

*Doctorate in Professional Educational,  
Child and Adolescent Psychology*



# **Experiences of an Equine Facilitated Psychotherapeutic Intervention: An IPA Study**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of D. Ed. Psy

I, Catherine Stracey, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

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## **Abstract**

*The Department of Health, (DoH, 2018) Long Term Plan called for a wider range of evidence based programmes designed to protect and promote children and young people's (CYP) emotional well-being and mental health. Research exploring Animal Facilitated Learning and Therapeutic interventions reported improvements in the emotional wellbeing of CYP. This study explored the experiences of two young people (YP) attending an Equine Facilitated Psychotherapeutic (EFP) intervention, the professionals who facilitated it, school staff where the YP were students and the YP's parents. Research questions considered how the participants experienced and made sense of the EFP intervention. The 'voice' of the YP was privileged and an in-depth exploration of their experiences is presented. Two YP (aged 14-15) attending a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), two Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) trained professionals, a member of the PRU staff and two parents participated. Qualitative methodology was employed with a 'Mosaic' approach to gather data from the two YP. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the adult participants. Attachment and affect regulation theories were considered as a psychological framework to underpin and situate the findings. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed, constructing idiographic accounts, as well as tri-angulating data both within and across groups providing a multi-perspectival account. Three super-ordinate themes were identified across the groups: developing relationships, self-efficacy and environment. The findings suggested that attachment and affect regulation*

*theoretical perspectives are an appropriate framework to guide and inform EFP practice. The findings reported that two YP with complex social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, who did not respond to traditional counselling or mentoring approaches, engaged with the intervention, and demonstrated improved social communication and interaction skills. The parents and school staff member reported improvements in their own emotional wellbeing. Implications for EPs include the exploration of EFP interventions to support CYP with SEMH needs.*

## Impact Statement

The NHS Long Term Plan (Department of Health, (DoH), 2018) suggested a strategy to build a wider range of evidence based responses designed to protect and promote CYP's mental health and emotional well-being.

Adolescents are often uncomfortable engaging with a highly clinical service (DoH, 2015) and therefore less traditional forms of intervention may be more successful. Increasingly, AAls are being offered as an alternative intervention to CYP who may be experiencing difficulties with their social and emotional well-being (Breitenbach *et al.*, 2009). Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) is an emerging specialism offered by a small but growing number of practitioners. This current study extends the existing research base in the following areas:

- The primary concepts of attachment and affect regulation theories have been suggested to have relevance to some of the central aspects of EFP and could be used as a guiding framework from which to assess EFP practice and development. The current study examined the application of these perspectives to an EFP intervention and concluded that they provide a useful psychological framework to guide and inform practice
- Existing research into equine facilitated interventions (EFI) primarily adopted a quantitative design, with a variety of assessment tools measuring different aspects of SEMH needs. A unique contribution of this study was to employ a qualitative design that privileged the 'voice' of the young people (YP) who participated, with the inclusion of additional adult perspectives to enable tri-angulation of the data. A

variety of research tools were utilised to ensure the YP lived experiences were authentically captured. The multi-perspectival approach augmented the data from the YP and afforded the researcher the ability to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

The research makes a novel contribution to the existing academic literature and our understanding of how an EFP intervention is experienced. There are several professional implications arising from this study:

- The current Local Authority referral process operates without coherent guidelines. It is important for the Local Authority, supported by Educational Psychologists (EPs), to establish a clear referral pathway and ensure all relevant teams within the vulnerable learners, children and families divisions have access to relevant information and guidelines
- To foster a multi-agency approach, in line with SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, DfE, 2015), it is necessary to establish a process whereby relevant teams are notified of a referral and subsequent attendance
- It is necessary for the outcomes of the CYP attending an EFI to be disseminated amongst other professionals in order to provide optimum support and efficacy. EPs are ideally placed to bridge the gap to provide the necessary support for CYP to strengthen and reinforce their developing skills to ensure continued positive outcomes. The findings to be disseminated to EPs to increase professional knowledge. To disseminate the research to a wider audience the findings will be forwarded to a peer reviewed publication.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### ***1.1 Overview***

This thesis explores the experiences of two young people, the professionals who facilitated the intervention, a member of school staff and two parents, of an equine facilitated psychotherapeutic intervention. The study was conducted in the south east of England, where the researcher was training as an Educational Psychologist. This chapter defines the terms involved and briefly reviews the national and local context of this research.

### **1.2 Conceptualisation of Mental Health**

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2010) defines poor mental health as “where the individual is unable to realise their abilities and has difficulty coping with the normal stresses of life and therefore finds it difficult to work productively or make a positive contribution to their community”.

The SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education (DfE), 2015) outlines the range of social and emotional difficulties that children and young people (CYP) may experience as:

“Becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically

unexplained. Other conditions include attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder”.

(SEN Code of Practice, DfE, 6.32 pp98).

Of the types and labels of poor mental health, they do not reflect the complexity of mental health difficulties over time, the context and the impact of these difficulties on social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. The dual continuum concept argues that mental health is experienced in many ways along different dimensions. Therefore, it is possible for the individual to experience episodes of emotional wellbeing when they feel content or happy, whilst still having poor mental health. Westerhof & Keyes (2010) suggested that there are three aspects to mental health; emotional wellbeing (feelings of happiness and satisfaction with life), psychological wellbeing (positive individual functioning in terms of self-realisation) and social wellbeing (positive societal functioning in terms of being of social value). They argue that an individual’s mental health can fluctuate depending on the security of all three aspects of their mental health and that it is important for those working with CYP to understand and recognise the complexities of SEMH needs.

Protective factors for ameliorating the risk of poor mental health include social and emotional competence and opportunities for CYP to engage within school and their community. “Future in Mind” (2015) identified the importance of educational settings in promoting mental health as part of a well-being

agenda and encouraging positive discussions around mental health issues. Educational settings that embed supportive social and emotional practices across the curriculum enable CYP to experience positive well-being and feel safe within their environment at school or college. Where unconditional positive regard is incorporated into the setting's ethos and culture, CYP benefit from positive relationships and understanding, and are able to maintain their wellbeing, even if they have a diagnosable condition such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or suffer from a form of anxiety.

### **1.3 National Context**

Adolescence and early adulthood is the peak period for the development of initial mental health problems, with approximately half of lifetime mental illness starting by the age of 14 (Hagell *et al.*, 2013) and three quarters having developed by the age of 18 years (Murphy & Fonagy, 2012).

Addressing the SEMH needs of CYP has been a priority of recent governments. "Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: A Green Paper" (Department of Health and Department for Education (DoH/DfE, 2017) is the most recent initiative that sets out the government's strategy to tackle the growing mental health needs of CYP. It recommended that all educational settings appoint a Designated Senior lead for Mental Health to initiate and implement coherent mental health policies and practices. To further assist educational settings support the SEMH needs of their students, the DfE published "Mental Health and Behaviour in

Schools (2018). This document called for schools and colleges to promote positive mental health and outlines the link between mental health and behaviour, as well as offering guidance on where and how to put in place support, including working with external agencies.

However, the Mental Health & Wellbeing in UK Schools survey (2019) highlights that the SEMH needs of CYP continue to be largely unmet. The survey reported that 70% of mainstream schools and 50% of alternative and specialist provision settings, identified that they are unable to fully meet the SEMH needs of students. Most schools (approximately 75%) reported they did not have a SEMH pathway to support emotional wellbeing and almost 60% did not have an up to date policy addressing the needs of vulnerable students. The findings of this report highlight that the majority of educational settings feel inadequately resourced or equipped to provide appropriate SEMH support to CYP and instead seek to pass on referrals to the already overwhelmed CAMH services (CAMHs Review, 2019).

The recent statistics on school exclusions (DfE, 2019) report an upward trend, with over 28% of permanent or fixed exclusions due to persistent disruptive behaviour. These figures suggest that the mental health needs of CYP largely remain poorly understood, and that the underlying difficulties manifesting as behavioural problems are not being addressed sufficiently early to avoid CYP being out of an educational setting. The increase of CYP being excluded presents a concerning picture as the most recent Youth

Index 2018 (The Prince's Trust Macquarie, 2018) highlights that young people not in employment, education and training are more at risk from poorer emotional well-being than other young people of this age group. This group are more likely to have negative outcomes when they continue to be exposed to adverse risk factors such as school exclusion, academic failure, family discord and neglect (Centre for Mental Health, 2016).

The NHS Long Term Plan (DoH, 2018) suggested a range of strategies to provide support for vulnerable CYP. A key strategy is to build a wider range of evidence based responses designed to protect and promote CYP's mental health and emotional well-being. The paper calls for a focus on intervening earlier to prevent emergent problems from escalating into a later crisis. Additionally, the paper outlines the present government's intention to continue to extend effective evidence based approaches to supporting CYP's mental health and life chances. It states that there should be a shift of investment into evidence-based preventative and early intervention approaches to improve the equitable access to psychological therapies. The paper states that there should be a longer term commitment to ensure equal and timely access to effective health care for CYP with mental health conditions.

The "Future in Mind" (DoH, 2015) initiative recognised that adolescents are often uncomfortable engaging with a highly clinical service and therefore less traditional forms of intervention may be more successful. Furthermore, it is

important to consider how CYP experience interventions and therapy (Leve, 1995). Distinctive features have been reported that differentiate the experiences of CYP versus adults, taking part in therapeutic interventions (Weisz *et al.*, 1998). CYP are more often than not referred to an intervention by a teacher, parent/carer or other authority figure. The CYP may be unaware of their problems or perceive their problems as “normal” and therefore view any intervention as unnecessary (Weisz *et al.*, 1998; Chandra & Minkovitz, 2007). In addition adolescence is a key period when CYP are developing their sense of personal identity. Engaging the CYP in an intervention can therefore be problematic due to potentially defiant attitudes, or explicit opposition towards the goals in the intervention. Consequently, CYP will fail to fully engage with the intervention and lack the motivation to set and work towards future goals (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2007).

The national Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHs) review (2019) recorded that the waiting times to access CAMHs support were lengthening, resulting in help being unavailable when CYP needed it the most, which exacerbated the SEMH difficulties for the CYP and their families. The review also reported that ‘holistic’ approaches were positively received by CYP and their families. The findings suggested that, together with external agencies, unconventional methods that provide psychological benefit, should be explored to support the SEMH needs of CYP, (CAMHs review, 2019).

## 1.4 Animal Assisted Interventions

Animals have played an important part in human existence for many centuries. Kellert & Wilson (1993) suggest that our relationship with nature, including animals, can be divided into different categories; utilitarian i.e. farming or hunting animals for their meat, milk or pelts; aesthetic i.e. observing other living creatures and appreciating their beauty; naturalistic i.e. gaining a deeper understanding of living creatures in the environment and symbolic i.e. how we attribute our own traits, characteristics and hopes and fears onto other living creatures. Animals are a rich source of symbolic representation in many cultures, from the Ancient Egyptians to native Australians. Furthermore, organisations now exist that promote the benefits or otherwise of human animal interaction, namely The Centre for Animal Human Relationships (CENSHARE), the Delta Society and the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organisation. It appears that there is more widespread acceptance that animals can help in both 'utilitarian' work such as assistance dogs, for example Guide Dogs for the Blind founded in 1942, to encompass more therapeutic work, such as the Pet a Pet Programme ([www.petsastherapy.org](http://www.petsastherapy.org)) introduced in North America in the mid 1980's.

The growing interest in using animals in therapeutic and educational environments led to the emergence of animal assisted interventions. The term "Animal assisted intervention" (AAI) covers both animal assisted activities (AAA) and animal assisted therapy (AAT) (Kruger & Serpell, 2010).



Both terms incorporate how the relationship between humans and animals is developed to successfully deliver outcomes that are either therapeutic in nature or afford the individual some element of personal growth.

The definition of animal assisted intervention and animal assisted therapy are defined by the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organisation (2014) as; "AAI is a goal-oriented and structured intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals in health, education and human service... for the purpose of therapeutic gains in humans". AAT is a sub-category that is a specific therapeutic intervention. The distinction between AAA and AAI/ AAT is dependent on whether specific targets have been agreed within a scheduled intervention. Therefore, AAA can be defined as an activity which provides educational, recreational or therapeutic benefits and can be facilitated by either trained individuals or volunteers. The interactions with the animals may be 'ad hoc' and of an unspecified duration (Delta Society, 2011). Owners who bring their dogs into hospitals and hospices for the patients to pet and spend time with would fall into this category. AAI or AAT, however, can be defined as a pre-planned process which has clear agreed goals to work towards, such as improving social, emotional and/or physical health. The facilitator and client would agree objectives and each session would entail working towards achieving the set objective. AAI may be part of a wider multi-element programme, or the AAI intervention may be sole objective (Delta Society, 2011). The distinction between an AAI and an AAT is that a mental health professional would be part of the team devising and delivering an AAT.

## 1.5 Benefits of Animal Assisted Interventions

Adolescents are often uncomfortable engaging with a highly clinical service (DoH, 2015) and therefore less traditional forms of intervention may be more successful. Recent years has seen growing interest in whether AAls have the potential to foster and promote the emotional and physical well-being of individuals from different backgrounds and age groups (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007). Positive interactions with animals have been shown to have beneficial effects on individuals; Fine (2015) suggested that just by having an animal in the therapy room can help ameliorate the initial tension between therapist and client. Moreover, the animal can act as a social facilitator and be the source of an initial conversation topic to 'break the ice', (Fine, 2015). Additionally, it has been suggested that because animals possess the ability to provide opportunities for positive and unconditional interactions, a CYP who has difficulties with their emotional well-being may find the situation more comfortable and relaxing (Levinson & Mallon, 1997).

Increasingly, AAls are being offered as an alternative intervention to CYP who may be experiencing difficulties with their social and emotional well-being (Breitenbach *et al.*, 2009). There have been a number of studies, albeit limited, that suggest that CYP who have attended AAls have benefited from their participation. Krskova *et al.*, (2010) reported gains in social communication skills, whilst Kruger *et al.*, (2004) reported improved social and emotional well-being. However, the studies largely relied on descriptive data gathered from single case studies, with either single or small groups of

participants and no control group. A further criticism voiced by Stern & Chur-Hansen (2013) raised the issue that no follow up measures were put in place, so that the longevity of the improvements could not be known.

Studies investigating the release of oxytocin, reported that whilst stroking their pet, owners recorded higher levels of the hormone, versus no release of oxytocin in the control group (Handlin, 2010). Oxytocin is accepted to be one of the main hormones for stress reduction and physical contact with another animal appears to elicit a release of this hormone. Odendaal (2000) researched the changes in hypertension and stress reduction neurochemicals in humans and dogs. His findings suggested that interspecies interaction leads to an increase in stress relieving neurochemicals and a lowering of blood pressure. Measurement of the neurochemicals oxytocin, prolactin and B-endorphin recorded elevated levels in the experimental group, as well as a reduction in blood pressure and cortisol levels. Moreover, similar effects were found in the animals, suggesting a mutually beneficial interaction.

A similar experimental approach was adopted by Yorke *et al.*, (2010). He was exploring the utility of using animals as means of therapy for CYP who have experienced trauma. It has been suggested that a child's normal brain development will be compromised if they experience trauma such as abuse or neglect (Yorke *et al.*, 2010). A child experiencing sustained neglect or abuse is subject to extended periods off stress, which results in detrimental

effects on the developing brain, leading to hypervigilance and impaired self-regulatory pathways. Yorke *et al.*, (2010) posits that early childhood trauma may explain why at risk children are especially vulnerable to developing social and emotional difficulties. Yorke *et al.*, (2010) suggested that having animals present as part of a therapeutic programme, helped the CYP as interacting with the animals helped elevate the levels of stress reducing neurochemicals and therefore aided the CYP to begin to learn to self-regulate.

Currently, Canterbury Christ Church University is conducting field research in conjunction with Kent Police regarding the use of victim support dogs. The study is looking at how the introduction of a support dog to help victims of trauma effects the release of oxytocin and serotonin. Results of the pilot study are expected to be available by the end of 2020 (see [www.Canterbury.ac.uk/university-first-to-recruit-facility-dog](http://www.Canterbury.ac.uk/university-first-to-recruit-facility-dog)).

## **1.6 Equine Facilitated Interventions**

Equine facilitated interventions are a sub-category of AAls which have gained in popularity over the last ten years. The term “Equine facilitated intervention” refers to a wide variety of programmes involving people and equines. Interventions can involve both riding and non-riding activities and are delivered to CYP and adults in both the profit and non-profit sectors. Equine facilitated interventions originally established a following in North America with the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship

International (PATH Intl) and the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) both established in 1969, and the associated Equine-Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA) and the Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) established in 1999. Other relevant organisations include the Equine Guided Education Association (EGEA) and EPONA, also based in North America. In the UK there has been a long established tradition of using horses to help children and young people suffering from disabilities, as the Riding for the Disabled was set up in the 1970's. The charity has a network of nearly 500 bases situated all over the UK and provides support and therapy for over 25,000 children and young adults. (RDA, website, 2019). More recently, influenced by the organisations in the USA, LEAP was set up in England in 2006.

There are two distinct types of equine facilitated intervention (EFI) and the difference is determined by who delivers or facilitated the intervention.

Equine facilitated/assisted (EFL/EAL) learning programmes can be delivered by trained equine specialists, teachers, coaches or other professional who have completed some form of training programme. EFL/EAL uses equine-facilitated activities as a tool for self-development and education. The programmes are tailored to help develop non-verbal communication, assertiveness, creative thinking, problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, relationship skills, confidence and resilience. EFL/EAL is more generally used with groups of CYP with social and associated behavioural difficulties, as well as corporate groups wanting to enhance leadership skills or personal development. Equine facilitated/assisted psychotherapy/therapy (EFP) uses

equine-facilitated activities to explore the way an individual sees and relates to themselves and others, their patterns of behaviour and survival as well as their strengths, and may include the exploration of past experiences, emotional difficulties and trauma. EFP is a form of psychotherapy and relies upon the therapeutic knowledge and experience gained through a mental health qualification. EFP programmes are delivered by a trained equine specialist and an accredited mental health professional (Lavender, 2006; Liefoghe, 2020; Wilson, 2012).

In 2015 the Equine-Assisted and Facilitated Practitioners Network (EAFPN) Conference was established as an annual event in the UK. The conference is supported by a wide variety of professionals ranging from equine behaviourists to educational and clinical psychologists. The intention of the conference is to provide a platform to promote best practice in research into EFIs and show casing latest best practice and guidance regarding deliverance of EFIs. Due to the variety of organisations it is difficult to determine how many equine practitioners currently offer equine facilitated interventions in the UK, but a recent online search identified 27 centres offering some form of equine facilitated programme, distributed across the whole of the UK.

### **1.7 The Local Context**

The research was undertaken in the South East where the researcher was on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). The Area Senior

Educational Psychologists (ASEP) supported the research as a number of CYP in the Local Authority (LA) have attended an equine facilitated intervention and it was considered prudent to explore the referral process as well as the evidence base for equine interventions. Furthermore, other departments within the LA in the children, schools and families division have requested an evidence base from which to make future recommendations for CYP with SEMH needs.

### **1.8 Researcher's position**

The researcher was on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist as part of the Programme of Study for the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the UCL Institute of Education. The researcher has had involvement with horses over many years and holds a professional coaching certificate (BHSII). For a number of years the researcher has worked as an expert coach teaching CYP from a variety of backgrounds to learn to ride and care for horses. Whilst engaging with CYP and their families in an equestrian environment, it was noticeable how positive the families spoke about their children, and how positive the CYP themselves were whilst spending time with the horses. This experience informed the basis of the researcher's interest in this field of research.

The rationale for undertaking this research from a professional basis was informed by practice within the LA whilst on placement. A number of educational settings referred students to a local centre and reported positive

outcomes for the individual's and their families. Central to the EP's role is the responsibility to elicit and gain an authentic 'voice' of CYP. This entails adopting a person centred approach, incorporating a variety of assessment tools and techniques. To elicit the 'voice' of the CYP it is essential to gain insights into their experiences and devise ways in which they can articulate their views. Anecdotal evidence from the LA suggested that it would be appropriate to gain insights into the experiences of the CYP attending an equine facilitated intervention. This guided the rationale for this research, endorsed by The British Psychological Society (BPS) which supports EPs researching the feasibility of approach, in terms of the CYP engagement and experience (Delivering Psychological Therapies, 2016).

### **1.9 Research Aims**

The aims of this research are as follows:

- To explore the experiences of the CYP, their families and professionals around them, who attended an equine facilitated psychotherapeutic (EFP) intervention
- To provide the Local Authority with additional knowledge and evidence of the application of an equine facilitated intervention to inform future practice



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter explores current literature and research relating to EFP and situates this study within the wider academic field. An argument to support the application of attachment theory as a theoretical framework for EFP is presented. Attachment theory and affect regulation, the recent neurobiological affiliate of attachment theory, are explored and the utility of these theories to inform and enrich the theory and practice of EFP is discussed. This is followed by an evaluation of current literature and research on equine assisted interventions which have focussed on adolescents with SEMH needs. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the reviewed literature, particularly how the current research seeks to address the gaps identified.

### **2.2 Attachment Theory: A theoretical framework for Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy**

Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) is an emerging specialism offered by a small but growing number of practitioners. EFP is a form of psychotherapy and the intervention is based on the therapeutic knowledge and experience of the professional delivering the programme (Liefoghe, 2020). The interventions can be run as small groups or for individuals, and involve two practitioners; an equine specialist to oversee the welfare of the equines and ensure the safety of the participants, and a trained facilitator or

mental health specialist (Moreau & McDaniel, 2000). EFP uses activities that include interactions with horses to enable the individual to develop their self-awareness, address behavioural patterns and recognise their strengths. Examples of activities may be watching how a horse is interacting with another horse, how it responds to being lead or how it responds to being directed. The mental health specialist will then invite the individual to comment on what they see or how the horse interacted with them. How the individual responds to these questions can offer some insight into the social and emotional constructs held by the individual. The mental health specialist can then begin to develop a hypothesis or formulation that will inform the basis of a plan that is implemented through-out the intervention to support the needs of the individual (Liefoghe, 2020).

In order to successfully interact with horses it is necessary to understand how they communicate and be sensitive to their needs and emotions. In the wild horses are natural prey animals and as such live in herds for protection. In order to survive equines have developed highly effective communication systems based primarily on body language, and are finely tuned to reading human emotions and intention. Horses have strong social bonds and the herd relies on living co-operatively, with each horse having a place in the hierarchy, with an older and environmentally knowledgeable mare as the leader (Rees, 1984). In order to work effectively with horses the handler needs to be able to read the body language of the horse so that appropriate responsive interaction can take place. In addition, the handler must model behaviours that the horse will positively respond to, qualities such as calm,

confident, assertive and clear leadership (Liefvooghe, 2020, Rashid, 2004; Rees, 1984). This requires the ability to be attentive to how the equine is responding to humans being present and how it is responding to humans interacting with it. Brandt (2004) suggested that in the equine human relationship, the body is the fulcrum from which communication develops, and as the sense of embodiment is experienced a deeper understanding between human and equine is achieved.

The horse's skill at accurately reading human body language and intent has been identified as being another quality that brings an additional therapeutic benefit to EFPs. Lentini & Knox (2009) suggested that horses are affected by discrepancies between stated intent and observed behaviour. Kohanov (2010) posited that a person who self-reported that they were relaxed and confident, but in fact felt nervous and fearful, would be correctly 'read' by a horse. A number of reasons have been suggested to explain how horses are apparently able to correctly detect and respond to human emotional states. First, Lentini & Knox (2009) suggest that being prey animals living in herds, their survival is dependent on accurately evaluating physiological and behavioural cues. Additionally, Burgon (2011) commented that since human physiological changes due to aggression and anxiety are similar, this triggers the horse's flight instincts. Therefore, the horse is able to observe a human's body language, for example how they hold themselves, muscle tension, increased heart rate and come to the safest assumption i.e. a perceived threat of danger. Therefore the horse would not approach the person, even if the person self-reported that they were relaxed and confident. This ability of

the horse to accurately read human emotional states has led to the notion that horses can act as mirrors to humans, or reflect back the emotional state of the human present (McConnell, 2010; Vidrine *et al.*, 2002). However, Gehrke & Baldwin (2011) do not fully support this theory but suggest instead that humans and horses can share a unique dynamic, one that is different to other animals utilised in AAls. They suggest that a more useful way of thinking about the human equine relationship is to consider that the horse can be a useful indicator of our own behaviour as the horse will quickly react to how it is being handled.

Currently there is a lack of a conclusive and published theoretical research base for EFP (Halberg, 2008). However, much of the literature that reports on the successes of EFP comments on the human-horse relationships that form in the therapy sessions as being fundamental to the process (Bachi, 2012). It is unsurprising therefore, that attachment based theories have been suggested as a theoretical framework to guide and inform EFP practice (Bachi, 2013).

