

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International

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*Ensuring Excellence and Changing Lives Through
Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies®*

THE INTERNATIONAL ISSUE

**PATH Intl. Conference
& Award Winners**

**Culture Competency
and Global Outreach**

Birth of a New Center

Inclusive Instruction



PATH
INTERNATIONAL



Culture Competency & Global Outreach

By Michelle Weed

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EQUIPHORIA

In 2011, NARHA Inc., which was established in 1969 primarily as an organization for member associations in North America, opened its arms to a more global audience by becoming the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International. Earlier in 2006 the association adopted its vision statement as “PATH Intl. is a global authority, resource and advocate for equine-assisted activities and therapies which inspire and enrich the human spirit.” Almost three years later, after the name change, it is worth examining what this has meant to the organization, how its international partners bring value to PATH Intl., and how the organization can evaluate what value it can provide to its international partners.

PATH Intl. was not the first organization dedicated to using the talents of the horse to help humans. Other countries, including England, Germany, France, Israel and Greece, have had established national and local therapeutic horsemanship programs for many years. Each of these programs is subject to its own national laws and regulations. Each is shaped by the particular nation’s unique equine culture, historic traditions and languages. Consider how two very different centers, which come from very different traditions Equiphoria in France and Korea Racing Authority’s therapeutic riding program (KRA) in South Korea, approach therapeutic horsemanship.

EAAT in France

France’s involvement in EAAT has a long history. In fact, the first study of the value of riding as therapy was

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown t-shirt with a small logo and blue jeans, stands in a sandy area in front of a modern wooden building with large windows. The building has a multi-level design with visible wooden beams and glass panels. The woman is smiling and looking down.

◀ Equiphoria is a gorgeous state-of-the-art facility run by H       Viruega and her partner, Erik Bogros, located in southern France at the top of a mountain in La Canourgue.

reported in 1875 by a French physician. Dr. Cassaign used riding to benefit a variety of conditions. He concluded that it was helpful in the treatment of certain kinds of neurological disorders by improving posture, balance and joint movement, as well as having psychological value. Nearly a hundred years later in 1972, the first International Congress took place in Paris, according to the Federation of Horses in Education Therapy International (HETI). In 2000, Angers, France, hosted the tenth International Congress titled, “Cheval et Differences Lack of Integration, Disability, Differences, Tolerance, Freedom and Autonomy, Integration.”

In January 2013, I was invited to teach a PATH Intl. Standards Course to staff and volunteers at Equiphoria, Hélène Viruega’s center. It is a pristine facility located on the top of a mountain in southern France. Hélène, her partner, Erik Bogros, and her entire staff were motivated, energetic and ready to learn and share. The lessons learned are applicable to our relationships with other international centers.

The key draw to PATH Intl. for Equiphoria and many international partners is the well-defined written standards that PATH Intl. brings to its organization. Many countries like France have well-defined horse cultures, but organizations for therapeutic riding or hippotherapy aren't always available, and few have standardized facility requirements. That being said, it was also obvious from my first attempt to teach the standards that PATH Intl. cannot just send our partners English language versions and expect them to figure it out on their own.

First, the language of our standards is incredibly technical. Translators fluent in both languages are often not familiar with horses, and fewer are familiar with medical and anatomical terms. In other words, it is all about the translation. It is vitally important to have face-to-face interactions so people can ask questions and more precisely frame these questions in their language in ways that both parties can understand. Often in the process of translating the answer, I had to explain the basis for the standard, its *raison d’être*, so that we could discuss whether the standard would, or could, apply given the local laws, regulations and culture.

Next, liability regulations are different in every country, as are training and licensure requirements for therapeutic horsemanship professionals and therapists. For example, Equiphoria’s certification for a therapeutic horsemanship professional is a week-long training that incorporates medical, psychological and recreational aspects of EAAT. The training occurs at a university with professors and medical professionals instructing and testing participants. They do not have a separate equine specialist for mental health and learning (ESMHL) certification as the instructor is expected to show competence in all areas of EAAT. PATH Intl., of course, requires the ESMHL certification for



equine-facilitated psychotherapy sessions. Then there were areas in which Equiphoria incorporated best-practices in our field and could serve as a model. Besides its superb facility at La Canourgue, the center’s most impressive aspect was its connections to the local medical community and its deep ties to peer-reviewed research. The Equiphoria staff includes an intern in the field of psychology and an on-staff psychologist. Viruega and Bogros are dedicated to moving the field of EAAT forward in France, not only through adopting PATH Intl. Standards, but also by advancing the entire industry through hard science, observation and writing. Peer-reviewed accredited research that shows the safety and benefits of our practices is an area that could greatly benefit PATH Intl. Each of Equiphoria’s sessions begins with a team discussion of the plan. The team includes the medical staff, the horse handling team and the center’s professional staff. Each session ends with similar team



◀ Equiphoria benefits from France's lengthy, well-defined horse culture and the country's long history with EAAT that dates back to 1875.

discussion as well as formally written clinical notes and analysis. This planning session, followed by the activity and then the assessment meeting, is superb. It is a practice that will not only make their team stronger, but could also be a best practice adopted by centers worldwide.

