

## SPARC Final Report: Boss Mares, Awarded 2021

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**Project Goals:** Lone Oak's framework reflects expressive arts, ecotherapeutic, and natural lifemanship strategies; social systems perspective; the ground-breaking trauma work of Dr. Bruce Perry; and professional social work values and ethics. Expressive arts therapy (EAT) is an innovative approach to working with youth who experienced trauma. Utilizing creative modalities to regenerate the part of the brain that was affected by trauma (Degges-White & Colon), EAT enhances well-being, creating a foundation for post-traumatic growth essential to the development of social and emotional competence, empathy, and compassion. This development empowers "our families" to build connections and respond well to challenges. EAT not only address trauma and its sequela but create an opening for the development of pro-social behaviors that empower families to create lives and relationships that are fulfilling.

EAT includes Animal-Assisted strategies and other art forms as alternatives to traditional interventions. The keystone of our EAT framework is equine-assisted therapeutic services. Though still viewed by many as "alternative," its evidentiary basis has grown in other fields (e.g., treatment of veterans' PTSD). We use the equine-assisted intervention model of Natural Lifemanship (Shultz-Jobe, 2016), as well as other arts to address trauma, while strengthening families by inviting them to participate in family sessions, workshops on parenting, EAT projects, and collaborative work at our barn. Our goal is to create a healing community that mentors and supports the "whole family," while offering concrete resources (e.g., school supplies), intervention for trauma, and education.

In Boss Mares, female adolescents ages 12 to 15 attended group sessions from Monday, June 21 to Thursday, June 24 for 5 hours during the day. This included 10 adolescents. During the day, participants as a group participated in equine-assisted therapy (including riding the horses), groundwork, and handwork (fiber art, woodworking, etc.). Participants that provided consent were part of a research study to assess self-concept. The goal of this group is to empower female adolescents while also providing leadership, teamwork, and empathy skill sets.

Over four days, participants worked with clinicians to:

- Learn about horses, empathy, and compassion
- Enhance self-esteem
- Build resilience and leadership skills
- Build relationships and community

At the end of the program, participants will be given a certificate of completion as a reminder of their achievements. The SPARC grant generously provided financial support to help meet the goals and safety for the group by providing helmets.

**Next Steps:** Lone Oak plans to continue this program again in 2022. Boss Mares will be asked to return to volunteer with younger groups as mentors. Lone Oak will continue to assess this program through research.

Thank you to IASWG for making this research possible through your generous financial support!