### **2.2.1 Overview of Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is considered to primarily originate from the combined works and theoretical observations of John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth and Donald Winnicott. Influenced by the work of ethologists Lorenz, Tinbergen and Harlow (1958), Bowlby began developing a detailed theory around the central concept of 'attachment'. He posited that in addition to the need for

sustenance, there exists a biological basis for humans to make strong affectional bonds to significant others. In a parallel to Bowlby's work, Ainsworth conducted various global studies involving mother and infant relationships that empirically validated the key concepts of his attachment theory. Bowlby, in conjunction with Ainsworth continued to develop their original ideas until the 1980's to produce an elaborate and extensive theory of human attachment.

Bowlby (1979) argued that human infants are biologically predisposed at birth to seek and make strong emotional bonds with another, and to seek safety in their presence. Bowlby (1979) defined attachment as "an inborn system in the brain that evolves in ways that influence and organize motivational, emotional, and memory processes with respect to significant care giving figures" (p.241). This occurs in the infant with a figure or figures who then gradually become the significant attachment figure or figures. In the context of this relationship, the infant's survival needs are met in terms of physical requirements for food, warmth and protection. Overtime, the infant develops a preference for contact and proximity with this person, regardless of their basic needs. Conversely, the absence of this person can induce anxiety in the infant but this is quickly reduced when the person returns to soothe the infant. The capacity and sensitivity of the carer and their ability to understand the anxieties and fears of the infant is a significant aspect of early attachment experience (Bowlby, 1979).

A key tenet of attachment theory is that infants learn about ways of relating from these early relationships with their main carers or 'attachment objects' and build up a set of expectations about themselves in relation to others. On the basis of these first experiences they build what is termed an 'internal working model' (IWM). This means that infants can approach new situations with some prior ideas about how they can cope in a new or stressful situation. The IWM has three elements: a model of the self, a model of 'the other' and a model of the relationships between these (Bowlby, 1979, 1982, 1988; Bretherton, 1990, 1997). IWMs develop as infants repeatedly experience a particular type of relationship with their carer or carers. The significance of IWMs is that they form the basis of expectations about self, others and relationships and therefore influence future social interactions, providing a template to make initial sense of new encounters. Bowlby argued that

"No variables ...have more far-reaching effects on personality development that have a child's experiences within his family... extending through the years of childhood and adolescence in his relations with both parents he builds up working models of how attachment figures are likely to behave towards him"

(Bowlby, 1973, p.369)

In conjunction with the notion of the IWM, Winnicott (1967), a colleague of Bowlby, suggested what conditions were necessary for the infant to have a positive experience that would lead to the development of healthy and stable IWMs. He suggested that when the infant is reassured by the carer's

understanding response the infant's anxiety is reduced as he experiences 'being understood'. Winnicott (1967) termed this process the 'holding environment', which he described as having three main aspects; holding, handling and object-presenting. In the initial phase of 'holding' the carer acknowledges the emotional state of the infant and fosters a sense of emotional cohesiveness, whereby a containing safe space for the infant is provided. The subsequent 'handling' phase affords the infant scaffolded support by the carer to develop emotional awareness and regulation. In the 'object presentation' new stimuli can be safely introduced enabling the infant to extend their knowledge of their environment. Winnicott (1967) suggested that the infant would be able to develop a sense of their own sense of self when the carer sufficiently met the infant's physical and psychological needs. This is because an infant that has a sensitive and attuned carer will be able to make independent discoveries about their environment and gain confidence and trust in their own capacity to have their needs met. Therefore how objects are presented, i.e. in a safe and controlled environment affords the infant the opportunity to develop their confidence and sense of self. However, Winnicott argued that it was important for the infant to experience a level of frustration or discomfort to enable the development of tolerance and emotional self-regulation. Attachment theorists such as Bowlby (1988) regarded early childhood experiences as having a profound effect on emotional and social (and therefore cognitive) development. However, Bowlby (1988) did not believe that IWMs formed in infancy were permanently or unalterably fixed and that opportunities for change were possible throughout maturation and adulthood.

## 2.2.2 Development of Attachment theory

Evolving from the main concepts of attachment theory Fonagy *et al.*, (1997, 2002) suggested a detailed theory in which the ability to mentalise and affect regulate is significant to an individual's development. Mentalising is the capacity to understand ourselves and others in terms of intentional mental states, such as feelings, desires, wishes, attitudes and goals. Fonagy *et al.*, (1997, 2002) suggested that in order to be successful in a variety of different and novel social situations, humans need to have the ability to mutually understand each other to enable co-operation; he suggested that attachment theory be understood as a system for explaining social experience and that individual's attachment mechanisms are environmentally responsive. A key factor associated with an individual's capacity to mentalise is connected to their early childhood experiences. An attuned caregiver, as defined in attachment theory, is positively associated with the child's ability to develop mentalising capacities. This in turn positively influences affect-regulation to include attentional and effortful control. As the developing child encounters a broader and more complex social environment, the capacity to extend and strengthen mentalisation increases (Fonagy *et al.*, (2002). These skills are developed to afford the individual the ability to reflect consciously and make accurate attributions about the emotions, thoughts and intentions of others. Fonagy (2008) argued that attachment theory helps to explain social experience and that cognitive development occurs through complex processes of social interaction. Relationships with attachment figures support the initial development of emotional regulation and ability to understand the perspective of others. He posited that the ability to emotionally regulate to



meet the demands of novel environments, affords the individual a broad range of affect regulation strategies that will enable them to flexibly adapt to a range of situations. Therefore, as the individual gains exposure to a wider social environment and context (e.g. peers, teachers and friends) the neurological networks underpinning attachment processes and mechanisms are strengthened.

Panksepp (1988, 2011) conducted research into the similarities of the human brain to other mammalian brains and demonstrated that the mammalian limbic system exhibits the similar function of processing emotions in both humans and other mammals. Similarities in social behaviours such as pair bonding, parenting behaviours, imprinting and enculturation of young were also noted across different mammalian species. Furthermore, research conducted in 1999 by Dan Siegel suggests that the limbic region of the brain responsible for processing emotions is integral to the attachment process. The limbic region of the brain will typically develop when an infant is sufficiently nurtured and exposed to the necessary environmental stimuli, thus enabling the development of effective attuned behaviours and connection with others (Siegel, 1999). This links to the concepts of attachment theory as an infant that receives adequate and attuned care develops a sense of secure attachment and is able to replicate attuned behaviours and connection to others. Whereas an infant that did not receive such care could develop atypical formation of structures in the limbic region and therefore may be unable to effectively attune and connect to others or demonstrate emotional self-regulation (Siegel, 1999).

Animals have long been recognised for their therapeutic benefits; dogs have been taken into hospitals and nursing homes (Bernstein *et al.*, 2000) and stroking a dog and dog ownership have shown to lower blood pressure and raise coronary survival rates (Friedmann *et al.*, 1980; Friedmann *et al.*, 1983). Moreover, advances in neuroscience have further extended our knowledge of the processes involved when humans and animals interact. Oxytocin is accepted to be one of the main hormones for stress reduction and physical contact with another animal appears to elicit a release of this hormone. Research findings suggested that interspecies interaction leads to an increase in stress relieving neurochemicals. Measurement of the neurochemicals oxytocin, prolactin and B-endorphin recorded elevated levels, as well as a reduction in blood pressure and cortisol levels. Moreover, similar effects were found in the animals, suggesting a mutually beneficial interaction, (Handlin, 2010; Odendaal, 2000; Sable, 2012; Yorke *et al.*, 2010).

Horses are uniquely placed to connect with humans as they have little neo-cortex or 'thinking brain' but rely predominately on their limbic system and primitive brain. They are highly social herd animals that form strong emotional bonds and have a need to attune to each other for reassurance, comfort or validation of possible dangers (Lavender, 2006). Additionally, as prey animals they are adept at reading humans emotional intent. Research by Henry *et al.*, (2005) reported that when confronted by humans who had negative feeling towards them, the horses' heart rate in the experimental group increased.

In 2013, Bachi sought to apply the main concepts of attachment theory to EFP. How an individual relates to others, starting with the infant to mother relationship and developing into adulthood with adult to adult relationships is a key tenet of attachment theory. Bowlby (1988) defined attachment behaviour as “any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world (p.27)”. Therefore, an individual exhibiting secure attachment behaviour will be confident to explore new experiences as they will feel safe in the knowledge that a competent ‘other’ is close by to assist or support the individual. This incorporates the notion of a person having a safe or secure base from which an individual can explore and master their environment (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1990, 1997). The idea is that the secure base provides a safe haven from which an individual feels safe to explore their environment knowing that if danger is present, there is a safe haven to return to (Bretherton, 1990, 1997).

When observing an EFP session, what is striking is the relationship and dynamic between the participant, the equine practitioner and the horse. In the delivery of an EFP, elements of Winnicott’s (1967) holding environment are considered to be relevant (Frame, 2006; Karol, 2007). EFP offers a range of opportunities for the provision of a secure base and a haven of safety via a holding environment. As previously outlined the holding environment has three aspects whereby the individual recognises that their emotional state has been recognised and then attuned to, before new opportunities of exploration and development are presented. In line with the

main concepts of evolving IWM, the horse itself can be viewed as a living and mobile medium through which therapeutic change can be elicited (Bachi, 2013). In addition the trained facilitator provides feedback and guidance in a naturalistic environment which assists in the process of developing rapport and trust between themselves and the participant and the horse. Lastly, how the horse reacts to the participant, often in an accepting and non-judgemental way can help develop the participant's sense of being held or contained (Bachi, 2013).

The horse being a large animal offers a unique experience to the participants that cannot be replicated in other forms of traditional or other animal assisted therapies (Bachi, 2013). Being able to lean against or put your arms around such a large living animal affords the participants a physical representation of being held, which combined with having to develop a relationship whereby you are able to trust a large and mobile animal not to hurt you requires the development of trust between the participant and the horse. This experience affords the participants the opportunity of not only proprioceptional feedback but also to experience being emotionally 'held' and promotes a feeling of emotional well-being, which align with the concepts of 'holding' and 'handling' of attachment theory (Vidrine *et al.*, 2002).

Where the interventions take place add to the sense of provision of a 'holding' environment, as previously defined by Winnicott (1967), (Bachi, 2013). In EFP the setting in which the therapy takes place is an integral part

of the process, as it includes the places where the horses live (i.e. in a field or stables/arena). This natural environment can offer a sense of holding as it is normally experienced as being relaxing and non-threatening. The trained facilitator is better able to develop rapport and openness with the participants as they are not presenting themselves in a clinical or authoritarian way, thus enabling the participant to relate to them in a more open and trusting manner. In addition, horses interact with participants 'in the moment' i.e. they do not make preconceived judgements about an individual but instead react to emotions and behaviours. Interaction with horses can help the individual develop their ability to understand the mental states of self and others. This notion is linked to the concept of IWMs i.e. developing the awareness of the mental states of self, others and the relationships between these mental states. Therefore, if horses are treated with care and consideration they will respond accordingly and can promote feelings of trust and acceptance in the participants (Bachi. 2013). Activities involved in interactions with the horse provide opportunities to enhance awareness of the mental states of others thus developing reflective practice. For example, by grooming a horse the individual has the opportunity to interpret how the horse is feeling, how the horse responds to touch or having a head collar put on can be reflected upon. Frame (2006) suggested that through EFP an individual is able to reflect on their IWMs developed through earlier childhood experiences via the principles gained through a holding environment, that then enables their 'true self' (Winnicott, 1967) to emerge.

Linked to the key principle of providing responsive and attuned behaviour of attachment theory, is the concept of 'affect mirroring' whereby the carer provides an experience through which emotions are reflected back to the individual through attuned behaviours. The individual is then able to fully experience their feelings and is able to begin to emotionally self-regulate. Siegel (1999) in reference to the mammalian limbic system, states "attachment establishes an interpersonal relationship that helps the immature brain use the mature functions of the parent's brain to organize its own processes" (p. 67). Connecting to emotion in the body provides the individual with an opportunity to begin to identify previously inaccessible or feelings that have not been brought into consciousness. Research (McComb *et al.*, 2016, Proops *et al.*, 2018a, Smith *et al.*, 2018b) demonstrates that horses possess an innate ability to accurately read and react to human behaviours and emotions and represents a key factor in the human-horse therapeutic relationship. For example, when a horse perceives an individual to be anxious or angry, the horse will use their reading of body language and vocal intonation to interpret this correctly. The horse will then reflect this state back by exhibiting increased awareness and arousal in body language and stature. Projection of internal states will be simultaneously reflected back to the individual in a way that is unique to the human-horse relationship, affording the individual validity via the horse's reactivity. Through non-verbal communication EFP can facilitate access to emotions and experiences that the individual may find difficult to articulate. In this way EFP affords the individual unique insights into their emotional state, which the therapist can probe and develop further (Bachi, 2013).

### **2.2.3 Implications for future research**

There is some evidence to suggest that utilising attachment theory as a psychological perspective has some relevance to EFP. Application of this theory appears to be a powerful tool to develop emotional awareness and is particularly relevant when the development of self in a specifically relational context is deemed beneficial (Wallin, 2007a). Therefore, utilising elements of attachment theory to EFP is relevant to populations of individuals that could benefit from therapy that aims to address some form of relational issue/s. It is designed to bring about change in attachment-related mechanisms such as internal working-models (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978) or reflective functioning. The primary concepts of attachment theory appear to have relevance to some of the central aspects of EFP and could be used as a guiding framework from which to assess EFP practice and development. The principles of attachment theory have previously been adapted to inform classroom interventions (Geddes, 2005), and the unique features of EFP suggests a good fit between attachment theory and utilising horses in a therapeutic context. EFP creates the co-production of relationships that may elicit attachment feelings and behaviours that can profoundly shift an individual's experience and further develop their sense of self (Bachi, 2013). It is the aim of this research to explore further the application of attachment based theory to EFP.

### **2.3 Research and Equine interventions**

The literature search identified that it is a relatively immature field that spans a variety of interventions across different populations. There exists a number

of terms that are used to encompass equine facilitated interventions (Selby & Smith-Osborne, 2013). The proliferation of terms presented a challenge when searching for relevant papers, since it is difficult to determine the distinct differences that the various interventions offer. Research focussing on therapeutic riding programmes or hippotherapy were omitted as the criteria for the search were equine facilitated/assisted learning and equine facilitated/assisted psychotherapy/therapy. All interventions use horses as part of the process. Online databases including EBSCO, Psychinfo, EthoS (a search engine for British theses) and the Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin were carried out. In addition to the key search terms all papers published and unpublished from 2005 to date in English were considered. The literature search identified two relevant systematic reviews of equine assisted interventions (Kendall *et al.*, 2015; Wilkie *et al.*, 2016) and these proved useful in identifying studies relevant to the current research. In addition to database searches literature was sought using the reference list of current publications and books written by EFL/EFP practitioners and studies identified in equine publications.

Researchers in the field of EFL/EFP have used a variety of methodological approaches; the table below (Table 1) outlines the range of research, methods used and their findings. This is followed by a critical evaluation of the studies which identify limitations and outstanding questions that provided the rationale for this current research.



**Table 1. Summary of EFI/EFP studies showing significant findings**

Author (PubYear)	Research Aim	Sample number (age range) Educational setting and country	Timescale	Methods	Variables	Findings
Bachi et al., (2012)	The self-image, self-control, trust and general life satisfaction of the participants in EFP would improve.	29 (14-18 years) Residential Israel	1 hour weekly sessions, over 7 months	Quantitative Pre and post  Qualitative interviews with adult referees	Offer Self-Image Questionnaire, (OSIQ) Self-control Children's Interpersonal Trust Scale (CITS0 Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLS)	A trend in positive changes for the intervention group for OSIQ, self-control, CITS and SLS.
Burton (2011)	Experiences of at risk young people participating in a therapeutic horsemanship programme.	7 (11-16 years) Residential foster care, UK.	Sessions of 1-3 hrs, weekly or fortnightly. Over two years.	Participative ethnography Case study design. Experiential learning/ reflection.	Perceived experience.	Psychosocial benefits; improved confidence, mastery and self-efficacy, self-esteem, empathy, opening up of positive opportunities.
Dell et al (2011)	Benefits of EAL on Inuit youths' healing - focus on those who abuse solvents.	15 (12-17yrs) Residential Treatment Programme Canada	2x2hr session per week. Over 3 months.	Phenomenological approach. Semi-structured interviews, staff reflection, EAL journals, observation. Experiential learning/ reflection.	Perceived experience of impact on healing.	Experiences allowed for 'spiritual exchange, complementary communication and authentic occurrence'. Healing aided through culturally relevant space.
Ewing et al (2007)	Effects of EFL on youths with severe emotional disorders.	28 (10-13yrs) Special day school, USA.	9 weeks (2x2 hr sessions per week) 36 hours in total.	Quantitative and Qualitative Pre and post intervention tests Case studies compiled from interviews and observations.	Self-esteem (self-perception profile for children) Empathy (Empathy questionnaire)	Quant: no significant changes. Qual: some changes in conduct and social acceptance.

				Experiential learning/ reflection.	Locus of control (Locus of control scale) Depression (Children's Depression Inventory) Loneliness (Children's Loneliness Questionnaire)	
Frederick et al (2015)	Impact of EAL on levels of hope and depression in At-Risk Adolescents.	26 (11-17 years)  Middle/high school,  USA	5 weeks, session length not stated.	Experimental design with longitudinal repeated measures. Control group used. Pre and post tests and Repeated measures. Experiential learning/ reflection	ADSHS level of hope self-report measure MDI level of depression self-report.	EAL effective at increasing levels of hope and decreasing levels of depression.
Hauge et al (2015)	Impact of EAA on perceived social support, self-esteem and self-efficacy amongst adolescents.	80 (12-15 years) Secondary school, Norway.	1 x 2hr sessions, over 4 months.	Use of Control group. Pre and post intervention Questionnaires.	Perceived social support Self-esteem. Self-efficacy.	Increase in perceived social support in intervention group.
Ho, Zhou, Fung and Kua (2017)	Effectiveness of EAL/EAP	75 (12-15, specialist secondary school)  Singapore.	3 hour sessions, over 16 weeks	Pre and post Quantitative  Repeated measures.	Habits of Mind questionnaire	Improved behaviours, personal responsibility, empathy.
Holmes et al. (2011)	Benefits of EAA to adolescents with emotional, behavioural or learning difficulties on anxiety and self-esteem.	11 (12-14 years)  Secondary school  UK	4 x 3 hour consecutive sessions.	Quantitative and control object  Pre and post intervention questionnaires	Self-esteem (Rosenburg self-esteem scale) Anxiety (Spence children's anxiety scale) Interaction Frequency (experimenter observation)	Reduction in anxiety. No significant changes to self-esteem.

Pendry et al., (2014)	Positive effects of EFL on child social competence.	64 (10-14yrs) Middle school, USA	8 children per 90 minute session once a week, over 11 weeks.	Randomised control trial Experiential learning/ reflection.	Parental ratings of child social competence .	Increase in social competence post-test.
Trotter, Chandler , Goodwin -Bond and Casey (2008)	Compare efficacy of EAP to classroom based counselling .	164 (12-16, high school) USA.	2 hour weekly sessions, over 12 weeks.	Quantitative	Behavioural Assessment System for Children (BASC) Psychosocial Session Form (PSF)	Improved social stress, self-esteem, conduct problems, hyperactivity , aggression, behavioural.

### 2.3.1 Critical Evaluation of the existing research

#### Aims of the research

Many of the studies outlined in the table above aimed to establish the social and emotional benefits of an EFI to those involved. The nature of the EFI varied but all were delivered in some form of riding establishment or stables. The majority of the studies sought to evaluate the impact of the intervention and all used different assessment tools designed to measure improvements in emotional wellbeing or social interactions. Bachi *et al.*, (2012) focussed on outcomes measuring self-image, self-control, trust and general life satisfaction. Burgon (2011) explored the social and emotional experiences of those participating in a therapeutic horsemanship programme. Dell *et al.*, (2011) aimed to understand the experience and potential healing impact of an EAL programme. Ewing *et al.*, (2007) employed a battery of tests designed to measure self-esteem, empathy, locus of control, depression and loneliness. Frederick *et al.*, (2015) study aimed to measure the impact of EAL on levels of hope and depression. The aim of Hauge *et al's.*, (2015)

study was to investigate how perceived social support, self-efficacy and self-esteem was related to the behaviours exhibited during tasks involving horses. Holmes *et al.*, (2011) study focussed on exploring the benefits of EAA on anxiety and self-esteem. Pendry *et al.*, (2014) aimed to explore the relationship between an EFI and changes in social communication skills. Trotter *et al.*'s., (2008) study compared the efficacy of a group EAI with a traditional classroom based counselling programme. The focus of the 2017 study (Ho *et al.*, 2017) was to evaluate the effectiveness of an EFI across 5 social and emotional domains.

### *Implications*

The studies largely aimed to evaluate the impact of the interventions. Ewing *et al.*, (2007) included a small sample of case studies compiled from ad hoc interviews and observations by staff. However, both Burgon (2011) and Dell (2011) sought to explore the experiences of the participants. Burgon (2011) employed an ethnographic approach, and therefore did not aim to form a rich description of the phenomenon of the intervention as constructed in the participants' experience. Dell *et al.*, (2011) employed a phenomenological framework based on identification of themes more in common with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The primary aim of this current study is to privilege the 'voice' of the CYP and explore their experiences of the EFP intervention, something that has not previously been undertaken.

### **2.3.2 Participants, sampling and intervention**

All of the participants were involved in an EFI of some description and all involved were either older children or adolescents (age range 10 -17 years of age). Participant numbers varied from 7 (Burgon, 2011) to 75 (Ho *et al.*, 2017). All studies recruited children or adolescents that had been identified as having concerns with their social and emotional health, with the exception of Hauge *et al.*, (2013) who recruited participants who did not have any specific social or emotional difficulties. Dell *et al.*, (2011) recorded interviews with 3 adult members of staff involved in delivering the intervention.

The recruitment strategy was reported in all of the studies and was appropriate for the aims of each study. All studies used purposive sampling to select participants since all studies aimed to investigate specifically identified participant groups. Dell *et al.*, (2011) cited a 'purposive and convenience' approach. Holmes *et al.*, (2011) cited an 'opportunistic' and 'purposive' approach with the sample chosen because the researcher had an existing relationship with the school. Bachi *et al.*, (2011) and Ewing *et al.*, (2007) selected participants that best fitted the recruitment criteria that were referred via teaching staff.

The type of intervention and the length of time for which the participants had experienced the interventions and the duration of the programme varied, although all studies made this clear. The majority of the interventions were variations of equine assisted activities or facilitated learning. Bachi *et al.*'s. (2011) and Trotter *et al.*, (2008) were the only studies where the intervention

was an equine assisted/facilitated psychotherapy intervention. One other study utilised elements of the psychotherapy in the programme (Ho *et al.*, 2017). The shortest duration of the intervention, 4 weeks, was reported by Holmes *et al.*, (2011) however, Frederick *et al.*, (2015) stated the intervention was run over a period of 5 weeks but failed to document the length of each individual session. At the other end of the scale, participants in Burgon's (2011) study attended the therapeutic horsemanship programme over a 2 year period. All studies, with the exception of Dell *et al.*,(2011) who omitted any detail of what the EAL programme entailed, outline the type of activities undertaken by the participants, ranging from general horse care such as grooming, learning to rug horses up appropriately, putting on tack correctly and some mounted activities (Burgon, 2011; Ewing *et al.*, 2007; Frederick *et al.*, 2015; Hauge *et al.*, 2013; Holmes *et al.*, 2011; Pendry *et al.*, 2014 and Ho *et al.*, 2017) to non-directed activities held in fenced arenas with the horses freely roaming and the participants interacting with them and self-selecting activities (Bachi *et al.*, 2011; Trotter *et al.*, 2008).

### *Implications*

Purposive sampling was common, leading to the potential of 'self-selection', highlighting the importance of transparency when reporting participant recruitment. The degrees of variance amongst the interventions poses a challenge when attempting to identify areas of similarity and difference and which variable may have the most impact.

### **2.3.3 Design, data collection and data analysis**

With the exception of Burgon (2011) and Dell *et al.*, (2011) and to some extent Ewing *et al.*, (2007) all the studies used a quantitative research design. It can be difficult to compare or to match interventions because the domains investigated employed a variety of assessment tools to measure different outcomes. Quantitative research into social and emotional outcomes often use questionnaire measures of 'self-esteem', 'empathy' or 'self-efficacy'. These areas are complex and require social and contextual situation (Saarni, 1990) and therefore these tools of measurement can have difficulties capturing the range of idiosyncratic, individual meanings in context. Furthermore, the research identified was limited to pre and post outcome measures, often completed by teachers and parents. Moreover, the results recorded by Pendry *et al.*, (2014) were based solely upon parental perceptions of child social competence, with no self-complete measures recorded by the participants. Ho *et al.*, (2017) utilised an assessment tool specifically devised to measure the unique EFI devised by the pre-vocational school in Singapore, therefore it is not a universally recognised assessment tool tested for validity or reliability.

