sturgeon Lake First Nation. This study is framed in a holistic understanding of health being a balance of mental, physical, social and spiritual wellbeing⁽¹⁾. The student's role during the practicum was to: transcribe, code data, contribute during the writing and dissemination process.



Methods

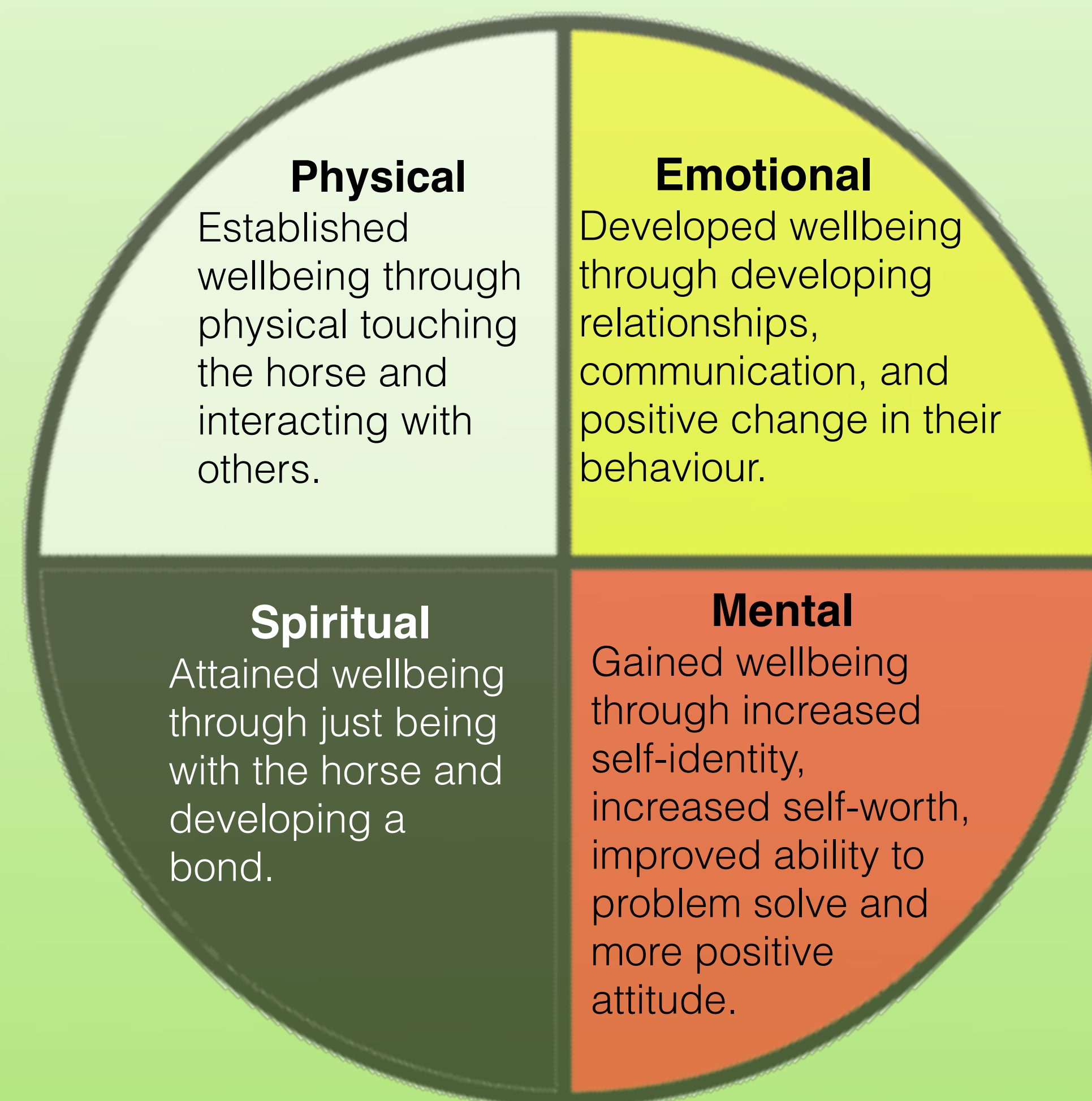
A case-study design was applied in the, exploratory, community-based research project to specifically examine how EAL contributes to youths' wellbeing. Through the use of stories, which reflect a First Nations cultural approach to knowing, this study shares how the EAL horses, facilitators and program content contributed to youths' wellbeing in multiple ways and to various extents.

