

Dressage Therapy

By Danica Yates

Freedom Horse Farm, Inc. rescues horses and will provide equine assisted therapy using the training theory and techniques of classical dressage. Dressage is the most ancient form of horse training, developed in the fourth century B.C. by Xenophon, a Greek soldier and student of Socrates. Dressage is now a competitive sport represented in the Olympics, but remains a training method that is also a philosophy and an art. I have worked for over 20 years using dressage to help horses and riders move with “throughness,” “self-carriage,” and “connection.” These principles are central not only to training horses, they are also cornerstones of how person-centered mental health counselors help clients. Somatic therapy, for example, connects the mind and body in a holistic healing that is very similar to classical dressage.

Throughness

The art of dressage training at its core, involves finding the physical imbalances and the emotional blockages in the horse and rider, and removing them so that the energy can move “through” the system. Counseling, as described in a myriad of theories, has the same goal of finding the disconnect in a person and helping them remove the tensions, fear, denials that prevent them from moving, thinking, and being a whole person.

Self-Carriage

When the horse and rider find balance, the thoroughness can be maintained without force or effort. In self-carriage, the rider is not holding the horse together, but the balance of the system and the energy moving through is self-sustaining and self-perpetuating. Similarly, in counseling, it is the role of the therapist to apply tools, and offer suggestions and encouragement, but to allow the client to discover their own unique balance or “self-carriage.” Counseling performed in this fashion has a long-lasting impact on helping clients learn to navigate life with ease.

Connection

In dressage, a horse must fully trust its rider to be willing to submit and connect. Likewise, a counselor and client ideally have a similar trusting relationship that allows the client to feel safe to open up the places inside themselves where their tensions and problems are stored. In both realms, for the best relationships to develop, the communication needs to be reciprocal- the rider must listen to the horse and incorporate the animal’s feedback about the training and the therapist must allow the client to navigate the therapeutic process for themselves. When trust and understanding is achieved, connection is developed.

Rescue horses

Freedom Horse Farm will utilize the synthesis of dressage theory and counseling theory to help horses and riders shed baggage and develop inner-freedom. We wish to specialize in working with clients who suffer from stress and past trauma. Many of our rescue horses have learned to let go of their fears and insecurities and offer incredible support now to people wishing to connect more holistically within themselves.