Burgon (2011) adopted a practitioner-researcher approach and following an ethnographic stance became absorbed in the research process over the 2 year period. This study gave an opportunity for the 'voices' of the participants to be heard. However, due to a lack of explicitly expressed reflexivity, it is unclear how much of the findings are based on the researcher's interpretations of the participants' experiences. Dell *et al.*, (2011) adopted a phenomenological framework to capture the experiences of the participants,

and tri-angulated the data by including adult participants who were involved in delivering and facilitating the intervention. It is unclear what phenomenological framework was employed but the findings suggest a thematic analysis similar to that developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted.

### *Implications*

The majority of studies adopted a quantitative design which have inherent difficulties conducting and interpreting data based around 'social' and 'emotional' construct research. It would be valuable to understand the 'social' and 'emotional' elements involved in some depth, as subjectively experienced and going beyond pre and post measurements. Therefore, research that elicits the individual lived experience of the interventions would be useful. Rather than outcomes that provide summative information about 'mean' participants, this study argues that EFP interventions would benefit from research that has the capacity to explore and theorise about its nature in practice.

## **2.4 Rationale and aims of the present study**

The literature review identified a number of studies attempting to evaluate the impact of EFI's. The majority adopted a quantitative design, with a variety of assessment tools measuring different aspects of SEMH needs.

Quantitative methods are often adopted with this population of participants as it can be difficult to gather sufficient qualitative data. A difficulty with quantitative methods are that CYPs completing them may not fully



understand the questions being asked which leads to inaccurate responses, and parents and other adults may complete them without the inclusion of the CYP. Qualitative methods elicit the personal experiences and attempt to capture the 'voice' of the participants. Two qualitative studies took an alternative stance and to some extent the 'voice' of the participants was promoted. However, neither study adopted a research design explicitly intended to promote the 'voice' of the CYP. The intention of this research was to privilege the 'voice' of the participants by ensuring that the YP's views and experiences were the focal point of the data. Additional data gathered from the professionals facilitating the intervention, a member of school staff and parents allowed for tri-angulation in order to augment the data. However, questions posed for the adults were designed to capture their interpretation of how the YP experienced the intervention (examples can be found in appendix 1), thus the primary focus of the data was the experiences of the YP. In this way their voices were privileged as additional comments or insights expressed by them about their experiences of the intervention were captured by the adults around them. The research design and methodology that will be an exploratory approach, enabling initial insights into how an EFI is experienced and made sense of by the participants. This research will contribute to the paucity of studies exploring the experiences of equine facilitated psychotherapeutic interventions identified in the literature search. Insights from this study will help inform the delivery of such interventions and provide EPs with knowledge of an additional intervention to augment their SEMH toolkit. Additionally, the study will help provide the Local Authority with

additional knowledge and evidence of the application of an EFI to inform future policy and practice.

## **2.5. Research questions**

What are the experiences that young people have had in under-going an EFP intervention?

What are the experiences that the professionals have had in facilitating and observing an EFP intervention and what sense did they make of the young people's experiences?

How did the parents of the young people experience and make sense of the EFP intervention?

## **Chapter 3: Research methodology and design**

### **3.1 Overview**

The purpose of this research was to gain insights into how an equine facilitated intervention is experienced by two young person's receiving it, their parent/s, a member of school staff and the two professionals who facilitated the intervention. This chapter will initially examine how the researcher decided which research design and methodology was most appropriate to meet the aims and purpose of this current study. Following this the recruitment of participants, research tools, data collection and analysis and ethics will be detailed.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The study had seven participants and involved three phases:

- i) The two young people
- ii) The two professionals who facilitated the intervention and a member of staff who accompanied the young people for the duration of the intervention
- iii) A parent of each of the young people.

Robson, (2011, p. 39) argues that when a study aims to describe rather than explain or evaluate, an exploratory design is most appropriate. Therefore, to meet the aims of this study, it was felt that the most appropriate research design and methodology would involve an exploratory, qualitative approach.

A qualitative approach was employed as this research sought to explore the subjective experiences of the participants. Qualitative methods offer the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into how meanings are constructed from the participant's personal experience from their own unique view of the world. Contrary to quantitative methods, qualitative research does not set out to provide evidence to support or disprove an existing theory. A limitation of this type of research is that normally small numbers of participants are recruited and therefore the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. Furthermore, as it is the subjective experiences of the participants that are investigated it is not possible to exactly replicate qualitative research as contexts and subjective experiences differ.

### **3.2.1 Choosing a Qualitative Analysis**

The aims of the research questions of this study were to explore the participant experiences of an EFP intervention and therefore, best suit a qualitative approach. Thematic analysis was rejected as it primarily seeks to identify themes or patterns across data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the primary focus of this research was on individual lived experiences, with areas of commonality of secondary importance. The participants were interviewed separately so did not fit the criteria for discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). A key theoretical tenet of Grounded theory is that social processes are governed by objective, discoverable rules from which theory can be generated (Willig, 2008); this does not suit the aims of this current research so was deemed an inappropriate analysis to adopt. Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed as this type of analysis focuses on understanding the lived experiences, cognitions, beliefs and psychological processes of the participants. IPA affords the researcher the opportunity to gain a new, rich and nuanced insight into individual's lived experiences, and understand it in a way that would not be possible otherwise, (Smith *et al.*, 2009). It provides a detailed and personal account of an individual's lived experiences and best suits the primary aim of this study, which was to privilege the 'voice' and the individual stories of the young people attending the intervention.

### **3.3 Epistemological position and theoretical foundations**

Phenomenological psychology methodology involves the adaption and application of concepts from phenomenological philosophy to support psychological research (Langdridge, 2007). For this research, the broad methodological approach of IPA, developed and utilised by Smith *et al.*, (2009) was adopted, which is underpinned by the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

#### **3.3.1 Definition of phenomenology**

Much of the debate centred on the definition of phenomenology focuses on the notion of 'reduction'. Husserl (1970) posited any understandings gained through a subjective, 'first-order' personal experience of the world that provided an extensive phenomenological, descriptive account could be used as a basis for further exploration in order to produce objective 'second-order'

scientific knowledge. He therefore argued for a process that involved phenomenological 'reduction' as a methodological procedure designed to facilitate a return to the 'things in their appearing'. In doing this, personal experience is described without being ascribed hierarchies of meanings and the researchers own way of understanding of the experiences are not imposed on to the participants' way of understanding the experience. An alternative position held by Smith *et al.* (2009) support rich descriptions but without the step of reduction and searching for 'essences'. The current research aims to consider potentially 'essential' features of EFIs as experienced among and between the participants as a useful step towards enhanced clarity and focus for future research and practice. Therefore the research methodology loosely adopts the process espoused by Husserl (1970) but it does not attempt technical 'reductions' such as the 'eidetic process', whereby attempts to reduce the phenomena to its fundamental elements by making different theoretical changes to see if the phenomena alters, is undertaken. Instead, the methodology is more aligned to the phenomenological process advocated by Smith *at al.*, (2009) as the research focus is on rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. Where attempts are made to identify greater clarity or reveal insights into the 'things in their appearing' they are done so with an interpretative element that inevitably draws away from specific 'reductionist' methods.

### 3.3.2 Idiography

Phenomenological research can aim to identify essential and general structures, as shared by many, or to generate idiographic analysis, elucidating one individual experience. Giorgi (2008) uses idiographic analysis to elicit an explication of phenomena as a whole; he suggests at least three participants are required to achieve a 'typical essence'. By contrast, Smith *et al.* (2009) specifically aim to gain truly individual, idiographic meanings, thus their approach may or may not lead to more general insights, but its starting point is developing individual, separate meanings. From the initial 'idiographic' position, Smith *et al.*, (2009) advocate a subsequent stage developed from individual accounts to 'over-arching themes' working with 'patterns across cases' (p.101). They argue that adopting this strategy results in a better understanding of the phenomena, as the analysis of the idiographic accounts across cases, illustrate ways in which participants may share related super-ordinate themes. However, this illustrates a degree of discordance between their idiographic claim and their method seeking to identify something more general across individuals.

In an attempt to avoid the tension derived from adopting the idiographic position espoused by Smith *et al.*, (2009), a pragmatic view was taken. Halling, (2008) suggests an alternative 'middle-position' framework and argues that phenomenological methods can identify general structures of experience, but that the foundations of any work should be at the level of the individual and their unique experience. He argues that phenomenological

analysis should move between two other 'levels' of possible investigation; the first being themes common to the phenomenon and the second being engagement with philosophical and universal aspects of human experience. He suggests that the process should shift between an individual level and the level of reflection, which may also identify more general structures of experience. This resonates with the aims of this research, which are to gain the individualised 'insider' experiences and perceptions of the participants, but also to bring theoretical perspectives from outside to illuminate them.

### **3.3.3 Hermeneutics**

Heidegger (1962) argued that all experience must be seen in the context of the embodied experience of each individual in relation to the experience being studied. The school of philosophy of incorporating this view is called hermeneutics and this challenges the belief that describing is not a step before interpreting but that it inevitably involves a measure of interpretation due to our own embedded existence and experience in the world. IPA is strongly influenced by this philosophical position, which shares some of the central ideas found in the social constructionist approach. Namely, that all meaning is constructed, or interpreted, by us as social beings (Burr, 1995) rather than having an ultimate, single reality.

#### **3.3.3.1 Hermeneutic Circle**

The approach by IPA argues for this more interpretative rather than descriptive phenomenology and also suggests that all description is



interpretation to a lesser or greater extent. IPA therefore suggests it is possible to make links from an individual's lived experience to theoretical frameworks that the researcher is aware of, without the researcher taking their pre-defined, external theoretical frameworks and imposing them onto the individual's lived experience. Smith *et al.* (2009) explain this notion in their concept of the 'hermeneutic circle' (2009, p.28), in which they describe IPA as an iterative process i.e. 'to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole you look to the parts'. Thus the process is dynamic and moves between individual aspects of the data and the wider contextual whole. This affords the researcher a number of different levels to access the meanings and gain multiple perspectives on the part-whole coherence of the data.

Finlay (2009) argues that the boundaries between description and interpretation are blurred and can be regarded as either ends of a singular dimension; for this reason it is important that the researcher is explicit about where the research sits on this dimension. This research occupies a broadly interpretative position, adopting IPA's centre-ground position between the poles of 'hermeneutic empathy' that attempts to reconstruct original experiences and 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that uses the lens of external theoretical perspectives to attempt to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.36). A greater emphasis on interpretation is focussed on some aspects of the research for example when making sense of individual experiences and the associated personal meanings, whilst other aspects involve greater emphasis on reconstructing the original

experience of the intervention, albeit with a degree of interpretation of the accounts being linked to external theoretical perspectives.

### **3.3.3.2 Double Hermeneutic**

Hermeneutics involve the process of interpretation and deciding on what is 'truth and knowledge' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and it therefore follows that the researcher should be explicit in accounting for the approach taken and to take steps to uphold the quality of the interpretative process. Consciously considering the researcher's subjectivity and factoring in active reflexivity are essential in the interpretative process. As previously outlined the distinction between description and interpretation can often be unclear and phenomenological frameworks acknowledge that description emanates from interpretation and therefore the researcher is subjectively embedded in the process, (Langdrige, 2007). To gain any level of objectivity it is essential to develop a thorough awareness of the self and one's relationship to the exterior world context and cultural values (Giorgi, 1994). A researcher may attempt to put their own expectations and understandings of the focus of the research to one side and instead to focus on the participants' understanding. However, it is important to recognise that this imperfect and so reflection on personal experience, background and existing knowledge is sought throughout the analysis process, (Finlay, 2008).

As Smith & Osborn (2003) note subjectivity and reflection are a pre-requisite when engaging in the process of a 'hermeneutic circle'. They argue that IPA

involves a 'double hermeneutic' since the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's experience and the participant is attempting to make sense of their own experience. Smith *et al.*, (2009) suggest that rather than attempting to 'epoche' or 'bracket off' personal knowledge and prior experience it is in fact more rigorous to be open and name existing preconceptions and then consider 'trying to see what it is like for someone' (p.36). As such, the researcher does not attempt to deny preconceptions and experience but instead acknowledges them and places the emphasis on the participants.

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

Finlay (2008) recommends that a 'phenomenological psychological attitude' is adopted that attempts to "retain an empathic openness to the world while reflexively identifying and restraining pre-understanding so as to engage phenomena in themselves", (p.29). In order to do this, it is essential that the researcher engages in a process of reflection. Finlay (2009) outlines various aspects of reflexivity, such as cultivating a 'critical self-awareness' whereby the researcher develops their sense of their impact within the research process. To enable an authentic account of the participants' subjective experience the researcher must attempt to 'live' the experiences and convey or interpret them as if they were the participant. The researcher using IPA needs to recognise that there is an 'intersubjective interconnectedness between researcher and researched' (Finlay, 2009, p.11) with interpretations evolving in relation to other people and the other environmental factors.

Therefore the researcher needs to be mindful of their own presence and influence in the research process.

“Reflexivity in this context is defined as the process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes”

(Finlay, 2003a, p.108).

This may, in practice be difficult to fully uphold but it does help make explicit the researcher’s position. Through critical and thoughtful engagement the difficulties of this researcher’s interpretative role or IPA by ‘numbers’ (Chamberlain, 2011) have been ameliorated. Many aspects from my own life and context are relevant to the research process. My own experience of working with and looking after horses and what they mean to me, how my unique autobiography with horses has shaped and informed my beliefs and understanding, my previous experiences of research and my current role as TEP on placement where I will take up employment. Throughout the research process I reflected on how I was influenced by these past experiences and future expectations and how they might have fed into areas of this current research.

The most notable example was my awareness of how my previous knowledge of horses needed to be ‘bracketed off’. This was necessary for two reasons, the first being to ensure I did not influence how the YP interacted through-out

the intervention with the horses. I need to avoid direct influence, i.e. not offer any explanations or suggestions when asked, as it was essential that YP followed and developed their own thoughts and beliefs. The second area was during the analysis phase as it was very important that I captured the YP's lived experiences and not my own interpretation of them. I adhered to the six steps of Smith's (2011) IPA analysis to ensure transparency so that each superordinate theme can be traced directly to the raw data. I retained an 'innocent curiosity' in order to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences, to ensure I was accurately representing the intervention from their perspective. I referred to my reflective diary to assist in the analysis process in order to consciously interrogate my initial interpretations.

The primary aim of this research was to ensure that the voice of the young people was the main focus and therefore it was important that I gave an authentic insight into the lived experiences of the participants. Being reflective and taking my experience out of the equation enabled me to see what processes were being worked through with the YP and enabled me to analyse the data from a "phenomenological psychological attitude", (Finlay, 2008).

### **3.5 Multi-perspectival Accounts in IPA**

As previously discussed, IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Smith, 2011) involves an 'interpretative' element, where the participant's account is acknowledged as being interpreted by the researcher with the aim to seek to understand how the participants experience a particular phenomenon. This means that the

data is critically interrogated in order to gain a deeper understanding of the 'things in their appearing', without seeking to identify causal explanations (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Practically, this means that the focus is on the first-person accounts of an experience with analysis which seeks to identify the psychological processes underlying the experience. This lends itself to the current research's focus on the 'lived experience' of the participants. However, in order to gain a wider perspective and understanding of the phenomenon being explored it is multi-informant; participants include the young people taking part in the intervention, a member of school staff working with them, their parents and the professionals who facilitated the intervention. The use of additional sets of participants in this research is designed to increase the sense of socially constructed and situated meanings that the accounts hold. As such the data is triangulated and affords additional levels of rich detail that enhance the understanding of how the participants experienced the intervention, (Robson, 1993).

Related to this research, IPA has also been used to gain insight into the experiences of children and young people (CYP) across a variety of phenomena, including the experience of a group therapy intervention (Newton *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, IPA has been used to consider interventions, experiences and concepts from multiple perspectives. Smith & Shaw (2016) interviewed different family members associated with one who had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and Rostill-Brookes *et al.*, (2011) interviewed young people, foster carers and social workers.

Larkin *et al.*, (2019) suggest that multi-perspectival IPA is able to retain the main focus to idiography in data collection and analysis as well as affording the researcher to consider the relational, intersubjective, and microsocial dimensions of a given phenomenon from two or more focal perspectives. This allows for the initial idiographic approach, but it is then augmented by the synthesis of not only within a sample but also between samples. In cases where there may be some constraints upon the capacity of the 'primary' participants to verbalise their experience, additional perspectives can be valuable in supplementing this. Through the analysis and synthesis of multiple perspectives, a more complex and richer account can be developed, (Larkin *et al.*, 2019)

This is particularly pertinent to this current research, as it employed a multi-perspectival IPA design so that the different perspectives would provide data on a shared psychological phenomena (Larkin *et al.*, 2019). As such the individual analyses is compared and synthesised at the within-group level and then at the between-group level. This enables a triangulation of data that can provide an enriched understanding of the participants' experiences.

### **3.5.1 Summary of the position of the current research regarding a phenomenological approach**

The philosophical foundations for the current research, and how they have been adapted for psychological research has been outlined, demonstrating how an 'integrative approach' of IPA has been utilised (Smith *et al.*, 2009)

and where it might depart from it. Smith *et al.*, (2009) argue that IPA has evolved from different strands of phenomenology and that this creates a 'plural vision' that enables 'mature, multi-faceted and holistic phenomenology' (p.34). Furthermore, the multi-perspectival design has enabled a deeper and richer understanding of the CYP lived experiences. The different participant accounts provided additional positions and perspectives that have augmented and enriched the accounts of the CYP.

There is currently little research focussing on the subjective experience of the participants attending an EFI. Reid *et al.*, (2005) argue that the focus on individual accounts enables engagement with new areas that may not have a theoretical pretext. This is appropriate for the current research as EFI's lack a clear theoretical framework.

### **3.6 The context of the research**

The Local Authority in which the research was conducted was based in the South of England in the Home Counties. The Pupil Referral Unit that participated is a small alternative educational provision that aims to support students who are experiencing complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in their mainstream Secondary School. They offer a core curriculum, which includes English, Mathematics and Science. Students also have the opportunity to participate in social skills, team building, sports, food technology and practical sessions as they focus on specific targets agreed with the individual on entry to the college. At the key stage from which the



participants were recruited, students attend for an agreed period of time as an intervention, working in partnership with their mainstream schools. The majority of the students attending this setting qualify for Pupil Premium, but due to the high level of student movement in and out of the setting it was impossible to gain a specific figure. The latest Ofsted Report (2017) rated the setting as 'outstanding', with particular reference to the setting offering a safe and settled environment. Systems were in place to support successful transitions, with meetings between school staff, parents, student and PRU staff held at the start and end of the intervention programme. There is also the flexibility in the system to allow students to remain at the PRU for extended periods of time.

### **3.7 The Equine Facilitated Intervention**

The intervention consisted of hour long sessions, with both YP present, delivered over a period of 6 consecutive weeks at a riding centre local to the PRU. The sessions were facilitated by 2 Equine Assisted Growth and Learning (EAGALA) trained professionals and involved the use of the same 2 horses each week. The sessions were delivered in an enclosed sand arena, where the horses were allowed to roam free. There were a variety of props that the participants could use, such as poles, cones and plastic tubes. The picture below illustrate what a typical set up for an EFI looks like.



The EAGALA model is a theory-neutral model of equine-facilitated work. EAGALA utilises a fully-developed, professionally endorsed treatment model for mental health professionals practicing equine-facilitated psycho-therapy. Unique to the model are standards, code of ethics, continuing education requirements, replicable frameworks and a team approach. Under the EAGALA model, both a registered, credentialed mental health professional and a certified equine specialist work together collaboratively at all times to assure the safety and support for the individuals participating in the intervention (<https://www.eagala.org.uk>). The model involves no riding and the participants work directly with the horses at ground level. This enables the participants to better perceive the horses actions and reactions as they work with them.

The mental health professional and the horse practitioner work together following a framework the EAGALA calls SPUDS (shifts, patterns, uniqueness, discrepancies, my stuff) to document particular aspects of how

the participant and horse/s interact. The horse practitioner shares their findings with the mental health professional, who reviews the SPUDS observations and utilises them to help the participant gain an understanding of the nature of the horse/human interactions as a medium for achieving therapeutic support. The participants are asked to identify areas that they would like to work on, for example assertiveness skills, and the EAGALA team use the horse/human interactions as a way of allowing the participant to practice such skills. The focus is on experiential learning, with the EAGALA team guiding or scaffolding ideas in a non-prescriptive or directional way. The key focus of the EAGALA team is to utilise the model to enable the participant to meet their goals by engaging the unique attributes of horses to help them understand and practice newly learned skills.

The intervention for this research was facilitated by an EP trained in the EAGALA model as the mental health professional and an experienced horse practitioner. They have worked together for 3 years and were accomplished in delivering the programme to participants similar to the CYPs participating in this current research. The intervention was funded by the Schools Community Fund (part of the National Lottery).

### **3.8 Pilot Work – Observation of a young person participating in an EFI and the interview processes**

Once I had decided the position from which to approach the research, and the context had been agreed with the local Authority, I sought to conduct a pilot study with one young person participating in an EFI to test out different

methods that I could employ, in order to determine any potential difficulties. Originally, I decided to do semi-structured interviews, yet the pilot study highlighted the potential difficulties with rapport building in conducting a semi-structured interview with the young people. It became evident that it was essential to gain a true sense of rapport to enable the development of questions or have the confidence to probe in more depth. It was necessary to develop a style of interviewing that allowed the young person a high level of sensitive scaffolding that was received positively and allowed for a 'co-construction' of ideas and experiences. Therefore, I changed to an unstructured interview because I found that the conversation developed more organically around the experiences that the young person wished to articulate. Although I did not encounter the same difficulties with the adult participants, this learning allowed me to be a co-constructor in these interviews too, and move away from attempting to ask questions in a numbered fashion.

In addition, my initial design included video recording the intervention as adopted by Hemingway *et al.*, (2015), however, the pilot revealed many areas of difficulty. It was apparent that my presence in the arena would disrupt the intervention. This was due to two reasons; the first being the young person was very aware of my presence and the second being that the horses behaved differently when I was in the arena. I explored the possibility of videoing the sessions which I could then analyse for 'significant' moments. My intention was to use these short clips to play back to the young person, in order to elicit a more detailed and verbose description of their experiences. However, it was felt that this could potentially elicit difficult memories or experiences for the

young person and on advice from the mental health professional delivering the intervention it was felt that it was inappropriate to video the sessions. Other methods of collecting data that would provide similar prompts were considered. Photovoice methodology (Sutton- Brown, 2014) suggests the use of photographs to elicit experiential knowledge and reflection, and together with existing methods utilised in IPA such as journals, I adopted these additional data collection methods in accordance with the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) for the young people.

### **3.9 Research Tools**

I wanted to privilege the voice of the young people but due to the inherent difficulties obtaining a verbose account of their experiences, the perspectives of adults around them that have a shared experience of the EFI are also included. Additionally, other means of capturing how the young people experienced the EFI were employed. Data is usually collected via interviews; either semi-structured or open interviews, but this proved not to be 'fit for purpose' due to the difficulties that the young people faced when talking in detail about their experiences of the intervention. The Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001,2011) suggests that to further augment the 'voice' of the young people other means of valid and reliable methods of data collection can be employed. To reduce the emphasis and burden on verbal methods of data collection, the young people were each given a camera and invited to take photographs during the intervention. They then designed and produced individual journals that incorporated some photographs as well as additional

drawings. Details of how all the data was integrated into the analysis process will be described in the Results section.

### 3.10 Participants

Table 2: Table of participants (young people)

Pseudonym	Year	SEN	Referral to PRU
Daisy	9 (13 years of age)	Emotional regulation difficulties, self-esteem and literacy difficulties	School refuser and challenging behaviour
Nessa	10 (15 years of age)	Social communication difficulties, emotional regulation difficulties, self-esteem	School refuser and challenging behaviour

Table 3: Table of participants (adult)

Pseudonym	Category
Alice	EAGALA trained EP
Jenny	EAGALA equine specialist
Sue	School staff (PRU)
Barbara	Parent
Louise	Parent

This research adopted a multi-perspectival approach regarding the participant sampling. The following inclusion criteria applied was:

### Young people:

- Attendance at a Key Stage 3 or 4 PRU
- Complex history of SEMH needs

### Adult participants:

- EAGALA trained professionals
- Member of staff at the PRU attended by the young people
- Parent of the young people

### Recruitment of participants

Qualitative research can involve sampling that is necessarily pragmatic due to the specific participant groups targeted. This was particularly pertinent to the recruitment of the young people. In my Local Authority approximately 60 students per year attend an equine facilitated intervention. Students are referred by a variety of educational settings, as well as social care and youth offending teams. However, as the most vulnerable young people are referred, it proved very difficult to gain consent; in the majority of cases it was felt that the young people were too vulnerable and neither the members of school staff referring the CYP nor the centre delivering the equine facilitated intervention would consider me approaching the young people to participate in the research. Therefore, the young people that participated in this research self-selected, and may represent a slightly different population. However, these participants provided access to a 'particular perspective on the phenomena under study' (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and although were heterogeneous, had the advantage of having some elements of being homogenous. They had difficulties attending mainstream secondary education and were attending a PRU, and were in Years 9 and 10. The

primary concern that was raised by school staff and parents focussed on emotional well-being, poor mental health issues and challenging behaviours.