Coding Tree of Youth Wellbeing

Culture	Biological/ Physical	Social	Psychological Mental Emotional	Spiritual
Knowledge Moontime	Physical Health Touch Nature Anatomy	Develop Relationships Importance of community & friends Behaviour Change Team Player Communication Leader & Experience	Identity Self-Esteem Nurturing Feelings/Mood Problem Solving Attitude Participation	Just being Bond Cultural Activities Spiritual Functioning

Results

The youths' experiences of the EAL program positively impacted the physical, mental/emotional, social, spiritual and cultural aspects of the youth, and the horse was a key helper to all of this. The horse has a cultural significance for some First Nations youth in the EAL program. The horse offered the White Buffalo staff a tangible connection for teaching the youth about who they are.



Conclusion

Overall, this study brings together two fields of promising practice but in which there is limited documented research evidence: equine assisted learning and residential treatment for youth volatile substance misuse ⁽²⁾.

Dissemination of the projects findings to date including the following: Annual First Nations traditional ceremonial horse dance, WBYITC graduation attendance, media distribution, website distribution, funders report and a painting in partnership with the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Programming group (SCYAP).

Policy Recommendations

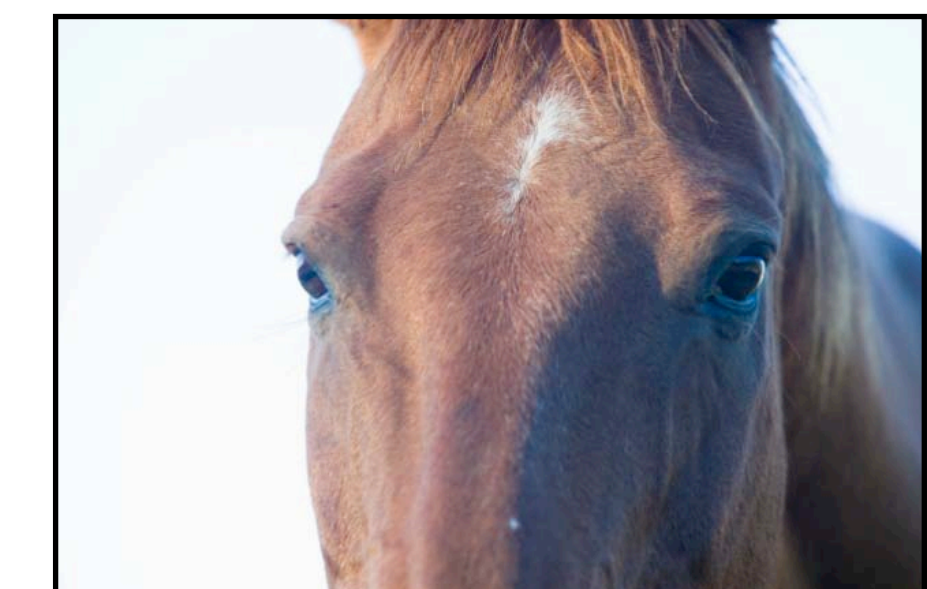
- Recognize that the horse and First Nations culture are historically linked.
- Acknowledge the lack of research in the EAL field.
- Value a multi-disciplinary, community-based team approach while researching the diverse areas of EAL and VSM.
- Practicing traditional First Nations ceremony to ensure a 'good' and respectful research process⁽³⁾.
- Understanding there is significant variation in how EAL is applied across programs.

Reflections

The main Core Competencies of Public Health covered in this practicum were: Communication, Leadership, Partnership Collaboration and Advocacy, Diversity and Inclusiveness.

Additional Information

For the full research report and other project material please visit <http://tinyurl.com/horseashealer>.



Acknowledgements

A special thank you to my field supervisors Dr. Dell and Darlene Chalmers. I would also like to thank my academic supervisor, Dr. Bird, as well as the School of Public Health for coordinating the practicum.

Key References

1. Dell, C and D. Chalmers. 2011. "Equine-Assisted Therapy as an Adjunct to Solvent Abuse Treatment for First Nations Youth: A Key Consideration for Building an Empirical Knowledge Base". Native Studies Review. Special invitation. 20(1), 59-87.
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3. World Health Organization. (2013). Indigenous Peoples & Participatory Health Research, Planning & Management. Preparing Research Agreements.

Partners