The Korean Approach

Let's shift our focus now to the other side of the planet to South Korea. In the summer of 2013, Kim Henning, a PATH Intl. Certified Advanced Instructor at the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center, a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center in Augusta, MI, served for several months as a facilitator and mentor for the KRA, sponsored by a government grant. While horses have long been a part of South Korea's history for riding and sport, horses are not common and are not embedded in its culture as they are in France. Nor is partnering with equines to improve

physical, emotional and mental functioning a very widely understood or practiced art.

Without a more general understanding of EAAT and how to manage centers in their culture, particularly in regard to funding and volunteers, South Koreans face numerous issues. Fortunately, education is offered at the university level with many PATH Intl. Certified Master Instructors guest lecturing for presentations and courses. For instance, last September, Dr. Octavia Brown, professor of equine studies at Centenary College and director of Therapeutic Riding at Centenary, a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center in Hackettstown, NJ, lectured on EAAT at a conference on the Pursuit of Evidence-Based Sports and Exercise Science, hosted by the Korean Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. She also met with the board of the Korean Academy of Therapeutic Horsemanship (RDA Korea), consulted on the future direction of that association and met with directors and instructors of both the KRA's therapeutic riding program and the Samsung RD (Riding for the Disabled) Center, a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center in Kyunggi-do, South Korea.

Dr. Brown's visit is indicative of Korean culture, which stresses education in health practices and research-based treatments. Many published studies on the efficacy of hippotherapy and therapeutic riding have come out of South Korea. Perhaps it is because of this professional approach to EAAT that South Koreans were able to see the areas in need of growth and, in order to reach their desired goals, called in an expert to fill the gaps.

The leadership and staff at KRA adopted this technique to raise their level of expertise. While Equiphoria had a ready and available group of dedicated horse people, KRA used their contacts made through networking with other PATH Intl. members to bring in professional help. Kim Henning, who is a PATH Intl. Lead Site Visitor and evaluator, jumped at the chance to teach and learn from KRA and other centers across their country. What she stressed after her return is that South Koreans were eager to incorporate PATH Intl. Standards. The standards offer a proven structure to programs. Why reinvent the wheel?

While teaching, she found language to be a speed bump, not an obstacle, but a consideration that took more planning to overcome. The amount of slang and idioms used by Americans in general made translation difficult, and the language of PATH Intl. Standards, though appropriate, is above the average ESL (English as a second language) student's comprehension. She worked every day with a translator who helped get the message across—in fact, the translators had to rotate out often just to keep up with her pace and intensity! She was challenged with the tradition that, in Korea,



◀ Each of Equiphoria's EAAT sessions begins and ends with a team discussion of the plan that involves medical staff and includes formally written clinical notes and analysis.

students will not question a teacher. In fact, in their culture, it is considered rude. Thus, assessing learning and understanding was problematic. She was able to gain much information in less formal settings; watching horse and student interactions allowed her to better grasp their level of learning. She fully immersed herself in the culture in order to better understand and meet their needs.

Cultural Understanding

In the end, the overarching lesson for PATH Intl. is that in order to be effective, our association needs to increase its cultural competence. What works here in the United States may not work elsewhere. For instance, something as simple as time consideration is important. Americans have a tendency to be time driven, goal oriented and career centric. Other cultures are less so; life is not rushed—it is enjoyed. Many cultures still close stores for siestas each day, and Sundays are reserved for family. Allowing extra time for planning, answering emails and possibly changing the schedule of PATH Intl. Workshops or the Standards Course could better serve the association's international partners. PATH Intl. may also need to have a policy of extended time for exams; for example, an extra hour is not enough to translate and answer the advanced instructor exam.

Conceivably, PATH Intl. might consider a different

system for international accreditation that is culture centric. While PATH Intl. currently recognizes other association's certifications on an individually applied for basis, there are no reciprocity (mutually recognizing each other's certifications) agreements in place with any other organizations. In the future setting up reciprocity agreements might entail working together with organizations outside the United States to compare processes, write standards for recognition, include a process for Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL) and recognize comparable trainings for therapists. This could open the door for instructor exchanges, thus creating more opportunities for EAAT cultural exchanges.

Hopefully, PATH Intl. members will wish to expand on the willingness to volunteer with centers as mentors, coaches and students, and to be the liaison for them with PATH Intl. Face-to-face learning is the most effective way to interact as we can reach more staff and answer more questions. These remote mentoring programs can be accomplished via Skype, Apple's FaceTime or in person, etc. Many international centers welcome the interaction, and the EAAT industry will improve through the education we can gain from their programs. Each volunteer who reaches out to partner with these international centers comes away from the experience

► Participants at Equiphoria benefit from the center's strong connections to the local medical community and its deep ties to peer-reviewed research.

▼ Equiphoria has been working with Michelle Weed, the PATH Intl. Standards Course Development chair, to become a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center.



richer for broadening his or her global perspective. Our association's increased cultural competence, coupled with a more standard set of best practices, will make PATH Intl. a better organization as it reaches out to form relationships with centers outside the United States and turn all of those associated with EAAT worldwide into a more close-knit team.

Michelle Weed is a PATH Intl. Certified Registered Instructor, ESMHL, Mentor, Accreditation Subcommittee chair and Standards Course Development chair, who has been a representative for three centers. Her experiences as a military spouse over the past 24 years, nine of which were overseas, have given her unique opportunities to travel and build relationships outside the United States. Recently while living in Europe, she learned firsthand about some of the needs of our international partners.