Two young people and five adults participated. A pilot group formed of one young person and two adults ran prior to the main research process. The main research group, delivering multi-perspectives on the same intervention, afforded me the potential of a richer and deeper understanding of the same shared experience of the intervention. I was the PRU's link EP that was involved in the research and this proved to be highly fortuitous as I was able to visit regularly and form a positive relationship with the young people. This helped me build a true sense of rapport before I attempted to interview them. Interviewing this population has inherent difficulties as they are often reluctant to engage or they find it difficult to or are unable to articulate their feelings and experiences in great detail. This proved to be the case in this research, and other methods of data collection, in addition to the interviews were employed. Furthermore, as I had developed a positive relationship they engaged enthusiastically with the process.

### **3.11 Data Collection**

The methods for data collection were divided in to two areas: young people and adults.

#### Young People

Materials: disposable camera, A4 and A3 paper, scissors, felt tip pens, pastel crayons, audio recorder.



The Mosaic approach enables children and young people to reflect on their experiences using a variety of different research tools such as observations, interviewing children and young people about their experiences, taking photographs and other visual methods such as drawings (Clark & Moss, 2001, 2011). Furthermore, Burton *et al.*, (2017) suggest that photographs can enhance self-reflection and promote hermeneutic sense making. Each young person was given a disposable and asked to take photographs of moments or things that were important to them during the intervention. At the end of the intervention they were asked to display them in a way that felt meaningful to them. The young people chose to create journals and used the photographs and accompanying drawings as their way of capturing the moments that were significant and meaningful to them.

The journals, pictures and drawings provided data within their own right, but also served as prompts or visual aids when conducting the open interview. A semi-structured interview was not employed as I felt it would be too prescriptive or constraining for the young person, therefore, an unstructured interview was adopted as I wanted the conversation to be defined by the young person. This approach also allows for an appreciation of their priorities and a sense of relative importance of what they choose to talk about. It is important to avoid directing the interview in any way, except as an on-going exploration of the young persons' experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The young person choose the photographs they wanted to add to their drawing and journals. In this way the conversation was shaped by the choice of photographs and how they were integrated into their journals. The young people were able to reflect

on their experiences of the EFI and were then able to create meaningful and insightful idiographic data. This revealed the 'things in their appearing' (Langdrige, 2007) in a potent and congruent way that privileged the voices of the young people. IPA was applied to the transcripts of the interviews and the written content of the young people's journal.

### Adults

Materials: audio recorder

Semi-structured interviews are considered a valuable research tool (Smith *et al.*, 2005). They are also considered to be a viable method when undertaking exploratory research Willig (2001).

Semi-structured interviews are frequently recommended for IPA research (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and were chosen for this research with the adult participants. The choice of using semi-structured interviews was derived from two main reasons. The first being that they offer a higher level of flexibility than structured interviews; they allow the researcher to build rapport with the participant. The second reason is that the method has a degree of flexibility as a broad pre-planned structure supports the interviewer's research aims but also allows for ideas and themes to emerge naturally which may not have been anticipated by the researcher. The respondents' interests, concerns and lived experiences can be incorporated in a free-flowing conversation where the ordering of questions is less important (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, semi-structured interviews can produce richer data than would be expected of structured interviews and be responsive to the needs of the respondent (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The interview schedule was derived from two main influences; firstly the pilot study and secondly the practical suggestions of Smith *et al.*, (2009). The latter advised questions to elicit in-depth, narrative responses allowing exploration related to the research topic and to move from questions to set the scene through to more sensitive or complex questions. Smith & Osborne (2003) recommend that the researcher should not attempt to test a pre-determined hypothesis when undertaking IPA work and that 'rather the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail' (p.53). The pilot study helped me develop questions that enabled the adult participants to focus on their experiences of the intervention in relation to the CYP.

The schedule was delivered in a flexible manner to enable the participants to fully explore and articulate their thoughts about their experiences. Practically this meant that a strict order of questions was not followed and some questions were adapted to suit the nature of the dialogue in order to capture the fullest data, whilst still maintaining appropriate questions relevant to the research. Throughout the interview process I engaged in active listening skills to encourage the participants to explore relevant ideas further, whilst also attempting to maintain the overall framework of the semi-structured interview.

Gaining authentic, meaningful accounts was the primary aim of the research and for all sets of participants it was explained that the data collected would be used in order to help understand what it was like for those involved in the

EFI and to use this information to see if other young people would find it helpful. It was emphasised that there was a lack of a specific agenda and that the primary focus was their individual experiences.

### **3.12 Final Study**

#### Interview Procedure

##### Young people

Two interviews were carried out at the PRU in an unoccupied classroom when they returned from session five and six of the intervention. They were interviewed separately, whilst they finished their journals or pictures.

##### Adults

EAGALA Professionals:

Were interviewed once and asked questions from a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 1a), allowing flexibility to question further on a topic they engaged with more, often going beyond the prompts, as well as guiding the dialogue to remain focussed on the schedule. The interviews were carried out on the site of the EFI.

PRU staff member:

Two interviews were carried out at the site of EFI whilst observing sessions 5 and 6 of the intervention. A quiet place was provided to ensure there were no interruptions.

Parents:

Were interviewed once via telephone and were asked the same questions from a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 1b) to ensure similar topics were covered.

### **3.13 Data Analysis**

Each the interview recording was transcribed verbatim. Data analysis involved analysing each transcript individually before moving on to the next, according to the idiographic principle of IPA. For each individual account, the steps of the data analysis followed the steps recommended by Smith (2011) outlined below:

1. Familiarisation with the data by reading over the transcript whilst listening to the recording.
2. Familiarisation and becoming more aware of the form of the transcript and making initial notes.
3. Line by line analysis of 'descriptive', 'linguistic' and 'conceptual' comments.
4. Emergent themes noted in the left margin, drawing on comments from step 3 above.
5. Emergent themes listed in chronological order.
6. Emergent themes organised into groups, which were then transferred onto individual separate sheets of paper. These groups were then categorised into 'super-ordinate themes'.

The young people's journals were analysed according to the same principles. The photographs were considered within the framework of Mosaic analysis

techniques. All data for the young people was then amalgamated before being integrated into step 3 as outlined above. A worked example of a transcript for a young person can be found in Appendix 2, showing the application of the steps.

Examples of my data analysis were discussed with my research supervisors, and a work colleague who had previously undertaken IPA research, in order to explore the credibility of my interpretation. Comments from this process were reflected on and, where appropriate, influenced my analytical process and formulation of themes.

I felt it was important for all individual transcripts to be analysed with the central principle of producing an idiographic account for each participant. Subsequent to this I was guided by the analytic strategies suggested by Larkin *et al.*, (2019) to map out thematic areas of commonality and difference. Larkin *et al.*, (2019) suggest that researchers employing a multi-perspectival IPA design consider the following strategies:

- Identify consensus overlap or conceptual overlap
- Identify conflict of perspectives
- Identify reciprocity of concepts
- Identify paths of meaning
- Identify “lines of argument” (after Noblit & Hare, 1998)

This process led to the synthesis of the super-ordinate themes, and identification of contrasting super-ordinate themes within the participant groups, as well as between the participant groups.

### **3.14 Ensuring transparency and rigour**

Ensuring the quality and validity of qualitative research presents a dilemma, as existing criteria designed to address these issues in a systematic way (Yardley, 2000; Yardley, 2008) are problematic when applied to phenomenology. Research that has an interpretative base, by its very nature faces unique questions of quality and validity, and so should be considered in relation to each individual case. Finlay & Evans (2009) suggest an overall criteria for qualitative research, together with more general considerations of artistic and ethical questions. They advocate for 'rigour, relevance, resonance and reflexivity', which moves away from a checklist approach and allows for the influence of recognised criteria and a more flexible approach to be adopted together. These factors were considered at each stage of the current research. The examples highlighted in this chapter demonstrate the intention to create practice-based evidence as contributing to relevance; a commitment to analysis that is predominately idiographic and rich to increase the resonance; the recognition of the importance of reflexivity; the careful checking of my own interpretations with my supervisors to ensure the credibility of claims, which are transparently reported.

### **3.15 Ethical considerations**

In accordance with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics (2006) ethical approval for the research, including application of a data protection number, was granted internally by the Institute of Education, UCL (see appendix 3). The researcher received regular supervision from academic and

Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology (DEdPsy) tutors and is in receipt of the signed research logs.

The following considerations were undertaken in the development of the application.

*Table 4: Ethical Considerations and Outcomes*

YPs level of understanding	The research was explained clearly to the YP. An information sheet and consent form (see appendix 4) was prepared for all participants, with support from the DEdPsy academic tutor and research tutor. The aims of the study, details of the researcher, contact details of the DEdPsy academic tutor and research tutor were supplied on the sheet. Age, developmental stage and linguistic abilities were taken into account.
Privileging the 'voice' of the YP	To help elicit the views and to capture an authentic 'voice' of the YP a range of research tools were used including cameras so that they could take their own pictures, as well as the opportunity to develop their own drawings and journals.
Suitability of the YP to participate	YP attending a PRU may be socially or emotionally vulnerable. The Head of the PRU initially identified suitable YP to invite to participate. For this research two YP self-selected.
Right to withdraw	The right to withdraw at any stage and voluntary participation was highlighted on the information and consent form. This was verbally reinforced at the beginning of the interview and understanding acknowledged before data collection commenced.
Consent	As a result of the information they received, the participants were able to make an informed decision as to their participation. Participants took their own individual photographs and consented to sharing them with the researcher.
Role of parents	Parents received an information sheet that detailed the nature and purpose of the study. Parental consent was obtained and they were remained of the opportunity of opting their child out of the study.
Confidentiality	Responses will be confidential and anonymised and neither the individuals nor educational setting will be identifiable. Participants were informed that their data would be made available to the research



	supervisors, and examiners and confidentiality would only be breached if the researcher was concerned for the safety of the participant or someone else, in accordance with university and LA safeguarding policies.
Storage of data	Data was stored on an encrypted storage device and used on a password-protected laptop which was locked in metal filing cabinet. Data will be destroyed upon successful completion of the doctoral programme (expected August, 2020).
Location of the interviews	The interviews took place in a quiet and familiar classroom to the YP, at a time when interruptions could be avoided. The member of staff who accompanied the YP to the intervention was present for the duration of the data collection process.
Follow up support	The YP attending the intervention had some social, emotional or mental health need. The experiences explored in the interview covered feelings, emotions and relationships. It was explained to the YP that they could talk to the member of PRU staff who was a trained ELSA, or to another trusted adult or organisation in confidence if they required further support.
Potential harm	Any medical conditions or other circumstances that might cause harm to the YP by attending the intervention were explored prior to attendance (see appendix 5). The YP were not stigmatised or disadvantaged by being part of the research. A debrief was provided after each interview.
Dissemination of findings	A letter outlining the findings was sent to the participants (see appendix 6). Additional materials will be developed to inform the LA referral process and inform EP practice.
Recognition and thanks	All participants received a letter, thanking them for their participation, (see appendix 7).
Benefits to educational settings and EPs	There will be direct benefit to educational settings and EPs as the information disseminated on the referral process and the utility of EFP interventions will develop a shared understanding and best practice protocols.
Benefits to CYP	Participating in the intervention itself benefitted the YP. There are unlikely to be direct benefits of the research to the participants themselves, although information drawn from this study will be used to inform future EP practice and will benefit CYP receiving the intervention in the future.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the main findings generated from the IPA analysis and adopting the Mosaic approach outlined in Chapter 3. Phase 1 presents each participant separately to retain the idiographic focus. Subsequent to these findings, Phase 2 presents how the experiences relate to one another, with the focus on the patterns and connections as well as the differences and conflicts. Phase 3 identifies the super-ordinate themes across the groups. Figure 1 demonstrates how the analysis was conducted and represents how the findings are presented in this chapter.

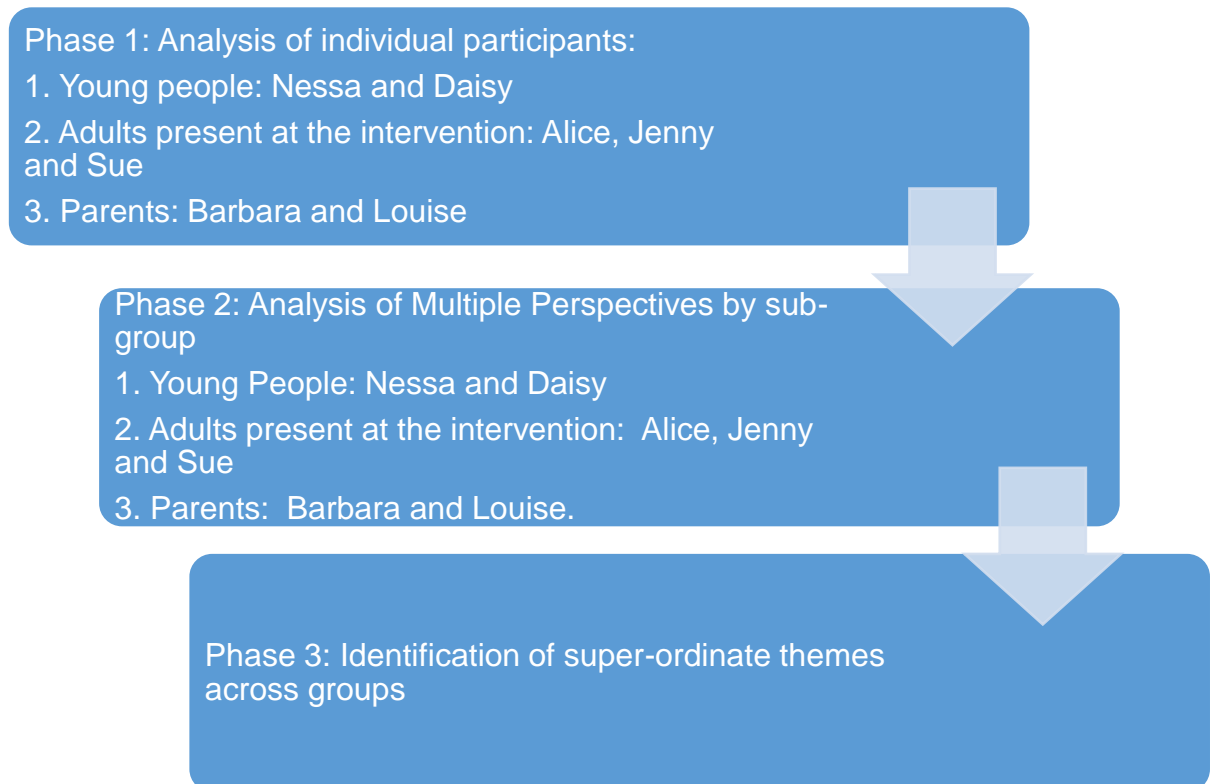


Figure 1.

The findings for each of the participants are presented to reflect the different research questions.

## **4.2 Phase 1: Personal meanings and experiences of the Equine Facilitated Intervention (EFI).**

The focus of Part 1 is the participants' individual experiences of the EFI. The main experiences and sense making of the participants is presented in the form of a summary of the super-ordinate themes. This structure is repeated for each participant, starting with the young people, followed by the professionals who facilitated the intervention, the member of PRU staff and concluding with a parent of the young people. It is structured this way as it reflects the connection to the physical environment where the intervention was delivered, with the young people at the centre, together with the professionals facilitating the intervention, the member of staff present for the duration of the intervention, and finally the parents experiencing it from a distance. To augment the notion of sense making and interpretation that is a key concept of IPA, for the young people I have provided a reflective comment regarding our initial encounter, and an overview of my observations of them participating in the intervention.

### **4.2.1 Young People: Nessa**

#### **Emerging Self-efficacy**

Over the six sessions Nessa developed her confidence when she was working with the horses. This may be attributed to feeling more at ease with the lack of structure and an understanding of what to expect from the sessions, but also

due to her development of skills and knowledge associated with being and interacting with the horses.

At the start of the interview Nessa's responses suggest that she was apprehensive about meeting the horses and was unsure whether she would get on with them. Her comment "*I like cats and dogs, and horses I think*" reflects her sense of not knowing what it would be like to meet and work with the horses and suggests some aspect of self-doubt and uncertainty that she would be able to work with them. She spoke of her initial meeting with the horses, saying that she "*didn't know what to do*" and that she "*just sort of walked towards them*". Of her first contact with one of the horses she expresses her anxiety about getting hurt, recalling that she "*didn't want them to bite me*". Her comments suggested both a notion of a lack of agency or purpose and of a fear of being harmed.

Nessa was able to make comparisons between her initial meeting and her last session with the horses, saying that "*well, I knew what to do, I could get them leaves and brush them*". This demonstrates an awareness of how her skills and knowledge developed over the sessions, leading to an increased confidence when she was interacting with the horses. During the interview she was keen to demonstrate how she had independently sought to extend her skills and knowledge. She spoke of how she had carried out some research on looking after horses, suggesting an emergent sense of agency. It appears

that the intervention had a significant meaning for her, and that recognition of her newly acquired skills and knowledge was important to her.

Her developing sense of self-efficacy supported her to problem solve and overcome some of the difficulties she faced when interacting with the horses, and she recorded in her journal how *“I tried again in a slightly different way”*. This was in reference to putting a head collar on one of the horses, an activity she had found difficult; *“I kind of didn’t know how to do that... I figured out where everything goes... I learnt something new”*. Nessa comments both in the interview and in her journal how she felt about being with the horses, expressing what a positive experience it was for her, writing; *“I absolutely loved working with the horses”*. It appears that Nessa made an association between communicating with the horses and social communication skills with her peers. She reported that she *“got better, I’m terrible at starting up a conversation unless we have something in common”* when talking about how she had learned *“horse communication and working with them”* during the intervention.

### **Developing relationships**

Analysis of Nessa’s narrative illuminated her developing relationships both with the horses and also with Daisy, suggesting that the horses ameliorated the social interaction between the two. Nessa spoke of *“team work”* and that *“helping is a good thing”*. In the early sessions Nessa would follow Daisy’s instructions without offering any alternative action, for example: *“Daisy said we should get them something to eat, so we looked for something for them to eat”*. However, in later sessions Nessa, unprompted would help Daisy complete a

task *“she was struggling a little bit, I’m not surprised... so I went and helped her”*.

Nessa also spoke of her closeness and connection with the horses. At the start of the intervention she reported that *“they looked friendly”* and was content to pat them a little. By contrast, towards the end of the intervention Nessa was initiating a lot more contact with the horses and spoke about them with more affection; *“I did give them a hug today”*. She was able to describe the different personalities of the horses and her feelings towards them; *“I know them now”* and *“she can be a little stubborn”*. Nessa’s narrative included detail of how the horses enjoyed her fussing or grooming them *“I think grooming is bonding”* and that the activities replicated similar feelings in her, *“I loved these activities because it made me happy as well as the horses”*. This suggests that the horses helped Nessa emotionally regulate, particularly the physical contact with them helped her feel *“calm”* and *“I relaxed on her”*. It demonstrated a real sense of Nessa experiencing and knowing another’s emotional state. The closeness she experienced with them, and its calming effect is captured when she states that *“you can’t think of anything else when you’re with them”*.

The relationship she developed with the horses appeared to have a positive impact on her which she describes as; *“Company, but I have a different version of company to other people, I don’t actually have to talk to them to be in their company”*. Having the ability to communicate with the horses without talking was significant for her, as she expressed when she explained how she

communicated with the horses; “*communication is very clear and it’s easy to think it*”. The strength of her connection to the horses was expressed when she spoke about a sense of loss when the intervention finished, saying that “*they are going to miss us*”. The relationship Nessa developed with the horses afforded her the opportunity to give and receive physical contact and affection. This was something that she enjoyed and elicited positive emotions in her.

### **Identity**

The intervention appeared to enable Nessa to connect with her grandfather in a way that had not been possible previously. Her grandfather was the only member of her family that she referred to in our interview and it was apparent that she was able to talk with him about her experiences in the intervention. The horses provided common ground through which both she and her grandfather could share experiences, and it also enabled her to receive positive feedback. The statement; “*He believes that I am in my element*” was recounted early on in our interview and highlighted the significance to Nessa of her emerging sense of self in relation to the horses. The notion of Nessa’s connection to the family’s history via the horses was a recurring topic throughout the interview and evidenced the growing connection between Nessa and her grandfather for example; “*He loves horses...he’s done that since he was young*”. Nessa developed a sense of her own identity in relation to her family’s narrative about horses. This was evidenced in the way she would incorporate the views and opinions of her grandfather to validate or emphasise a point that she was making for example; “*but my granddad says he’s never ridden a horse*” and “*we can’t ride them...but I’ve learnt horse communication and working with them*”. This indicates that she was moving

away from a passive sense of self to begin to identify aspects of her identity aligned to her grandfather's experiences of horses. The experiences of the intervention afforded Nessa the opportunity to discover more about her family's history and develop her own sense of self and identity.

#### **4.2.2 Daisy**

##### **Identity**

Daisy's experiences with the horses afforded her the opportunity to explore a more authentic sense of herself and to begin to reconcile different aspects of her identity. From the outset Daisy was very confident meeting the horses, she walked very confidently up to the horses, looking very relaxed and patted them on their necks and rubbed their faces. She was able to sum up the differences in the horses quickly, pointing out that one was "feisty" and the other was "stubborn". For her, the two horses appeared to represent different aspects of her personality; "she's feisty, like me" and "she's stubborn, like me". She described the horses, relating their personality traits to her own, as a mechanism to describe herself to me;

*"Well, at first I liked Biscuit as she's feisty, like me, but then I liked brushing Cinnamon and stroking her, but she's the boss, she doesn't like to do stuff she doesn't want to, like leading her, she's stubborn, like me, nobody tells me what to do".*

This passage illustrates how Daisy is trying to make sense of her connection to the horses by comparing them to herself. The passage reflects Daisy's fragmented thoughts about herself and the horses. She liked the feisty one but



also liked being able to brush and stroke the other horse. The traits that she describes are negative and present the image of someone or something that is not easy to get on with and likes things to be on their own terms. This is how Daisy is choosing to present herself, and it draws from the negative narratives about her from both home and school. However, almost lost in the middle of the passage, Daisy recalls how she liked brushing and stroking the horse. This describes a caring and kind person, who enjoys the physical contact with the horse.

Maintaining the projection of a certain image or identity is a source of tension and difficulty for Daisy. She described herself as feisty, stubborn and difficult to deal with, but the opposite is true when she was with the horses. She presented as confident, kind and caring; a different identity than the one she ascribes to. Being with the horses allowed Daisy to be more authentic:

*“I feel more like myself with the horses and I don’t need to put on an act around them!”*

Daisy reported that she was bullied at primary school and to protect herself she became good at fighting, and that she feels that she needs to keep up her reputation:

*“I just built up a reputation and when I had fights I never lost them”.*

Daisy primarily identified as a *“loud person”* and it was only through her interactions with the horses was she able to explore her quieter self.

*“Like I’m free, free to be me”.*

The intervention facilitated her exploration of other aspects of her sense of self, which to her felt like freedom and release from the identity she portrayed at school. She felt a tangible relief that she could adopt aspects of a more authentic self. Daisy's self-reflection gave her an insight into why she presented different aspects of herself and prompted her to consider how she might reconcile the conflicting aspects of her different selves in the school environment.

### **Developing relationships**

Daisy was concerned that the horses were not always standing together in the arena and she would try and get them to be together. Her desire to have the two horses close together was the motivation behind getting the horse that stood alone at one end of the arena to move to join up with the other horse. Daisy believed that the horse was lonely:

*"I thought she was lonely...I told A that there should be more horses together, if there were more horses together they wouldn't be lonely".*

She was not able to articulate why she thought the horse needed company. It appeared that she was thinking about her own sense of social isolation and transferred these feelings to the horse. When Daisy failed to get the horse to move she would spend time with her talking to her and brushing her, and over time developed a close connection with her:

*"You know, I could walk to Cinnamon, I could talk to Cinnamon, I think she likes me more, I got leaves for her and I stroked her".*

Daisy enjoyed being close to the horse and believed that there was an understanding between the two of them that was mutually beneficial as she felt that they both were calm and relaxed in each other's company.

*"I stood there and then I leant on her and she didn't move but she felt warm and good...I went to get a brush and brushed her, she loved that"*.

The strength of the connection that Daisy felt to the horse raised some difficult feelings for her at the end of the intervention, as she was very concerned that the horse would miss her:

*"But Cinnamon will miss me the most, we are friends, she's gonna be lonely without me"*.

It is reasonable to interpret this concern as not about the horse missing her but as Daisy missing the horses, particularly Cinnamon. It is evident that the horse evoked a strong emotional connection for Daisy and that it was a meaningful relationship for her. The significance of her connection with the horse is reflected when Daisy spoke of the preparations she had made to ensure her journal and pictures would remain safe and secure:

*"I know where I can put it and they won't find it"*.

## **Control**

Daisy makes reference that she has to be the leader or the boss demonstrating a desire for her to be in control. One explanation of this could be that she feels

that it is her role to be the leader and therefore it is necessary for her to be in 'charge' of the horses and set the agenda for the horses to follow:

*"Well, I needed to be the boss, she needed to know I was in charge".*

An alternative explanation is that in order to feel safe and secure, Daisy felt it was necessary for her to be in charge and therefore in control of her environment. As previously discussed, Daisy is frequently in a state of hyperarousal; she is quick to react and has a sense of being out of control. To counteract this sensation Daisy has adopted a strategy of attempting to control the environment in order to afford her some sense of safety and security. However, this strategy was challenged when she was working with the horses and she found it difficult to 'be in charge'. Instead it was necessary to adopt a less power based relationship and just be 'present' in their company. Initially this produced some anxiety for Daisy:

*"Comfortable being kind but I need to be the leader".*

As the intervention progressed Daisy's need to be in control lessened and she was more comfortable taking part in activities like brushing the horses that provided a more mutually beneficial experience:

*"I'm really nice when I'm with Cinnamon".*

Control is an important concept for Daisy and it is interesting that as she develops a stronger relationship with the horses, her desire to be the leader subsides. Her statement that she is 'nice' when she is not being the leader and

was just enjoying the company of one of the horses suggests that she was experiencing a feeling that was calming and relaxing for her.

#### **4.2.3 Adults present at the intervention: Alice**

Alice is the EAGALA trained mental health professional who co-facilitated the intervention. She is also an Educational Psychologist working in a local authority EP service. The following findings are drawn from the semi-structured interview conducted with Alice at the end of the intervention. The themes for Nessa and Daisy are presented individually.

##### **Nessa:**

##### **Confidence**

Alice reported that Nessa appeared to be lacking in confidence and this affected how she interacted with her, Daisy and the horses. She reflected that at first Nessa was hesitant meeting the horses and followed Daisy's lead:

*"Nessa was a bit less confident, looking to Daisy for validation and to check with her if she was doing the right thing or not".*

Alice believed Nessa's reluctance to interact with the horses was not entirely due to lack of knowledge but that she was feeling unsure of what to do:

*"Nessa appears to know what she needs to do but a bit of a confidence issue rather than a lack of knowledge".*

Alice reported that after the third session, Nessa appears to be more confident and is able to independently interact with the horses without pre-emptive instructions.

*“What I remember clearly is that over time Nessa was making independent choices and was much more relaxed...was able to carry on rather than looking to us or Daisy for assistance”.*

### **Developing relationships**

Alice reflected that by the third session Nessa had developed a stronger connection with the horses and was willing to independently introduce some activities. This suggests that as Nessa developed her sense of trust in the horses she was able to develop a deeper understanding of them and offer suggestions to explain their personalities. She describes one of the horses as *“ah, she’s a softy like me”* and *“this one trusts us more”*.

At this point it is evident that as Nessa developed her relationship with the horses, she was able to engage more with the therapeutic work and began to make sense of her experiences. Parallel to this process, Nessa demonstrated more engagement with Daisy and an ability to work on an activity together:

*“Again we see a bit more team work, engaging together, making a bit more sense of the horses, then relating to themselves and talking about ways of being comfortable with the horses”.*

### **Setting boundaries**

Nessa had difficulty being assertive with the horses:

*“Nessa was needing to be assertive as we had one horse really pushing into her space and almost pushing her but she didn’t want to say anything because she was saying ‘I don’t want to be mean, I want to be liked’”.*

Nessa held the belief that in order to be liked she need to concede her personal comfort and boundaries in order to fit in or be liked. This created feelings of disappointment and frustration for Nessa. In an attempt to reconcile these feelings she had developed her own narrative that this was better than being ‘mean’. However, Nessa was able to reflect on this and realise this was not working for her. Nessa worked on establishing boundaries with the horses and realised that she had achieved something that had delivered a positive impact. She reflected that this was because she had approached and done something differently, and that it was not about the horses liking her for who she is:

*“Nessa said that ‘yes when she was assertive the horses responded to her better’ “and what was interesting, towards the end of the intervention it was Nessa who got Cinnamon to move not Daisy”.*

### **Daisy:**

### **Control**

Alice reflected that Daisy was confident with the horses but needed to be the leader:

*“And then for Daisy, there was the bit about I want to be the boss, so that was a big thing for her”.*

Alice reported that she was keen to get the horses to do what she wanted, when she wanted them to do it, but was confronted with a challenge when one of the horses would not comply with her demands. She became quite frustrated and agitated. It took up until the fourth session for Daisy to be comfortable and calm when faced with these challenges. She was then able to leave what she had started and move onto something else:

*“Daisy just said ‘oh well, never mind I will go back and run with Biscuit’”.*

Alice reflected that Daisy was able to engage well with the mindful activities that were suggested to them and commented:

*“It’s made me realise more what is happening within me”.*

No further explanation was offered but it did mark a turning point for Daisy where she was willing to relinquish the role of the leader and enjoy the time with the horses:

*“For Daisy, it was then more about the time and space for her”.*

#### **4.2.4 Jenny**

Jenny was the second professional who co-facilitated the intervention and her role was to focus on how the horses behaved and interacted with the young people. She was interested in the shifts, patterns, uniqueness, discrepancies and self-awareness of the behaviours exhibited in the interactions between the horses and the young people.



**Nessa:**

### **Developing her understanding of horse behaviour**

Jenny reported that Nessa was reluctant to touch the horses and approached them hesitantly. She followed Daisy and in the first session took at least ten minutes before she independently touched the smaller of the two horses. This horse then moved away from her and returned to Daisy. Nessa was distressed by this and walked away from the horses and said that it was because the horse did not like her:

*“Oh, they don’t like me much”.*

Jenny reflected that this was not what she believed and commented that;

*“The horse was not displaying any behaviours that led me to believe that it was unhappy or worried about being in close proximity to Nessa, it just walked away to see if Daisy had something for it”.*

This illustrates how Nessa was making sense of her interactions with the horses. She brought to the intervention her previous difficulties of forming friendships with her peers and related these to the actions of the horses. She interprets the horse walking away from her as a negative action because it does not like her. However, there was an alternative explanation i.e. the horse was interested in something else. Over the sessions Nessa was able to recognise this and accepted that the horses were simply following their own agenda.

## **Setting Boundaries**

A significant learning for Nessa was setting the boundaries for the horse to adhere to. In one session one of the horses was pushing into her and Nessa kept stepping back and the horse kept stepping forwards into her.

*“She was invited to stop the horse stepping into her, but she couldn’t and verbalised it as being mean and then she was disappointed”.*

Nessa found it difficult to be assertive with the horse as she did not want to be “mean”. However, there was a significant shift in their interactions after Nessa developed her assertiveness skills. She found that working with the horses was a more positive experience as the horses were more compliant and willing to connect with her. This was an important learning for Nessa as she recognised that she could achieve her goals by being assertive. She became aware that she did not have to sacrifice what was important to her in order to be liked, and that by being assertive the horses were more willing to interact with her. This was demonstrated as it was Nessa that was able to get Cinnamon to walk across the arena and not Daisy.

*“And then she was able to practice that, when she is assertive, she sort of realised that it didn’t affect anything if they didn’t like her or not, the horses responded better to her, and then living with that experience and feeling and then actually thinking ‘I feel better, this was better for me’”.*

## **Daisy:**

Jenny reported that Daisy was confident meeting the horses and that they responded positively to her. Cinnamon was relaxed in Daisy's company and would sometimes be willing to do what Daisy wanted her to do. Daisy would either spend time brushing Cinnamon and they would both be relaxed in each other's company or Daisy would enjoy leading and running with Biscuit.

## **Emotional regulation**

Jenny noted that in the fourth session Biscuit was very anxious and "*charging around the arena*", which was very unusual. She noticed that Daisy had spent some time with the horse prior to this. However, Daisy confidently approached Biscuit and quietly talked to her until she calmed down and stood still with Daisy. Biscuit was then able to relax and she and Daisy spent some time together, first of all with Daisy brushing and then with her running and Biscuit following her. It appeared that Daisy was able to recognise that Biscuit needed help to calm down. She also was able to draw comparisons with herself which suggests an emerging awareness of her own emotional state:

*"It made me realise more what is happening in me".*

## **4.2.5 Sue**

Sue is a member of staff at the PRU, she accompanied Nessa and Daisy to every intervention. Sue was fascinated by how the girls interacted with the horses as well as each other, and spoke in a very considered and thoughtful way.

## **Environment**

Sue commented on how different the environment was to the PRU and reflected on how peaceful it was at the stables.

*“We come into this environment, the more we’ve come along the calmer it’s becoming...you can feel it yourself, I can feel it myself, it’s like, it’s like going to a spa it’s that sort of feeling of tranquillity, like I’m walking in a field with all these beautiful flowers, nothing threatens you”.*

This reflects the positive impact the intervention had on Sue, as she appreciated the benefits she gained from being in a calm and peaceful environment. There is also the reference to the PRU being a place where one might feel threatened, suggesting that as a staff member she would be anxious. Accompanying Daisy and Nessa afforded her the opportunity to reduce her own anxiety levels and allow her the time and cognitive resource to actively observe and process what was happening in the intervention.

## **Developing Relationships: Daisy and Nessa**

Sue reflected on how Daisy and Nessa had developed a friendship over the course of the intervention. Sue explained that prior to the intervention the girls were not friends and at best tolerated each other. At the PRU, Nessa felt the need to be in charge and Daisy resented this and the two frequently fell out and it required staff to intervene in order to resolve the disagreements. She

commented that without the intervention she felt that the two girls would not have been friends:

*“Daisy has become a friend to her and given her so much since coming on the course...she has patience that she’s not had before in trying to build a relationship with someone who she wouldn’t have normally selected”.*

Sue explained that the intervention had given Daisy the opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge and skill and this helped develop the girls’ friendship:

*“It’s been so nice these two together have complimented one another because when Nessa is in an environment that she is not sure of, she will step back and observe, whereas Daisy is willing to demonstrate what she knows about the horses and how to make them feel at ease. So they’ve been a nice couple together”.*

Over the course of the intervention Sue was able to reflect that as Daisy and Nessa developed their friendship Daisy was happy to relinquish her role as ‘leader’ and let Nessa work independently with the horses:

*“And for Daisy I think she finds it a bit difficult when Nessa changes her mind...in her usual environment she would become very vocal and need help to exclude that person whereas here she’s chosen to sit on the side and be an observer...she’s just quietly accepting it”.*

The strengthening of the relationship was further demonstrated when Daisy asked Nessa for assistance. This illustrated Daisy was now able to work co-operatively:

*“Daisy has succumbed, Daisy has decided to give the option to Nessa to help which is nice because she wouldn’t normally but she’s actually agreed and asked for help”.*

How Daisy experienced the intervention appears to have shifted her perception of how others view her. Daisy returned to her mainstream school for a short period each week as part of the transition process. At the start of the intervention Daisy would report that it was “*horrible*” when asked about her time back at school. However, towards the end of the intervention she reflected that her experience of school was improving, as Sue explained:

*“Yes, but if Daisy’s thought her behaviour has shifted a little bit she’s got an entirely different response hasn’t she?...yeah because she thought about it and said no, no, it’s fine. She’s still obviously got her trust issues because her confidence is shattered because she thinks nobody likes her”.*

### **Daisy, Nessa and the horses**

Sue felt that the girls had developed different relationships with the horses. She explained that it appeared that over the course of the intervention Daisy had come to appreciate the connection she had made with the horses and that this was important to her:

*“She’s quite content just being next to the horse and touching it, moving towards its body for comfort. She’s back to that feeling of being free and enjoying the body contact... I think she’s quite happy to be quiet today as she’s so relaxed, she just wants to stroke the horse...she’s happy with the horse’s mood and she looks like she wants to stay, she’s chatting and chatting like an invisible friend”.*

Sue explained that she felt that Daisy had a desire to nurture whereas Nessa was more insular and her relationship with the horses was connected to a sense of achievement. She reflected on the difference in Nessa at the end of the intervention compared to the beginning:

*“I think Nessa seems very confident in her interactions, when I think back to the first session. The first session I think she was a bit fearful both with the horses and with Daisy. Now, completely different girl, she’s tactile, she’s leading, she’s happy, you can see the amount of love now as she was frightened before but look at the response now, it’s even the response from that horse...look at her body, she’s so proud of herself...look at her beaming face, oh, oh, my word look at that, who would have thought that, ahh”*

It appears that as Nessa understood how to interact with the horses she developed a greater sense of belonging and connection to them which in turn developed her self-esteem and positively affected her emotional wellbeing.

*“Nessa is proud as punch, she’s got the swagger today”.*

#### **4.2.6 Parents: Barbara**

Barbara is Nessa's mother and was enthusiastic about Nessa to attending the intervention. She had become very worried about Nessa's difficulties forming friendships, which was negatively impacting on her experiences at school. Barbara was concerned with Nessa's low mood and reluctance to engage with her learning. She was hoping that the course would help Nessa make friends and be something that she would really enjoy. Barbara spoke tentatively in the interview and exhibited some anxiety, she appeared nervous about what to say and did not want to say the 'wrong thing'.

#### **Engagement**

Barbara commented on how keen Nessa was to attend the intervention. She expressed her sense of relief about Nessa's enthusiasm for the intervention, and although she was apprehensive about the possibility of Nessa getting hurt in some way, Barbara experienced a reduction in her own anxiety.

*"Erm, it was really good in a way and she was really looking forward to going so I was happy about that as it got her out doing stuff. I was a little bit worried because on the form I had to fill out, the waiver, just in case she got hurt, and maybe I was being a silly mum, but I was, it was OK. I thought it was nice of her to enjoy what she was doing and she was really happy with the horses and I think she really did bond with them from what she was saying and she seemed to enjoy it so I was happy that she was happy".*

Barbara was able to reflect that the intervention made Nessa happy which elicited feelings of happiness in herself. Barbara evidently experienced some



anxiety about Nessa completing the course, and was a little surprised at Nessa's engagement with it:

*"She will try something but if it loses her interest she won't want to do it anymore but she was interested to complete every session of this. She really enjoyed it".*

Barbara's comments suggest that she experienced anxiety from two different dimensions; one being fearful her daughter may get hurt and the other that she might not complete the intervention. She felt that Nessa had been given an opportunity and she did not want her to drop out after a few sessions:

*"She just really enjoyed it and was lucky to have such an experience and I really enjoyed her participating and I was only a teeny weeny bit worried she might get hurt, but I guess all parents are like that".*

### **Emotional wellbeing**

Barbara felt a sense of achievement and pride at how well Nessa had engaged with the intervention and how she had acquired new skills:

*"We went to a fair and she got to see a horse and you could tell that she had sort of been around horses for a bit as she had that sort of natural flair...Oh she was so excited, she was bubbling over with joy...She just had that sort of natural, 'I've done this before kind of approach to the horse...Yes she sort of said hello before she got on the horse, stroking it, it was lovely".*

Barbara was able to share in the positive experiences with her daughter. When Barbara reflected on her experiences of the intervention it enabled her to feel a sense of accomplishment alongside her daughter.

### **Family cohesion**

Barbara enjoyed the connection with her step-father that Nessa was able to develop as a result of the intervention. She had hoped that Nessa would have a shared interest in horses, but prior to the intervention she had shown no interest:

*“I’ve always offered it to her and said what about the horses. Grandad likes them but she’s never wanted to do it”.*

However, she was pleased that due to Nessa’s participation she was able to share her experiences with her grandfather:

*Yeah he loved it because he used to have a horse when he had more ground before he retired and then got less involved, but yes, he always had a horse and built carts and things like that and yes Nessa did show him the photos and everything...she would talk about how it went and who was there and even the journey she would take a little snack and talk about different horses and what they were doing and what they wasn’t doing and things like that”.*

It appears that the intervention afforded Nessa’s mother and grandfather an opportunity to share common experiences and allow Nessa the opportunity to develop a closer connection with her family.

#### **4.2.7 Louise**

Louise is Daisy's mother and she was concerned that Daisy was finding settling in school really difficult. She felt that the bullying that Daisy had encountered in primary school had made Daisy hate school and was refusing to go. Louise was concerned that Daisy would not be able to go back to her mainstream school. She wanted Daisy to be able to have some friends and not get into so many fights. She hoped that Daisy would like being with the horses and that it would help her calm down.

#### **Engagement**

Louise recalled how she was not sure what to expect from the intervention but that she felt that it would be something that Daisy would be interested in and want to attend. She thought that it would be beneficial for her daughter as the intervention was predominately self-directed and she felt that this would suit Daisy as she could get to know the horses on her own terms. Louise was relieved when Daisy engaged with the intervention so enthusiastically:

*"I asked her if she'd like this and she immediately got excited about it".*

Louise reported that she felt a sense of relief as she had become anxious about Daisy's lack of engagement with her school:

*"I was saying that next time you don't want to go to school, that this can't go on and she knew that and didn't want to go, so this was brilliant that she did want to do it".*

Louise's initial experience of the intervention was positive and alleviated some of her anxiety about getting Daisy to engage with some form of school based activity. Louise reflected that allowing Daisy to explore working with the horses on her own terms was a valuable experience for her that enabled her to develop a better understanding of herself:

*"It's not an adult telling you... a horse doesn't lie and won't do something that is not true and I think you can trust that more than what someone could say to you".*

Louise had expressed her wish for a *"magic wand to make everything better"*, which indicated that she felt a loss of agency and desired things to be better. There is a sense that Louise was struggling with her own emotions and felt relieved that her daughter was so keen to attend the intervention.

### **Emotional wellbeing**

Louise explained that she felt that Daisy's mood at home had improved and that she appeared to be more relaxed:

*"She seemed not so bothered...her attitude seems to have changed...she became funnier".*

### **Family cohesion**

Louise also noted that there had been some small changes in the way Daisy interacted with her siblings;

*"She was better with her sister, she wasn't feeling the need to take things out on her so much".*

Louise's experience of the intervention suggests that not only did it bring a sense of relief to her but that it also afforded Daisy the opportunity to develop a better understanding of herself, improved her emotional wellbeing, and that had positive consequences for the family.

### **4.3 Summary of findings for Phase 1**

IPA is primarily concerned with the idiographic and this section of the chapter has presented findings for each individual participant with no attempt to compare the group. The themes generated relate to how the individuals made sense of the EFI experience, with the lens focussed on how the young people experienced the intervention. In order to tri-angulate the accounts to enable a deeper understanding of how the EFI was experienced, the next section presents a multi-perspective account and highlights the areas of commonality, contrast and difference.

### **4.4 Phase 2: Multiple perspectives**

To gain a more complex understanding of the intervention the accounts were viewed from the multiple perspectives involved. Emerging patterns or themes were identified and additional analysis undertaken to enable interpretation of shared understandings within and across the idiographic accounts.

#### **4.4.1 Themes identified within sub-groups:**

##### **Nessa and Daisy**

Themes shared by Nessa and Daisy were “Developing relationships” and “Identity”. However, there were nuances contained within their accounts. For Nessa it appeared that her developing relationship with Daisy and the horses held equal importance for her. Nessa identified that it was beneficial for her to be able to communicate non-verbally with the horses and valued their interactions. She commented that she has difficulties with her social communication skills and appreciated the experience of connecting with the horses. It was significant to Nessa that she could find a way to develop a relationship that was not speech dependent. Nessa also enjoyed the opportunity to work together with Daisy and develop her relationship with her, something that she was not able to do prior to the intervention.

Closely linked to the notion of developing relationships, the experiences Nessa gained from the intervention enabled her to form a deeper connection to her grandfather. She and her grandfather were able to develop a shared family narrative which added to Nessa’s sense of belonging and identity.

Daisy developed her relationship with Nessa as the intervention gave her the opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge and skill in handling horses. She was able to assume the role of leader and enjoyed the unique experience of Nessa relying on her for advice and guidance. However, the relationship Daisy forged with the horses appeared to be the most significant. She appeared to ‘lose herself’ in their company, with her time spent either running with Biscuit or stroking and brushing Cinnamon. Daisy adopted a different

identity when she was with the horses and presented a more authentic version of herself.

The themes that are divergent in their accounts are self-efficacy and control, and these are linked to the previously discussed themes. For Nessa her sense of self-efficacy emerged as she developed her relationship with both Daisy and the horses. Daisy initially had a desire to be very controlling but as her relationship and connection to the horses developed, this became less important for her. As Daisy felt more secure and experienced a more authentic version of herself, she became less concerned with the need to be in control.

Figure 2: similarities and differences between the accounts: Nessa and Daisy

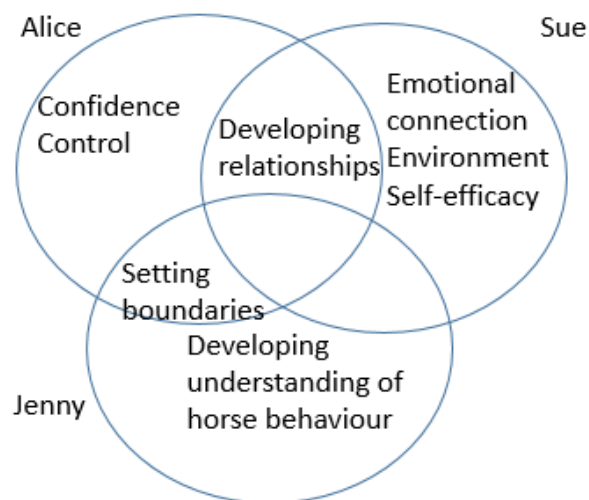


#### 4.4.2 Alice, Jenny and Sue.

There were areas of both commonality and difference between the accounts of Alice, Jenny and Sue. The theme of developing relationships was present in the accounts of Alice and Sue. Both commented on the developing relationships experienced by Nessa and Daisy. Alice's account focussed

more on their developing relationship with the horses, whereas Sue identified the developing relationship between Nessa and Daisy.

Figure 3: similarities and differences between the accounts: Alice, Jenny, Sue



Alice and Jenny spoke about how Nessa became more confident handling the horses when she was able to be more assertive. This signified a major shift in Nessa's approach to the horses. After she developed her ability to set and maintain her boundaries, she became more confident. Nessa was able to develop her thinking around how the horses interacted with her and move away from her initial beliefs. In contrast to Nessa, Alice reported that for Daisy, control was a key issue, but over time this became less important to Daisy.

Sue experienced a sense of calm and tranquillity and commented on how peaceful the intervention was. She reported a lack of anxiety or threat in comparison to her experiences at the PRU. She found it interesting that the



pace of learning was controlled by the horses and that both Nessa and Daisy needed to adjust their behaviour in order to connect with the horses. Sue felt that the environment afforded Nessa and Daisy unique experiences that enhanced their relationship and deepened their understanding of themselves.

#### 4.4.3 Barbara and Louise

Barbara and Louise's accounts reported similarities in the themes of engagement, emotional wellbeing and family cohesion. Both experienced a sense of relief that Nessa and Daisy engaged with the intervention so enthusiastically, and commented on how happy and relaxed they were, and as a consequence family life was more peaceful.

Figure 4: similarities between the accounts: Barbara and Louise



## **4.5 Summary of Phase 2**

Analysing the superordinate themes within the groups identified areas of similarity and difference. Similarities were illustrated in the sub-group Nessa and Daisy in the superordinate themes of developing relationships and identity. In the sub-group Alice, Jenny and Sue similarities were identified in the superordinate themes of developing relationships (Alice and Sue) and setting boundaries (Alice and Jenny). In the sub-group Barbara and Louise similarities were identified in the superordinate themes engagement, emotional wellbeing and family cohesion.

## **4.6 Phase 3: Triangulation and Complementarity of Findings**

The primary aim of this research was to privilege the voice of Nessa and Daisy. In order to gain a richer understanding of their experiences, additional accounts of how they experienced the intervention from the perspective of the adults around them were included. Tri-angulation of the findings both within the groups and across groups revealed themes that are interrelated and symbiotic. During this phase of the analysis I found making sense of the data a complex and thought provoking process. I found the nuances within the individual accounts raised many questions for me to reflect upon. As I attempted to understand the lived experiences of the individual participants, through the perspectives of the other key stakeholders, more breadth and depth to capturing the 2 YP's lived experiences of EFI was added. I re-read the individual accounts many times and 'tested' the validity of my themes by considering if other themes were either more plausible or provided a more

psychological understanding. This process afforded me the ability to fully consider how the different participants experienced the impact of the intervention on each of the YP and how the different accounts held similar themes albeit with a nuanced understanding. This can be represented in terms of building blocks, where identification of the foundation stone can help the understanding and interconnectivity of subsequent blocks. For example, the ability to develop relationships, a theme present in Daisy, Nessa, Alice and Sue's accounts, is connected to developing knowledge and understanding, a theme present in Jenny's account, which in turn enhances confidence (Alice's account) and self-efficacy (Nessa's and Sue's accounts). Establishing safe and secure relationships develops emotional wellbeing (Barbara's and Louise's accounts) and inhibits the need to control (Daisy and Alice's accounts).

The additional analysis required for this final phase illuminated how the themes from the individual accounts are connected and can be subsequently organised into further super-ordinate themes. It is recognised that this moves away from the idiographic accounts, but in doing so the ability to make more sense of how Nessa and Daisy experienced the intervention is enhanced, as the complexities and inter-connectivity of the individual accounts are more fully depicted. The following diagram illustrates how the individual themes have been grouped into revised super-ordinate themes, with their 'subordinate themes' originating from the idiographic accounts.

Figure 5: Super-ordinate themes across groups

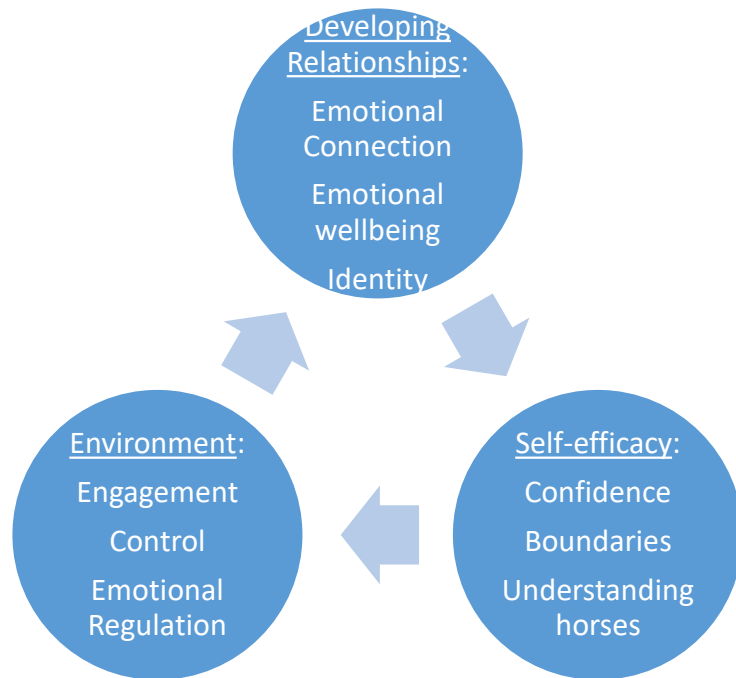


Figure 5.

#### 4.7 Findings Summary

Each individual participant's account was analysed separately and the super-ordinate themes identified. Subsequent to this analysis, the differences and similarities between the individual accounts were identified within groups and across groups. This analysis enabled the identification of three, inter-related super-ordinate themes of developing relationships, self-efficacy and environment across all participants.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Overview**

The chapter will involve reflecting on the findings in the context of the attachment and affect regulation models and theories discussed previously, and their application as theoretical frameworks to EFP interventions. The discussion will primarily focus on the super-ordinate themes developed from the individual participant narratives and the research studies discussed in the literature review. The implications of the findings of this research, with reference to previous research in this area, will be included. The strengths and limitations of this research will be presented followed by the implications of this research to Local Authority and EP practice.

### **5.2 Research Question 1: What are the experiences that young people have had in under-going an EFP intervention?**

The two young people that provided the data relevant to this question were Nessa and Daisy. Both had complex SEMH needs and had received a number of fixed exclusions and had difficulty engaging in mainstream education. Nessa had attended the Key Stage 3 PRU for a number of months and Daisy had only been attending for a number of weeks prior to the start of the intervention. The main themes that were identified were: emerging self-efficacy, developing relationships, identity and control. These themes will be discussed with reference to the research question through the

lens of attachment and affect regulation theories and previous research into EFP interventions.

The narratives of Nessa and Daisy described how they were able to develop positive relationships with the horses and each other, as well as a growing awareness of their own individual sense of self and identity. The narratives described how they were able to communicate and interact positively with the horses, exhibiting a developed ability to understand the emotional states of the horses and to be able to emotionally regulate themselves in order to build a mutually beneficial relationship based on trust and co-operation.

### **5.2.1 Holding Environment**

The experiences related by Nessa and Daisy reflect how some of the central concepts of attachment theory correspond to the central features of an EFP intervention. Winnicott (1967) suggested that an infant would be able to develop a sense of their own self when their physical and psychological needs were sufficiently met via the 'holding environment'. The intervention afforded Nessa and Daisy the three aspects of the 'holding environment'. The arena where the intervention took place was experienced as a relaxing and non-threatening space, where they both felt safe and psychologically contained. The scaffolded support of the professionals facilitating the intervention enabled Nessa and Daisy to develop their own emotional awareness and regulation, which subsequently enabled them to extend their knowledge and exploration of the environment. Winnicott (1967) posited that

as a result of a sensitive and attuned carer the infant would be able to make independent discoveries about their environment and gain confidence and trust in their own agency. Although horses cannot be regarded as carers, their presence in the therapeutic setting helped promote trust and a feeling of acceptance for Nessa and Daisy. It is possible that Nessa and Daisy had an experience of being their carers' and this might have fostered aspects of their relationship e.g. a reciprocal caring relationship.

A super-ordinate theme in Nessa's narrative was the development of self-efficacy as she was able to demonstrate her acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding of the horses. She became more confident and accomplished in handling the horses and independently completed tasks such as putting on the head-collar. Trust is an important element of the 'holding environment' and this was significant to Nessa, as at first she was fearful of the horses and did not want to get hurt, but this subsided and she was able to get physically close to the horses and groom them. Her ability to be assertive was rewarded by the horses who subsequently allowed her to lead and direct them.

The safety and security of the environment allowed Daisy to be her authentic self and enjoy the sense of freedom that this afforded her. Both Nessa and Daisy reported enjoying the feeling of being next to, leaning over and grooming the horses affording them proprioceptive feedback as well as experiencing in their bodies and minds the feeling of being emotionally held.

This concurs with the findings of Vidrine *et al.*, (2002) who suggested that the experience of developing trust in a large and mobile animal not to hurt you promotes a feeling confidence and emotional well-being which align with the concepts of 'holding' and 'handling' of attachment theory. It is possible that Nessa and Daisy experienced the 'holding' effect of the horses, which allowed them to become more confident and relaxed, as their sense of trust in the horses developed.

The intervention produced strong and difficult emotions in Nessa and Daisy that they needed to manage in order to successfully interact with the horses. Both were frustrated when one of the horses would not easily comply with their wishes; Daisy found this initially particularly difficult as she desired to be the 'boss'. However, both Nessa and Daisy devised strategies to overcome their difficult emotions which enabled them to continue to positively interact with the horses. Winnicott (1967) argued that it was important for individual's to experience some level of frustration to enable them to develop tolerance and emotional self-regulation. In the intervention the horses were the medium through which Nessa and Daisy could safely develop their ability to hold on to difficult emotions and develop strategies to emotionally self-regulate.

Furthermore, (Bachi,2013; Frame, 2006; Karol, 2007) suggest that the physical setting of EFP interventions is an integral part of the process, representing safety and security, as the natural environment can promote a



sense of tranquillity and calm. Burgon (2011) in her ethnographic study suggested that the natural environment of the setting was highly significant to the participants, which together with the horses, promoted a sense of calm and emotional well-being. In this study, this was emphasised in Sue's (PRU staff member) narrative as she felt the relaxing effect of the setting and described it as non-threatening, suggesting that the notion of a 'holding environment' extended to include her within the therapeutic process.

### **5.2.2 Affect Mirroring**

Over the course of the intervention both Nessa and Daisy developed their ability to positively interact with the horses. Their narratives record how they both learnt to modify their interactions with the horses to facilitate more successful outcomes. How the horses reacted to them guided Nessa and Daisy to develop attuned behaviours that the horses responded to positively. Horses are highly sensitive to 'others' in their environment and therefore have an instinctive propensity to constantly sense, react and respond to emotional expressions of other animals or humans in their surroundings, which align to the concept of affect mirroring (McCormick and McCormick, 1997). In the first session, Daisy was able to demonstrate emergent attunement skills such as being attentive to the horses and she was rewarded by the horses who showed interest in what she was doing, whereby they would stand and watch her. However, Daisy reported that it was important for her to be the 'boss' and although she was 'comfortable being kind' it was important for her to be the leader of the horses. However the horses did not respond positively to her urgency to control them and either moved away from her or refused to follow her. This reflects the

findings of Henry *et al.*, (2005) who reported that when confronted by individuals who had negative feelings towards them, or looked hostile, the horses' heart rate in the experimental group increased, indicating that they felt anxious and therefore unwilling to be close to those individuals.

Daisy was able to articulate what she experienced, describing the horses as similar to her; one was feisty and the other was stubborn. Daisy initially struggled with the horses being non-compliant and she would become frustrated which resulted in the horses keeping out of her way. A turning point came when one of the horses was displaying quite wild behaviour and running around the arena, and even at one point went to kick the other horse. This seemed to resonate with Daisy who went forward talking very quietly in an attempt to calm the horse down, and after a few minutes she was successful. In that interaction, Daisy had successfully employed a successful strategy to calm the anxious horse by demonstrating the ability to provide attuned behaviours such as relaxed body language, speaking with a quiet voice calling the horse by name and maintaining eye contact, that enabled the horse to relax. There had been times in the preceding sessions when Daisy had become frustrated when the horses reacted negatively to her attempts to control them in an un-attuned and discordant manner. As she adapted her behaviour and way of handling the horses to gain a more mutually beneficial response, she was able to respond to them in a more attuned way and develop a more co-operative and congruent relationship with them. Daisy became less concerned with being the 'boss' and demonstrated more attuned behaviours such as contributing to mutually

beneficial interactions such as grooming or running with the horses. She realised that the horses were responding to her emotional state and when she was calm they responded better to her. In her narrative she comments on how it felt to just stand close to the horses. Siegel (1999) describes this as 'to feel felt' as internal feelings are reflected back. This afforded Daisy the confirmation of her 'being' and gave her the sense of freedom that she expressed in her narrative.

Nessa reflected in her narrative how she gained confidence in handling the horses as she developed her ability to communicate with them and recognised that her feelings of calm and relaxation were mutually experienced by the horses. The value of horses in the therapeutic setting is often reported for possessing the ability to provide accurate and responsive emotional feedback (Bachi, 2013; Burgon, 2011; Dell *et al.*, 2011; Ewing *et al.*, 2007, Frederick *et al.*, 2015; Hauge *et al.*, 2015; Ho *et al.*, 2017; Holmes *et al.*, 2011; Pendry *et al.*, 2014; Trotter *et al.*, 2008) in a manner that is beyond the human therapist. More recent research by McComb *et al.*, (2016); Proops *et al.*, (2018); Smith *et al.*, (2018) demonstrated that horses possess an innate ability to accurately read and react to human behaviours and emotions. The ability to scaffold affect or emotional regulate, correlates with the notion suggested by Winnicott (1967) that caregivers, by providing emotionally attuned behaviours, allow the infant to establish a visual and auditory representation of their own internal emotional state, enabling the capacity for the infant to 'see' their own feelings.

### 5.2.3 Mentalising and Reflective functioning

Nessa and Daisy demonstrated some ability to offer explanations of their own behaviour and that of the horses, together with an awareness of the mental states of themselves and the horses. Therefore they were able to make and use mental representations of their own and others' emotional states to help modulate and interpret their own and the feelings of others (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002). As Nessa and Daisy developed their relationship with the horses and each other they articulated how they believed the horses might be feeling or they gave explanations as to why the horses were behaving in a certain way. For example, Daisy felt that the horses might be lonely, and Nessa expressed that she thought the horses were happy when they were being groomed.

The biggest challenge that both Nessa and Daisy faced was when they attempted to get one of the horses to move and participate in the activity that they had devised. At first they both felt that the horse was just stubborn and this negatively impacted on both Nessa's and Daisy's interaction with the horse. However, when Nessa developed her assertiveness skills she was able to reflect that the horse may not be stubborn, but was responding to Nessa's lack of confidence and inability to be 'herd' leader. Nessa developed her thinking to understand that the horse required her to be confident before it would follow her. Daisy's favourite interaction with the horses was to run along-side one of them, sensing that one of the horses would be happy and willing to co-operate with her. Both Nessa and Daisy were able to gauge and

reflect on the horse's reactions and modulate their own behaviours to achieve their individual goals.

The intervention also gave them the space to reflect on the mental states of each other and develop their relationship. Nessa was able to understand when Daisy needed help, which Daisy was able to accept, as she could recognise that she needed Nessa's assistance and that it was well intentioned. Additionally, Nessa reflected on her ability to communicate with the horses by 'just thinking it'. This illustrates how she was able to sense the willingness of the horse to co-operate and to communicate her wishes by exhibiting appropriate body language and using non-verbal communication. Fonagy et al., (2002) suggested that mentalisation facilitates social collaboration and well-functioning groups. The intervention provided Nessa and Daisy with the environment that developed their social interaction skills by using mentalisation and reflective functioning. They exhibited an enhanced sense of self, emotional regulation, body awareness and connection to outcome as they developed their relationship with the horses and their understanding of each other. The horses provided non-judgemental feedback that enabled them to explore and reflect on their experiences which facilitated this process. Similar findings were reported by Ewing *et al.*, (2007); Hauge *et al.*, (2015); Ho *et al.*, (2017); Pendry *et al.*, (2014); Trotter *et al.*, (2008). These studies reported increases in social competence, acceptance and perceived social support within the intervention group. Central to the theory developed from attachment theory by Fonagy *et al.*, (2002), is that individual's attachment mechanisms are responsive to context and

developed via social experience. The ability to think about another's mental state, reflect and modulate behaviour is an essential human skill that facilitates positive and co-operative social interaction.

### **5.3 Research Question 2: what are the experiences that the professionals have had in facilitating and observing an EFP intervention and what sense did they make of the young people's experience?**

The professionals relevant to this question are the two EAGALA trained professionals who facilitated the intervention; Alice a mental health specialist and Jenny an equine specialist. Sue's narrative, the member of staff from the PRU who accompanied Nessa and Daisy to the intervention is also included in this section. The main themes identified were: developing relationships, control, confidence, boundaries, developing understanding of horse behaviour, emotional regulation, emerging self-efficacy, environment and emotional connection. The aim of this research was to engage a range of participants to tri-angulate the information from the experiences of the young people participating in the intervention. As such the discussion drawn from the narratives of the professionals who facilitated and the staff member who observed the intervention will be presented to augment the previous detailed discussion in relation to the first research question. The intervention was dependent on the therapeutic knowledge and experience of the professional facilitating it (Wilson, 2012). In an EFP intervention two practitioners are needed (Moreau & McDaniel, 2010); an equine specialist to oversee the

welfare of the horses, to ensure the safety of those present and to note significant moments of interaction between the horses and Nessa and Daisy, who in this study was Jenny. The trained mental health specialist, was Alice, a Local Authority Educational Psychologist.

### **5.3.1 Holding environment**

Bowlby (1988) stated that the role of the therapist was to attempt to maintain a supportive and secure position in the working relationship in order to facilitate new ways of thinking and feeling in place of unconscious reactions and expectations. Alice and Jenny were responsible for ensuring Nessa and Daisy felt safe throughout the intervention. As a result of their difficulties engaging with their educational settings, Nessa and Daisy had encountered many professionals with whom they did not build trust. Engaging with the intervention afforded them the opportunity to meet unfamiliar adults, who were also professionals connected to the education of young people, and form trusting relationships with them. The unique natural setting in which the intervention occurred and the inclusion of horses assisted in the promotion of building rapport and trust (Bachi, 2013; Fine, 2015; Levinson & Mallon, 1997). The narratives of Alice and Jenny identified that Nessa and Daisy engaged well, suggesting that they felt safe and were able to trust Alice and Jenny. Alice commented that Nessa sought less validation from both Daisy and herself as she became more trusting of the environment and of her own abilities.

### **5.3.2 Affect mirroring**

Alice and Jenny facilitated the interactions between Nessa, Daisy and the horses. Bachi (2013) posited that it was necessary for the therapist/s to support the clients to verbally process the horse mirror affect and provide sensitive and encouraging feedback. This can be particularly necessary when the behaviour exhibited by the horse may be misunderstood or misinterpreted. A common event occurs when the horse walks away from the client and its action is misinterpreted as the horse not liking the client. An example of this was reported when Nessa said that the horse did not like her because it walked away from her. In this instance it was essential that Nessa was supported by Alice and Jenny who facilitated her thinking to explore other explanations and therefore maintain her sense of security and trust.

### **5.3.3 Mentalising and Reflective functioning**

Mentalising refers to the ability to understanding and interpreting feelings, and the capacity to correlate these feelings to behaviours relates to the concept of reflective functioning (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002). Alice's narrative highlights how Nessa and Daisy were able to discuss how they thought the horses might be feeling, and attributed emotions to match their behaviours. As they became more accomplished and confident in describing to Alice and Jenny how they thought the horses might be feeling and adapted their behaviour accordingly, the horses were more willing to remain with Nessa and Daisy and co-operate with their demands. Sue commented that Nessa and Daisy worked well together and that they appeared to have formed a



positive relationship over the duration of the intervention; she noted instances of co-operation and tolerance between the two, reporting that she had not witnessed similar behaviour at the PRU. This suggests that the intervention facilitated social collaboration and co-operation between Nessa and Daisy, which Fonagy *et al.*, (2002) argues that mutually beneficial social interactions is an emergent property of mentalisation and reflective functioning and necessary for individuals to emotionally develop.

#### **5.4 Research Question 3: How did the parents of the young people experience and make sense of the EFP intervention?**

Barbara and Louise were the two parents that contributed to the data for this section. The main themes identified were: engagement, emotional wellbeing and family cohesion. The parent participants of this research experienced the intervention vicariously as their only contact and knowledge of it was via either observed behavioural changes or details verbally recounted by Nessa or Daisy. The two parental narratives contained similar themes and relate to the aspects of attachment theory previously discussed.

##### **5.4.1 Holding Environment**

Barbara and Louise commented on how their daughters actively engaged with the intervention and how this alleviated their own feelings of anxiety. This gives a sense of how they felt contained, enabling Barbara and Louise to feel safe and secure. It suggests that the outcomes from the intervention expanded outside the boundaries of the setting and positively impacted on

the lives of Nessa and Daisy's families. Bachi (2013) suggests that in an EFP intervention the holding environment is expanded and the narratives of Barbara and Louise suggest that it may extend to the family members of the clients.

#### **5.4.2 Affect mirroring**

Louise commented that she felt that the intervention would have a positive impact on Daisy as the contact with the horses was self-directed and that the horses could be trusted to be authentic. Louise recognised the ability for horses to mediate emotional regulation and facilitate an emergent sense of self-awareness.

#### **5.4.3 Mentalising and Reflective functioning**

Barbara spoke of Nessa's newly acquired 'horse communication' skills and how well she was able to transfer these skills when she met an unfamiliar horse. Louise spoke of how the dynamic at home had changed and how Daisy had become more tolerant of her younger sister. The ability to engage in positive social interactions relates to Fonagy *et al.*, (2002) assertion that mentalisation and reflective functioning are integral to emotional development and social co-operation.

### **5.5 Tri-angulation of the findings across all research questions.**

This study adopted a multi-perspectival design in order to augment the privileged 'voices' of Nessa and Daisy. Tri-angulation of the data provides an opportunity to identify areas of similarity and difference, which can assist in understanding the phenomenon being investigated (Robson, 1995). The multi-perspectival accounts contained many similarities and some differences. However, all themes were interconnected and augmented the accounts of Nessa and Daisy, providing a coherent and detailed rich picture of how the intervention was experienced by all the participants.

The three super-ordinate themes, together with their associated sub-ordinate themes, were:

- Developing relationships: emotional connection, emotional wellbeing, identity
- Self-efficacy: confidence, personal boundaries, understanding horses
- Environment: engagement, control, emotional regulation

These super-ordinate themes identify with the major concepts of attachment and affect regulation theories. The major concepts associated with attachment and affect regulation theories are contained within the three super-ordinate themes, which have been previously discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter. It is interesting to note that positive outcomes were felt by the adults who were indirectly experiencing the intervention, i.e. the member of PRU staff and parents. Sue spoke about how she experienced a sense of calm and tranquillity when she was at the setting where the intervention took place. Barbara and Louise spoke of their anxiety

levels reducing as Nessa and Daisy engaged so positively with the intervention, as well as family life being more settled and calm. This extension of the benefits of the intervention was reported by Hemingway *et al.*, (2015) which explored the experiences of young offenders attending an equine facilitated learning intervention. They reported the 'ripple effect' on the wing by other prisoners and prison officers who noticed that when the offenders returned to the wing from the intervention, it was quieter and there was less aggression exhibited by the offenders.

The existing literature reports similar findings to this current study. The existing studies did not apply an attachment or affect regulation theoretical approach to the research but all reported positive outcomes with concepts associated with these psychological theories, such as improved social communication and interactions skills (Bachi *et al.*, 2012; Burgon, 2011; Dell *et al.*, 2011; Ewing *et al.*, 2007; Frederick *et al.*, 2015; Hauge *et al.*, 2015; Ho *et al.*, 2017 Holmes *et al.*, 2011; Pendry *et al.*, 2014; Trotter *et al.*, 2008). Burgon (2011) and Trotter *et al.*, (2008) reported increases in confidence and other aspects of self-efficacy. Bachi *et al.*, (2012); Burgon (2011); Ho *et al.*, (2017) and Trotter *et al.*, (2008) reported increases in self-control and emotional regulation. It has been previously discussed in Chapter 2 that due to the different approaches and delivery of EFIs it is not possible to make direct comparisons between studies, however areas of commonality exist amongst the findings. These findings also share connections to the concepts of attachment and affect regulation theories and suggest that application of

this psychological framework to EFIs, enhance the theoretical basis and address some of the gaps between practice and knowledge (Bachi, 2013).

## **5.6 Evaluation of this research**

### **Strengths**

The findings suggest that some of the key components of EFP align with the key concepts of attachment and affect regulation theories. Therefore, application of attachment theory-based perspectives to EFP is a useful psychological framework to inform and guide practice (Bachi, 2013). The concepts of a secure base and place of safety through the provision of a holding environment, affect mirroring and mentalisation and reflective functioning can provide a theoretical framework for EFP interventions. The themes identified in the findings have relevance and connect to the main concepts of attachment and affect regulation theories. The link between these concepts and the inclusion of horses in the therapeutic environment demonstrate their connection to the contribution of positive psychological outcomes (Bachi, 2013). Nessa and Daisy, and their wider network of adults benefitted from the EFP intervention in ways that can be aligned to attachment and affect regulation theories.

The primary aim of this research was to privilege the voice of the young people taking part in the EFP intervention. Previous research had not attempted this, particularly in the UK, and therefore provides initial and valuable information about how the young people experienced and made

sense of the EFP intervention. In addition, to augment the information gathered from the young people, the study was multi-perspectival, gathering the experiences of the professionals who facilitated the intervention, a member of staff from the young people's educational setting and their parents, with the lens focused on how the YP experienced the intervention. The intervention was of relatively short duration, yet significant changes to perception and development of self-awareness was achieved. In addition, a notable strength of the intervention was that the mental health professional who facilitated it was an EP with a wealth of experience working with 'at risk' adolescents, and another was having Sue accompany Nessa and Daisy to the intervention. This afforded her a stronger connection to the intervention that enabled her to experience it first-hand; her account reflects how she directly benefitted from the intervention. It also provided an opportunity for Sue to observe Nessa and Daisy in a different context where they interacted with each other more positively and demonstrated an enhanced ability to emotionally regulate. Sue was able to report her observations to other members of staff, and in doing so, helped shift the narrative about Nessa and Daisy to a more positive one.

It was an exploratory, qualitative study which employed a unique mix of qualitative research tools to ensure the voices of the young people were accurately and authentically gathered. It was the first time that the 'Mosaic approach' (Clark & Moss, 2011) was utilised to combine a variety of research tools that were analysed using IPA. This enabled an in-depth and thorough analysis of the data that provided a coherent and detailed account of the

participants' lived experiences. The use of these research tools can be replicated in the future to elicit the voice of CYP who may have difficulty and anxiety about verbalising an in-depth verbal account about their experiences or feelings.

In addition to privileging the voice, I intended that the intervention would be an empowering experience for the young people in contrast to the often disempowering experiences they may have had within their educational settings. Chandra & Minkovitz (2007) argue that in order for an intervention to be successful young people must engage and have the motivation to work towards future goals. The nature of experiential learning lends itself to engagement and is useful in engaging populations, such as 'at risk' CYP, who may find engaging in a highly clinical environment a challenge (DoH, 2015). EFP interventions are self-directed and offer experiential learning opportunities, which afford the YP an opportunity to set the agenda and pace of the sessions, which fosters engagement and a sense of empowerment. The findings identified that both Nessa and Daisy engaged enthusiastically with the intervention. Furthermore, as a result of participating in the intervention they developed a more positive relationship with the members of staff at the PRU, most notably the member of staff who accompanied them to the intervention and the Head of the PRU.

### 5.6.1 Limitations

This study offers some evidence to support the application of attachment and affect regulation based theories as a relevant framework to EFP interventions. However, the facilitation of the intervention utilised additional psychological perspectives. To assist in the experiential learning process, Alice employed aspects of mindfulness, (Goleman, 2003), cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT, Beck, 1976) and solution focussed therapy. The employment of a variety of psychological perspectives supported the facilitation process as it allowed for 'in the moment' flexible responsiveness. Mindfulness and CBT techniques were successful in bringing into conscious awareness to Nessa and Daisy how their bodies felt and recognition of what they were feeling. This process assisted in engagement in the intervention and facilitated Nessa and Daisy to hypothesise about what the horses might be feeling and thinking. Adopting a solution focussed approach that utilised the 'scaling' technique facilitated Nessa's ability to be assertive with the horses, as it helped her recognise where she was and where she wanted to be. Concepts from person centred psychology (Rogers, 1965) were also relevant to the intervention as it was incumbent on Alice and Jenny to be genuine, accepting and empathetic when working with Nessa, Daisy and the horses. The findings were reported under the framework of attachment and affect regulation theoretical approaches and so it must be acknowledged that a different nuance to the data may have been reported if considered from a different psychological perspective. However, it was the relational components and processes that underpinned this intervention regardless of the therapeutic techniques applied.



A criticism of qualitative methods is the lack of generalisation to the wider population, and this is relevant to this study. IPA seeks to explore the lived experiences of small homogenous groups. Collecting idiographic accounts provides insights into a given phenomenon but cannot be applied to the wider population. The choice of psychological framework for this research was chosen as it was thought to best deliver the rich data required to meet the aims of this exploratory study, and so therefore, does not claim to be representative across the wider population. However, Smith *et al.*, (2009) argue that there is a case for the development of phenomenologically-informed models to synthesise multiple analyses from small studies and single cases. It is therefore hoped that findings gained from this study can be utilised to inform a wider population.

It is also acknowledged that the young people who participated self-selected and therefore may be positively biased. Furthermore, interventions with horses are not suitable for everyone as some people may have health conditions, such as allergies, which make any form of equine intervention unsuitable or inappropriate. It is also true that some young people may not like horses or being outdoors, with the associated likelihood that they may get dirty. This was a contributory factor in the recruitment process for this study and one young person dropped out after the consent process as they were concerned that they would get too dirty. It was unclear whether it was the young person themselves having this concern, or whether it was a response to parental concerns. It is therefore important to provide sensitive and thorough briefing through-out the recruitment process to ensure that any

concerns or issues are fully covered and any fears allayed. This was relevant to this research as Barbara was anxious when it came to completing the waiver form. I therefore, ensured that she had the opportunity to discuss fully her concerns with me and reflect on them before completing the waiver.

The nature of EFIs prevent them being replicated or reproduced exactly, and therefore, results in a different mix of interactive factors that cannot be directly compared. However, this is also recognised as a strength as the intervention is individualised to match the needs and pace of the YP.

Access to horses and the EFP interventions are limited and therefore accessibility and opportunities to benefit are more scarce compared to other alternative SEMH interventions. Funding is an additional obstacle as staffing costs for two EFP practitioners together with the associated costs of the hire of a suitable setting and horses mean it has a considerably higher hourly cost than traditional talk therapies, although applications for funding can be made via various charities such as the National Lottery Community Fund. However a recent paper (Hemingway, 2018) suggested that the average cost of equine intervention was considerably below that of the cost of a CAMHS referral for one year. Moreover, Hemingway stated that CAMHS themselves, referred more than one third of the young people to an equine assisted intervention run by a charity in the South East of England, as they were not engaging or responding to the CAMHS talk-based interventions. This

warrants further exploration of equine assisted interventions being made available to young people requiring social and emotional support.

If I were to conduct similar research in the future I would make some alterations to how I collected the data. The Mosaic approach and the tools utilised produced good results but it may prove to be beneficial if the CYP were given a camera and introduced to the idea of writing a journal at the earliest stage of the intervention. This may capture more detail and insight into their experiences. Although I was unsuccessful in having some of the sessions video recorded I believe this would further support rich data collection as the videos could be played back to the CYP to demonstrate 'significant moments' and celebrate success. This method was successfully utilised by Hemmingway *et al.*, (2015) and it was reported that it also assisted in supporting the participants' recounting their experiences. Inclusion of additional members of teaching staff from the PRU and also the mainstream schools would add to the multi-perspectival approach and provide an additional stream of data that would add to the robustness and rigour of the findings.

## **5.7 Suggestions for future research**

A challenge faced by research into equine assisted/facilitated interventions is the difficulty establishing areas of standardisation due to sample sizes, varying populations within studies, variety of research designs and methods (Lentini & Knox, 2009; Smith-Osborne & Selby, 2010)). There is a lack of

good quality qualitative research into equine assisted/facilitated interventions, however, the existing, predominately quantitative, studies do report similar themes of psychosocial benefits to those presented in this study ((Bachi, 2013; Burgon, 2011; Dell *et al.*, 2011; Ewing *et al.*, 2007, Frederick *et al.*, 2015; Hauge *et al.*, 2015; Holmes *et al.*, 2011; Pendry *et al.*, 2014; Trotter *et al.*, 2008; Ho *et al.*, 2017). It would be beneficial to have a wider contribution of qualitative studies with similar populations, employing similar qualitative methods and research tools. A useful addition to the evidence base would be the inclusion of a follow up element to be undertaken so that the longer term impact and effect can be understood. The Equine Assisted and Facilitated Practitioners Network (EAFPN) as well as the associated bodies such as EAGALA, LEAP and The Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin are useful contacts to investigate current or possible future research projects.

Researching the experiences of different cohorts of CYP is another area to be developed. A limited number of studies exist which explore the use or impact of EFIs across a broad spectrum of CYP. Studies that report positive findings in regard to the use of EFIs for CYP with autism, particularly in relation to social communication skills include: Anderson & Meints, (2016); Bass *et al.*, (2009); Kern *et al.*, (2011) Memishevikj & Hodzhikl (2010). CYP with attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have been reported to benefit from EFI, Cuypers *et al.*, (2011) reported improvements in behaviour and an increase in overall quality of life. Liefoghe, (2020) suggests the utility of EFIs with CYP who have experienced bullying and self-harm.

There is also a growing number of studies reporting positive outcomes for adults suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Arnon *et al.*, (2020) evaluated the impact of an EFI on a group of military veterans and reported positive levels of engagement and reduced levels of anxiety amongst the participants. Previous research by Yorke *et al.*, (2010) reported positive outcomes for CYP recovering from trauma and this suggests the utility of similar programmes for Looked After Children (LAC) or other CYP who may have experienced adverse childhood experiences resulting in them experiencing trauma. The leading CYP trauma team at Beacon House advocate for a simple sequence of intervention and support for CYP experiencing trauma. The three steps reflect the processes undertaken in EFP, namely the environment to support emotional regulation, followed by the ability to relate and connect through an attuned and sensitive relationship. The third element achieved with the horse as a metaphor, affords the CYP the opportunity to reflect, learn and articulate.

### **5. 8 Implications for the Local Authority (LA)**

An aim of this research was to provide the LA with additional knowledge of the application of an equine facilitated intervention to inform future practice. Recent years have seen the increase in demand for social and emotional support for CYP. More emphasis has been placed on educational settings to become more involved in supporting CYPs with social and emotional difficulties (Green Paper, DoH/DfE, 2017). The Care Quality Commission (CQC, 2018) highlighted the need for better joined up services and for young

people to be at the heart of decisions. The report stated that the quality of treatments is variable and CYP find it desperately hard to get any help at all and welcomed the Ofsted initiative to assess how schools support CYP SEMH needs as part of their inspection. EFIs are frequently offered as a last resort when other interventions have failed, it would be preferable to adopt an early intervention approach to help prevent the escalation of SEMH needs of CYP. This research adds to the evidence base that for more complex SEMH needs, LA's could consider EFIs as part of their Local Offer.

Currently the referral process is ad hoc and without clear guidelines or criteria. It is important for the LA, supported by EPs, to establish a clear referral pathway and ensure all relevant teams within the vulnerable learners, children and families divisions have access to relevant information and guidelines. Given the reported increase in the SEMH needs of CYP and the challenges accessing LA and CAMH services (CAMHs) review (2019), I suggest that it would also be beneficial to have a mechanism whereby relevant teams are notified of a referral and subsequent attendance. A multi-agency approach and pathway is necessary and should include all relevant professionals involved in the referral and delivery of SEMH interventions to CYP.

### **5.9 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)**

EPs have a significant role working with educational settings and community to promote and sustain quality assured social and emotional wellbeing

practices and interventions. In order to fulfil this requirement EPs contribute towards research to extend the evidence base around psychological therapies that enhance social and emotional wellbeing (British Psychological Society, 2016). Existing knowledge of equine assisted/facilitated interventions is limited amongst EPs and the extent to which these therapies are used in LAs throughout the UK is unknown. Anecdotal evidence from a centre located in South East England suggests that most of the referrals come via social care and youth justice teams.

This research has developed the evidence base for EFIs, and an initial implication from this for EPs would be to provide dissemination and training to increase EP professional knowledge around the evidence base for EFIs. Information for materials to use in this process could be assimilated from this research to include definition of EFIs, existing research, research findings and populations for whom EFIs have been proven to be beneficial.

EPs can subsequently consider further exploration and utility of equine assisted interventions in their practice, particularly when cultivating multi-disciplinary team work. The Green paper (2017) advocated for the appointment of Mental Health Support Teams and an Education Mental Health Practitioner role. EPs are ideally placed to liaise with these professionals and use the findings of this research to extend the knowledge and understanding of EFP interventions, as EPs have a legitimate role in assessment and intervention in CYP SEMH needs (SEND Code of Practice,

DfE, 2015). The EP profession has been growing their offer of therapeutic intervention (Atkinson *et al.*, 2012; Delivering Psychological Therapies, BPS, 2016). EFIs could be considered to be an area that EPs can be trained in to deliver. This would enhance the interventions currently available and provide the essential quality assurance.

Additionally, this research highlighted the lack of coherence amongst the professionals involved in supporting the CYP. Dunsmuir & Hardy (2016) highlighted the need for the development of a clear after-care plan to be agreed with the CYP and the family at the end of an intervention, to ensure progress is maintained and to avoid relapse. It is therefore, necessary for the outcomes of the CYP attending an intervention to be disseminated amongst other professionals in order to provide optimum support and efficacy to the CYP.

EPs can be the bridge to provide the necessary support for CYP to strengthen and further reinforce their developing skills to ensure continued positive outcomes. The key concepts from attachment and affect regulation based theories; a holding environment, affect mirroring, mentalising and reflective functioning are frequently represented in many of the training programmes and advice that EPs offer to schools, teaching staff and parents. EPs are uniquely placed to support educators and parents in three main areas. The first, at a systemic level can deliver training programmes to enhance a whole school approach to help support CYP with SEMH needs,



for example; Trauma Informed School training that includes detailed explanations of how the brain develops and the importance of the limbic system, along with support strategies such as Emotion Coaching training that can be delivered as a separate whole school programme. Other relevant training would include the Key Adult Programme; this references the importance of a safe and secure holding environment, as well as other elements that complement the Trauma Informed training. At a group level EPs can modify existing training to use in group supervision sessions like ELSA to help inform and support staff who are working with CYP with emotional literacy difficulties. At an individual level, EPs can advise schools on what additional support material is available (for example the Hand Brain Model, Dan Siegel, (1999) and the Window of Tolerance or Brain Stem Calmers (Beacon House Resources, [www.beaconhouse.org.uk](http://www.beaconhouse.org.uk)) and appropriate strategies to further develop emergent skills acquired from attending an EFI. The key concept of providing a safe haven can be translated into the school environment by EPs co-producing with school staff the idea of a 'safe place' for the CYP to go to when they feel overwhelmed by strong emotions. In addition, identifying a key adult that the CYP can develop a trusting relationship with and can depend on to support them when they experience difficulties is recommended. This is something that is regularly included in EP consultation and statutory advice. The initial skills of affect mirroring can be further developed by the CYP supported by school provision of the Zones of Regulation intervention; development of mentalising and reflective functioning can be supported through the CYP attending an ELSA or similar programme.

Many EFIs offer some form of regular 'check in' session to maintain contact with CYP and to continue the progression of new skills and self-development. It is important for EPs to be part of this initiative and would help support the successful transition of CYP back into their mainstream or other educational setting. Working closely with school staff and families would help those around the CYP, understand the focus of the intervention and put in place relevant support. This could be extended further by linking up with school therapy teams and engaging more in working alongside those professionals who might be involved with the CYP. This would provide more consistency and enable the continuity of the therapeutic support. Additionally, the focus of the interventions are on the CYP and parents have little direct contact or involvement. EPs are ideally placed to provide support to the parents to bridge this gap, enabling a comprehensive and shared understanding between home and school, which may enhance the longevity of positive outcomes. If the family meet the criteria, the EP can facilitate support for the family from Beacon House via the parental/carer support programme.

Section 19 of the Children and Families Act (2014) states that LAs should have regard to the views and wishes of CYP. Palikara *et al.*, (2108) suggest that capturing the views and opinions of CYP is variable and often tokenistic. Central to the role of an EP is gaining a true representation the voice of the CYP and a key aim of this research was to ensure the experiences and views of the young people were the central focus. The 'mosaic approach' (Clark & Moss, 2011) was adapted to provide the necessary tools to privilege

the voice of the young people participating in this research. This approach can be replicated by EPs in their practice to gain the voices across a varied population of vulnerable young people who may find it difficult to express their strengths, difficulties, needs and desires to unfamiliar adults in a verbally articulate manner.

### **5.10 Implications for my own professional practice**

The research has influenced my own professional practice, particularly when working with CYP who have difficulty engaging with an unfamiliar adult. The focus on gaining an authentic 'voice' of the CYP that I meet and assess has become more acute. Often in the assessment process the CYP find themselves in a stressful or anxious situation and are expected to complete some form of assessment tool. For the assessment to be valuable it is essential that the CYP completes it as honestly and as openly as possible. My experience of gathering data from this research has helped me think about different ways of gathering information I might need to identify areas of need or difficulty for the CYP. I draw from the Mosaic approach and adapt my methods as necessary to ameliorate any constraints or demands of an assessment. I also take into consideration the environment where any assessment takes place and if appropriate conduct it away from a classroom environment.

The study highlighted how experiential and outdoor learning can be incorporated into educational settings to assist CYP develop skills,

particularly their social communication and interaction skills. It is a topic that I explore with school staff and parents in consultation to identify areas where it can be utilised in some form of intervention. In some schools this has resulted in school staff identifying areas of need and incorporating elements of experiential learning into outdoor activities such as Forest School.

### **5.11 Reflections**

I kept a reflective diary throughout the research process to record my ideas, areas to explore further, thoughts and reflections. I found this a useful exercise as it helped me to both remember and reflect upon the rationale for the decisions I made. This research gave me the opportunity to experience an EFI as it was delivered over a 6 week period. I thoroughly enjoyed conducting this study and having the opportunity to meet and be inspired by EFP practitioners and learn from their knowledge and experience. I found the experience of watching Nessa and Daisy progress over the weeks uplifting and thought provoking. It was encouraging to see how they both were able to develop and maintain their relationships with member of staff at the PRU. I also found it rewarding that both Nessa and Daisy were always very pleased to see me when I visited the PRU; it appears that due to our prolonged contact and their enjoyment of the intervention they have developed a level of trust in me. This has been demonstrated when Daisy requested that I attend her transition meeting to her new educational setting. She felt that because I knew the 'real Daisy' I would be able to advocate for her.

I enjoyed conducting an IPA study but I underestimated how long it takes to transcribe and analyse each transcript. Smith *et al.*, (2009) suggest that it takes approximately two days to transcribe and analyse each transcript, which at the time I thought was an over estimation, but the process not only took me the approximate two days as suggested, it also was over an extended period of time. This was necessary as I needed the time to follow the six steps suggested by Smith *et al.*, (2009) and allow time for reflection. After the initial analysis phase, I needed more time to go back and reflect on my initial thoughts and question my thinking; was there another more appropriate theme? Was I seeing what I wanted to see? Is it an accurate reflection and account of the participants' experience? I found this process time consuming but rewarding as I believe I made a good attempt at achieving a "phenomenological psychological attitude", (Finlay, 2008) and the themes identified present an authentic representation of the participants' lived experiences. If it was appropriate, I would employ IPA in future research that I might undertake.

The unstructured nature of the intervention was also an area that I found interesting and is something that I explore with school, particularly at the PRU where many students find it challenging to follow rigid rules and activities. This is work in progress but small steps have been made to allow some students more freedom in what activities they chose to help them settle and engage with their education.

The research afforded me the opportunity to engage in an intervention that I had not experienced myself before. It was thought provoking and impacted on my practice, and is an area that I hope to pursue in the future. It undoubtedly helped establish a trusting relationship with Nessa and Daisy and is one that continues to develop as I continue my work as link EP at the PRU. My aim would be to train to become a certified EAGALA professional and establish a local practice.

## **5.12 Conclusion**

The NHS long term plan (Department for Health, (DfH), 2018) suggested a range of strategies to provide support for vulnerable CYP. A key component was to build a wider range of evidence based responses designed to protect and promote CYP's mental health and emotional wellbeing. It called for an early intervention approach to be adopted to prevent emergent difficulties from escalating into a later crisis. Adolescents are often uncomfortable engaging with a highly clinical service and less traditional forms of intervention may be more successful ("Future in Mind, DoH, 2015).

"Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper" (DoH/DfE, 2017) placed more responsibility on educational settings to address the SEMH needs of CYP. Recent figures from DfE (2019) report an upward trend for permanent and fixed exclusions, with behavioural problems being cited as the single largest reason cited for the exclusions. This indicates that the SEMH needs of CYP are largely unmet.

Equine facilitated interventions incorporate a wide variety of programmes involving people and horses to address a broad spectrum of needs. EFIs use equine-facilitated activities as a tool for self-development and education. The interventions are tailored to help develop non-verbal communication, assertiveness, creative thinking, problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, relationship skill, confidence and resilience. The current study offers a distinct contribution to the qualitative literature regarding EFP interventions by employing IPA to explore the lived experiences of the young people who participated in it. The study provided an in-depth understanding and insight into the lived experiences of the EFP from the perspective of the CYP. This was further strengthened by adopting a multi-perspectival approach which triangulated the data from the experiences of the two professionals who facilitated the intervention, a member of PRU staff and two parents.

The design and research tools were adapted to incorporate the Mosaic approach with the aim to privilege the 'voice' of the young people.

Attachment and affect regulation theories were proposed as a theoretical framework to guide and inform EFP practice. The idiographic accounts offered insight into the lived experiences and subjective perspective of the participants. The presentation of findings preserved individual meanings as well as considering them within and across groups. Three super-ordinate themes were generated out of the similarities and differences across the groups. The three super-ordinate themes, with associated sub themes were:

- Developing relationships: emotional connection, emotional wellbeing, identity
- Self-efficacy: confidence, personal boundaries, understanding horses
- Environment: engagement, control, emotional regulation

The themes align to the concepts of a secure base and place of safety through the provision of a holding environment, affect mirroring and mentalisation and reflective functioning. It is therefore suggested that the application of attachment and affect regulation based theories provides a useful psychological framework to guide and inform EFP practice. The findings suggest that EFP interventions can assist in the support of CYP SEMH needs through the development of intra and interpersonal, relational processes.

The primary aims of this study have been achieved. The 'voices' of the CYP were privileged by adopting qualitative methodology that employed research tools developed from the Mosaic approach. This study therefore hopes to not only be a useful addition to an area lacking in research, but also to enable greater consideration of experiences of the CYP. It is hoped that this thesis supports the argument for the 'voice' of CYP to be placed at the heart of decision making when devising and implementing interventions to support SEMH needs. This thesis explores, and the most part confirms, the perceived value of EFP interventions to the CYP involved and also suggests that the benefits extend to their wider network of adults, such as teaching staff and parents.



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## **Appendices**

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## **Semi-structured Interview questions**

### **Start of the interview - Initial Procedure:**

- Introduction of myself, including aim of study.
- Go through information sheet.
- Check signed consent received and remind about right to withdraw at any time.
- Re-iterate confidentiality, anonymity, protection of data
- Permission for audio recording
- Procedure in the event of disclosing current concerns that may need to be shared
- Any questions

### **Finish of the interview:**

- Is there anything else you would like to mention that we have not covered? Is there anything else you would like to ask me? How have you found the experience of being interviewed? (recording stopped)
- Thank you and goodbye. Feel free to contact me if you have any more questions about the study. I will be in touch when I have completed the study and let you know what I found out. Thank you again.

### **1a) EAGALA practitioners:**

Can you tell me a little about your experiences of working with animals/horses in a therapeutic way - what lead to you training as an EAGALA practitioner?

What did the training entail? How long have you been working as an EAGALA practitioner? How well known or understood do you think equine facilitated learning/therapy is?

What aspects of your work as an EP help facilitate the equine interventions?

Can you tell me a little about your work with N and D? What were your initial thoughts when you started working with them? What did it feel like to be working with them – at the start and at the end?

What does your role as a facilitator involve?

What did you notice change for N and D over the course of the intervention?

How do you think they interacted with the horses, at the start and at the end?

How do you think they interacted with each other, at the start and at the end?

In what areas did you feel they benefitted the most from the intervention?

How do you interpret what you see as N and D, tell their story from session to session? What did you learn from N and D?

How do you think Nessa and Daisy benefitted from the intervention and what did that feel like for you?

**1b) Member of school staff:**

How long have you been working at the PRU? What aspects do you enjoy the most? How long have you known N and D?

Can you tell me a little about N and D? What do they like doing the most? Which activities do you like doing the most with them, and what does that feel like?

What do you know about equine facilitated interventions and what are you expecting?

Remembering back to the first session, can you tell me a little about how you think N and D were? What did you see them doing? And how well do you think they were coping?

Thinking about how N and D are with each other, are they the same towards each other here as they are at the PRU? In what ways are they different? How are they with you now? In what ways has that changed? What are they like back at the PRU?

Thinking about how N and D were in the first session to now, what has changed? How has that been for you?

What have you felt coming to the intervention each week? How would you describe it?

**1c) Parents:**

How has the last few weeks been with you? How has it been at home with x?

What do you know about equine facilitated interventions and what were you expecting?

What has x told you about the intervention? What has she talked about?

What aspects do you think she enjoyed the most? And what did she say about it? How did that make you feel?

How has she been with the family over the course of the intervention?

What do you think she has got out of the course, and how does that make you feel?

What changes, if any, have you seen with X over the last few weeks?

**Appendix 2: Steps of IPA for one participant (Nessa)**

- 2.1: Initial diary summary for one participant
- 2.2: Initial annotated interview transcript for one participant
- 2.3: Table of emergent themes for one participant
- 2.4: Table of super-ordinate themes with sub-ordinate themes for one participant

**Appendix 2.1: Initial diary summary for one participant (Nessa)**

After listening to the interview several times and transcribing I recorded my initial impressions in my research diary.

“Nessa appeared to be very excited about going to meet the horses and spoke about her grandfather’s experience with horses and how much he liked to be around them. This appeared to be an important relationship for her, as he was the only family member that she spoke about. She seemed to be both excited to meet the horses and apprehensive approaching them for the first time. She talked about watching to see what D was doing and copying her. Developing her skills with the horses was important to Nessa, she independently researched how to communicate with them and she talked of how she had improved over the weeks, this suggests a growing confidence and belief in herself? How she helped D was important; she helped D put on the head-collar, something she couldn’t do at the beginning. How she and D got on better was significant for her, D let her help her and things were calm”.

Appendix 2.2: Initial Noting on transcript for on participant: Nessa

				Initial Noting:
				-descriptive (describing the content or subject)
				-linguistic (way language is used)
				-Conceptual (reflections knowledge of psychological theory)
Emergent Themes	1	Nessa		
	2	CS: Hi, so we're going to have to chat about being with the horses, have you been around horses much before?		
	3			
	4			
No previous knowledge	5	N: No, not really	hesitant, non committed	
	6			
	7	CS: What sort of animals do you like?		
	8			
Familiar with cats/dogs. Thinks will like horses	9	N: I like cats and dogs, and horses, I think	pause, reflective moment - not sure if will like horses. Internal conversation	
	10			
	11	CS: Can you remember how you were feeling when we first went to the stables?		
	12			
Difficulty describing feelings	13	N: Umm, umm, dunno, umm, good	Some level of confusion? not sure how to respond, not stopped to remember - but overall positive	
	14			
	15	CS: What sort of things did you think you might be doing?		
	16			
Not sure what to expect	17	N: Umm, maybe cleaning where they live? Dunno really	not sure what to expect, new situation, Dunno really - not thought too much about what she might be doing	
	18			
	19	CS: Ok, what was it like for you when you first went in to meet the horses?		
	20			
Keedy activity, knowing what to do	21	N: OK, didn't do much, didn't know what to do	reflecting on lack of organised activities - left to own devices. Self-agency	
	22			
	23	CS: Oh I see, what did you do, when you went in to meet the horses?		
	24			
Unclear what to do, copied D.	25	N: Umm, just sort of walked towards them, I didn't know what to do, umm, they looked friendly, then following example, not		
	26	I stroked one of them, so I did too.	initiating contact herself, lack of agency.	
	27			
	28	CS: Oh, and what did that feel like?		
	29			
Feels good, connection, unfamiliar	30	N: OK, they're soft and warm, and I dunno, the breathe on you, feels funny	Incomplete sentences, trying to find way to describe the feeling	
	31			
	32	CS: What do you think the horses might have felt?		
	33			

34 N: I dunno, they seem to be ok, umm, they stood still, they just stood there and I patted them  
 35 We didn't really do much, we patted them and H said we should get some food, so we looked for  
 36 something for them to eat. We asked what they eat, A said maybe look around and see what we could  
 37 find, so we did and found some leaves. *Emergency attachment - looking to find ways to care for them*  
 38  
 39 CS: Ahh, and what did it feel like giving them the leaves?  
 40  
 41 N: It was funny, I didn't want them to bite me, but they didn't, they just took them, and then pushed *Deserity initial meeting, surprised by the reaction*  
 42 me  
 43  
 44 CS: Oh, what did that feel like?  
 45  
 46 N: Dunno, thought, 'that's rude' (laughing) *Stepped into her space + pushed - reaction that's not right. Lack of assertiveness*  
 47  
 48 CS: Ahh, yes, and then what did you do?  
 49  
 50 N: *stepped back a bit*, and H said we should get more leaves, so we did *Getting out of horses way - non-assertive following ID!*  
 51  
 52 CS: So, how do you think today went in comparison to last time round  
 53  
 54 N: Good, umm, well, I knew what to do, I could get them leaves and brush them, I knew what they *Reflection of how skills were like, Cinnamon is stubborn, won't move and Biscuit pushes you. I tried to put the halter on* *Knowledge developed over the weeks*  
 55  
 56 CS: Is this your notebook, can I have a look at what you've done so far?  
 57  
 58  
 59 N: I've drawn some things, and written stuff  
 60  
 61 CS: I like the front, that's good  
 62  
 63 N: Thank you. Yes, it's the first time, I met the horses. *My grandad thinks I'm in my element* *Sense of belonging, connection to grandad*  
 64  
 65 CS: Oh does he? What did he say to you?  
 66

Family history and Connection	67	N: He loves horses and because he makes wagons for the horses to pull, he's done that since he was young	Strong narrative in her family - something positive that connects her to her granddaddy.
	68	young	
	69	CS: Oh right and what did he say about you working with the horses	
	70		
Connection to granddad, doing something that suits her	71	N: He believes that I am in my element	Connection + sense of belonging
	72		
	73	CS: What do you think about that?	
	74		
Taking on the role, doing something that fits with granddad's life	75	N: I agree, I really want to ride them, I don't mind grooming them	State that she would like to learn to ride too - something in the future?
	76		
	77	CS: Umm yes, they were dirty today, today you did a lot more grooming	
	78		
Confidence + knowledge, taking responsibility	79	N: I like brushing, Cinnamon needed a brush	Bold statement, assertive, taking charge, more agency
	80		
	81	CS: Yes she was filthy wasn't she?	
	82		
Preparedness to engage + work	83	N: That killed my arm and the hand and a couple of days later I played tennis and it killed my arm and my hand	Significant - important to her as wanted to do a good job. Came on even when got tired.
	84		
	85		
	86	CS: What from the grooming?	
	87		
	88	N: No from writing that, it killed my hand	
	89		
	90	CS: Oh and some of the things that you did when you wrote on the cards, what did you write when you were working with them	
	91		
	92		
	93	N: Oh those, I couldn't think of much so I just filled it up with a bunch of stuff that was in my head	
	94		
	95	CS: Oh ok, how did you find it, working with the horses?	
	96		
Acquired Skill	97	N: Easy when you know the names	Reflects acquired knowledge + skill, but attributing it to knowing their names.
	98		
	99	CS: Oh, you think it was easier when you knew their names?	



100  
 101 **N:** Yes you can communicate with them better because they've already been trained with those specific names it can help you have a bond with them instead of calling them something they are not  
 102 *Finds communication with them easier*  
 103  
 104 **CS:** Oh ok you think that made a difference  
 105  
 106 **N:** Yes, if you train a dog it responds to its name, so if you change its name half way through it makes it  
 107 difficult  
 108  
 109 **CS:** How did you feel you got on with them?  
 110  
 111 **N:** Pretty well, think I got on better with Biscuit rather than Cinnamon  
 112  
 113 **CS:** Why's that?  
 114  
 115 **N:** Just the attitude just the yeah. One is easier to be attuned to than the other  
 116 *Recognition of different relational aspects*  
 117 **CS:** It is quite difficult to explain, I think in your book you put that she has more energy so did you find  
 118 that?  
 119  
 120 **N:** Yes she has more energy more sporty things because I don't like sporty things  
 121  
 122 **CS:** You did a lot of running around in these sessions:  
 123  
 124 **N:** I can tell you its more energetic than you think *She didn't realise it would be so active - a bit of a shock to her. Way she's telling me sense of pride*  
 125 *Energy requires lots of movement*  
 126 **CS:** You enjoyed running around?  
 127  
 128 **N:** Yes, look that's a nice picture  
 129  
 130 **CS:** Have you had any other experiences with horses or animals?  
 131

Closeness to car	132	N: I have a cat I'm lying on my sofa on my phone and he comes up and cuddles and watches my phone	
	133	with me	Connection + attuned behaviour with her car
	134		
	135	CS: That's sweet. What about with the horses?	
Comfort from horses	136		
	137	N: I did give them a hug today	Connection, sensory, overcome hesitancy, more agency
	138		
	139	CS: What did that feel like?	
Bond broken	140		
	141	N: It was nice	sensory feedback, it felt good
	142		
	143	CS: What do you think the horses felt?	
	144		
	145	N: They are going to miss us	Anxiety over breaking the relationship/attachment
Recognition of differences between the horses	146		
	147	CS: Do you think they liked working with you?	
	148		
	149	N: Maybe, yes, yes	
	150		
	151	CS: They were quite different weren't they?	
	152		
Proactive engagement	153	N: But with Biscuit, Little Biscuit she's more active whereas Cinnamon wasn't	affectionate way of describing B. Emotional response, Attachment
	154		
	155	CS: Yes, I think you're right. How was Cinnamon today when you were grooming her what did you think?	
	156		
Proactive engagement	157		
	158	N: I think grooming is bonding and I know I'm right because I've researched it in two places, one I've watched it and all of which are accurate	Attachment + independently researched how to look after horses = significant
	159		
	160		
	161	CS: Oh, that's great and what's the second area?	
	162		
	163	N: The internet but to be honest I think the tv show is more reliable	
164			

165 CS: Oh Ok, so how was it when you were grooming Cinnamon today, what was she like?  
 166  
 167 N: **Calm** *Felt good, emotionally regulating*  
 168  
 169 CS: And what did that make you feel like?  
 170 *Able to identify + articulate feelings*  
 171 N: **Happy** *+ emotions*  
 172  
 173 CS: Do you know what I noticed today, you were much more, you know your arms, you were leaning  
 174 over them and you were leaning into them, did that feel good?  
 175  
 176 N: **Umm, yeah, I relaxed on her (laughing)** *Remembers how she lent-over her\_trust*  
 177  
 178 CS: Did you think when you first worked with them, did you think you'd be doing that?  
 179  
 180 N: No, no, dunno, **I know them now** *Relatig her acquired knowledge + relationship*  
 181  
 182 CS: Like you're confident, ok to be around them now?  
 183  
 184 N: Yeah  
 185  
 186 CS: Was today the first day you led Biscuit all the way round the arena?  
 187  
 188 N: All the way round the arena but not the first time I've led her  
 189  
 190 CS: Wow, and how did that make you feel?  
 191  
 192 N: **I'm happy, look at me (laughing) I don't know, you can't think of anything else when you're with**  
 193 **them** *best in the moment - complete attunement*  
 194  
 195 CS: Ahh, yes and wow look at your book, you've done a great job  
 196  
 197 N: Thank you.

198  
 199 CS: I love your signature here  
 200  
 201 N: Any piece of artwork I own I always sign it  
 202  
 203 CS: Here you said that brushing was your favourite activity would you still say that or was it the  
 204 leading?  
 205  
 206 N: Brushing, and leading **Competent + confident - high self-esteem**  
 207  
 208 CS: Yes. It's interesting you said because it made you feel happy as well as the horses, I think that's  
 209 important.  
 210  
 211 N: There was one annoying thing about today, that song called Dover Street, I keep humming it to  
 212 myself absently and it's driving me insane  
 213  
 214 CS: Ha ha do you think that affected how you work the horses today?  
 215  
 216 N: Maybe, but I quite liked it  
 217  
 218 CS: Did you do a little sing for Cinnamon then?  
 219  
 220 N: **I can't sing when I'm walking around, I can hum but I can't sing**  
 221  
 222 CS: Oh ok, and do you think that it is important that both of you were happy while you were doing  
 223 that?  
 224  
 225 N: Yeah, we were all happy **Emotionally regulated**  
 226  
 227 CS: What do you think when we look at the some of the pictures, what do you see?  
 228  
 229 N: Well, if you look at them, Cinnamon is nice and calm, chilled time. Company, but I have a different  
 230 version of company to other people, I don't actually have to talk to them to be in their company

Development &  
 Knowledge + Skill

Total engagement

Feeling good

Feeling at peace  
 Sense of belonging

concentrating  
 cognitive resources  
 available only to activity  
 with horses

Describe connection  
 without language.  
 Feels felt

231  
 232 CS: Oh ok, so do you think that's how it is with horses maybe?  
 233  
 234 N: Sometimes maybe, communication is very clear and it's easy to think it *Emphasising 'feeling felt' attachment +*  
 235 *Sense of attachment with the horses*  
 236 CS: Oh, I see like not having to say something?  
 237  
 238 N: Yeah, like Biscuit telling her to go faster and stop, I just sort of moved  
 239  
 240 CS: Yes, I remember and she followed you. And Cinnamon, what did she like the most?  
 241  
 242 N: Cinnamon didn't like to move  
 243  
 244 CS: No, well what did Cinnamon like to do today?  
 245  
 246 N: Brushing her, she liked that, she stood still and nudged me, but she stood still all the time I brushed  
 247 *Attuned behaviour* her. *Reflecting on how mutually enjoyable Attuned behaviour Sense of connection* She liked that, it made her happy  
 248  
 249 CS: Yeah and how did that make you feel?  
 250  
 251 N: Good, I just felt good and still  
 252  
 253 CS: Yeah, she looked really happy didn't she? So what do you think makes Cinnamon happy?  
 254  
 255 N: I think just being in a calm and relaxing environment really  
 256 *Calm environment*  
 257 CS: Does that tie in with what makes you happy?  
 258  
 259 N: ~~Umm, yeah, it was nice and chilled, a good place~~ *All statements link to attachment being calm, enjoys each other's company.*  
 260  
 261 CS: There was a time when I thought she was just going to follow you, going round the arena when  
 262 you had Biscuit but she seemed to stop didn't she. And I thought what was interesting was, do you  
 263 remember the first time you tried to put their head collars on them?

264  
 265 N: I kind of didn't know how to do that, I kind of semi know how to put it on. I figured out where  
 266 everything goes  
 267  
 268 CS: And what did that feel like to you?  
 269  
 270 N: I learnt something new (laughing) surprised at herself, doing something  
 271 she had not done before  
 272 CS: And how did H get on trying to put the head collar on?  
 273  
 274 N: Struggling a little bit but it's not surprising as Cinnamon is quite tall  
 275  
 276 CS: And what happened between you and H, can you remember?  
 277  
 278 N: Team work  
 279  
 280 CS: Team work? So did H ask for help?  
 281  
 282 N: Yes Pro-social, willing to work  
 283 co-operatively  
 284 CS: And how did that feel for you?  
 285  
 286 N: I don't mind, helping is a good thing  
 287  
 288 CS: Yes and were you able to put the head collar on?  
 289  
 290 N: Yep  
 291  
 292 CS: Ok, and how does that make you feel?  
 293  
 294 N: Yeah, ok like I can do it, I don't know, but my grandad says he's never ridden a horse, when he was  
 295 younger he used to want to ride Slightly confused answer - but referring  
 296 back to family history, connection with  
 grandad to confirm her place 9

Development of  
 knowledge + skill

Skill + competence

Pro-social - offering to  
 help

Connection to  
 grandad

connection to  
grandad

Development of  
skills-attachment-  
linked relationship  
with grandad

297 CS: Oh ok

298

299 N: He still makes the wagons and the wheelbarrows

Reference to time - reflecting  
family history + her  
connection with it

300

301 CS: Has he been interested in what you've been doing with the horses?

302

303 N: I think he is a bit disappointed we can't ride them but I've learnt horse communication and working  
304 with them

305

306 CS: Yes, that's true, and how did you find learning it?

307

308 N: Good, got better, I'm terrible at starting up conversation unless we have something in common

Recognizing social communication  
difficulties

309

310 CS: That's going to go there is it? Is that where she rolled last time?

311

312 N: Yeah

313

314 CS: I'm fascinated by what you are doing, where are you going to put those photos? I'm watching and  
315 I don't want to mess up your design. Do you need glue for that?

316

317 N: I'm not going to stick the photo directly on the paper

318

319 CS: Are you not? What are you going to do with it then? So when you were laying all that out the  
320 cones and stuff, what was that exercise

321

322 N: I'm making a bridge

323

324 CS: Making a bridge?

325

326 N: A bridge of like all the progress we've made so each one of those hoops, they're like a session, we  
327 didn't really do much in the first session other than meet them

328

329 CS: Oh I see

330  
331 N: I'll let you see it when I'm finished  
332  
333 CS: Ok, thank you, I'll leave you to finish it then

334  
335  
336 Title: Horse Therapy info booklet

337 First Session

338

339 In the first session we met the horses, which we later called Cinnamon and Biscuit.

Getting to know the horses and how to interact with them.  
Energetic attachment with the horses

340 We worked on being around the horses, we stroked the horses and talked to the horses. We worked with one each at a time, this is because we didn't want to overwhelm them!

Demonstrating attachment

341  
342 When we had been with Cinnamon and Biscuit for a while, we noticed that Biscuit was more energetic than Cinnamon. She kept walking around the edge of the arena while Cinnamon on the other hand just stood in one spot most of the time.

345 What did you expect to do?

346 In these sessions I expected to be able to get to know the horses and to lead them around the arena, also, just to be around them and brush them

348 How did you feel when you were with the horses?

Sense of belonging connection and engagement

349 I felt at home with the horses, I've never been able to work with horses until the course came along with this wonderful opportunity. I have absolutely love working with the horses!

really enthusiastic

351 What did you do when the horses didn't do what you wanted?

11

Energetic resilience + assertiveness

352 I tried again in a slightly different way, if that didn't work then I might feel a little disappointed but I wouldn't give up. I would keep on trying. In other words I never gave up!!

Demonstrating development of resilience + perseverance  
Emphasising point

354 How did you feel when the horses did want you wanted?

Recognition of abilities, fears good, high self-esteem

355 I felt really happy when I got them to do what I wanted one example would be when I got Cinnamon to walk with the lead rope or when Biscuit stands patiently next to me.

Recognition of new skills + being assertive  
being able to get them to do what she wants

357 What was your favourite activity?

Attuned behaviours, connection + mutually enjoyable

358 My favourite activity was brushing the horses and leading them around the arena. I loved these activities because it made me happy as well as the horses.

loved these  
Mutually beneficial attachment

360



**Appendix 2.3: Table of emergent themes for one participant (Nessa)**

Theme	Quotation	Line Number
No previous knowledge	No, not really	5
Familiar with cats and dogs, thinks will like horses	I like cats and dogs, and horses, I think	9
Difficulty describing feelings	Umm, I, umm, dunno, umm, good	13
Not sure what to expect	Umm, maybe cleaning where they live? Dunno really	17
Lack of activity and knowing what to do	Ok, didn't do much, didn't know what to do	21
Unsure of what to do, copied D	Umm, just sort of walked towards them, I didn't know what to do,	25-26
Getting to know them	umm, they looked friendly, then D stroked one of them, so I did too	25
Feels good, connection, unfamiliar	Ok, they're soft and warm, and I dunno, they breathe on you, feels funny	30
Uncertain, looking for help and guidance	I dunno, they seem to be ok, umm, they stood still, they just stood there and I patted them. We didn't really do much, we patted them. We asked what they eat, A said maybe look around and see what we could find, so we did and found some leaves	34-37
Nurturing	D said we should get some food, so we looked for something for them to eat.	35
Unsure how to interact with them	It was funny, I didn't want them to bite me, but they didn't, they just took them and then pushed me	41-42
Unfamiliar way of interacting, surprise	Dunno, thought, that's rude	46
Unsure, lack of confidence, followed D's lead	I stepped back a bit, and D said we should get more leaves, so we did	50
Confidence, expressing knowledge and achievement	Good, umm, well, I knew what to do, I could get them leaves and brush them, I knew what they were like, Cinnamon is stubborn, won't move and Biscuit pushes you. I tried to put the halter on	54-55
Different view of herself	My grandad thinks I'm in my element	63
Family history and connection	He loves horses and, because he makes wagons for the horses to pull, he's done that since he was young	67-68

Connection to grandad, doing something that suits her	He believes that I am in my element	71
Taking on the role, doing something that fits with Grandad's life	I agree, I really want to ride them, I don't mind grooming	75
Confidence and knowledge, taking responsibility	I like brushing, Cinnamon needed a brush	79
Preparedness to engage and work	That killed my arm and hand and a couple of days later I played tennis and it killed my arm and hand. No from writing it killed my hand.	83-84, 88
Getting to know them	Easy when you know their names	97
Communication and connection	Yes you can communicate with them better because they've already been trained with those specific name it can help you have a bond with them instead of calling them something that they are not	101-102
Friendship	Pretty well, think I got on better with Biscuit rather than Cinnamon	111
Recognition of different relational aspects	Just the attitude just the yeah	115
Energy required, lots of movement	I can tell you it's more energetic than you think	124
Closeness to cat	I have a cat, I'm lying on my sofa on my phone and he comes up and cuddles and watches my phone with me	132-133
Comfort from horses	I did give them a hug today...It was nice	137 & 141
Bond broken	They are going to miss us	145
Recognition of differences between the horses	But with Biscuit, little Biscuit she's more active whereas Cinnamon wasn't	153
Mutual activity	I think grooming is bonding	158
Proactive engagement	And I know I'm right because I've researched it in two places, one I've watched it and all of which are accurate	158-159
Emotional regulation	Calm...happy...umm, yeah, I relaxed on her	167 & 171 & 176
Connection	No, no, dunno, I know them now	180
Achievement	All the way round the arena but not the first time I've lead her	188
Development of knowledge and skill	Brushing and leading	206
Total engagement	I can't sing when I'm walking around, I can hum but I can't sing	220
Feeling good	Yeah, we were all happy	225
Feeling at peace	Cinnamon is nice and calm, chilled time	229

Sense of belonging	Company, but I have a different version of company to other people, I don't actually have to talk to them to be in their company	229-230
Sense of attunement with the horses	Sometimes maybe, communication is very clear and it's easy to think it	234
Rapport and development of knowledge and ability	Yeah, like Biscuit telling her to go faster and stop, I just sort of moved	238
Attuned behaviour	Brushing her, she liked that, she stood still and nudged me, but she stood still all the time I brushed her. She liked that, it made her happy... I just felt good and still	246-247 & 251
Calming environment	I think just being in a calm and relaxing environment really	255
Development of knowledge and skill	I didn't know how to do that, I kind of semi know how to put it on. I figured out where everything goes... I learnt something new	265-266 & 270
Pro-social – offering to help	Struggling a bit but it's not surprising as Cinnamon is quite tall... team work... I don't mind, helping is a good thing	274, 286
Connection to grandad	Yeah, like I can do it, I don't know, but my grandad says he's never ridden a horse, when he was younger he used to want to ride. He still makes the wagons and wheelbarrows. I think he is a bit disappointed that we can't ride them	294-295
Development of skills – attunement. Linked to relationship with grandad	I've learnt horse communication and working with them. Got better, I'm terrible at starting up conversation unless we have something in common	303-304 & 308
Getting to know the horses and how to interact with them. Emerging attunement with the horses	We worked on being around the horses, we stroked the horses and talked to them. We worked with one each at a time, this is because we didn't want to overwhelm them.	338-339
Sense of belonging, connection and engagement	I've never been able to work with horses until this course came along with this wonderful opportunity. I have absolutely loved working with the horses	349-350
Emerging resilience and assertiveness	I tried again in a slightly different way, if that didn't work then I might feel a little disappointed but I wouldn't give up. I would keep on trying. In other words I never gave up!!	354-355
Recognition of abilities, feeling good, high self-esteem	I felt really happy when I got them to do what I wanted one example would be when I got Cinnamon to walk with the lead rope or when Biscuit stand patiently next to me	358-359
Attuned behaviours, connection and mutually enjoyable.	My favourite activity was brushing the horses and leading them around the arena. I loved these activities because it made me happy as well as the horses.	363-364

**Appendix 2.4: Table of super-ordinate themes with sub-ordinate themes for one participant (Nessa)**

Sub-ordinate themes relating to self-efficacy super-ordinate theme

Sub-ordinate Theme	Quotation	Line Number
No previous knowledge	No, not really	5
Familiar with cats and dogs, thinks will like horses	I like cats and dogs, and horses, I think	9
Difficulty describing feelings	Umm, I, umm, dunno, umm, good	13
Not sure what to expect	Umm, maybe cleaning where they live? Dunno really	17
Lack of activity and knowing what to do	Ok, didn't do much, didn't know what to do	21
Unsure of what to do, copied D	Umm, just sort of walked towards them, I didn't know what to do,	25-26
Uncertain, looking for help and guidance	I dunno, they seem to be ok, umm, they stood still, they just stood there and I patted them. We didn't really do much, we patted them. We asked what they eat, A said maybe look around and see what we could find, so we did and found some leaves	34-37
Unfamiliar way of interacting, surprise	Dunno, thought, that's rude	46
Unsure, lack of confidence, followed D's lead	I stepped back a bit, and D said we should get more leaves, so we did	50
Confidence, expressing knowledge and achievement	Good, umm, well, I knew what to do, I could get them leaves and brush them, I knew what they were like, Cinnamon is stubborn, won't move and Biscuit pushes you. I tried to put the halter on	54-55
Preparedness to engage and work	That killed my arm and hand and a couple of days later I played tennis and it killed my arm and hand. No from writing it killed my hand.	83-84, 88
Energy required, lots of movement	I can tell you it's more energetic than you think	124
Proactive engagement	And I know I'm right because I've researched it in two places, one I've watched it and all of which are accurate	158-159
Achievement	All the way round the arena but not the first time I've lead her	188
Development of knowledge and skill	Brushing and leading	206

Development of knowledge and skill	I didn't know how to do that, I kind of semi know how to put it on. I figured out where everything goes... I learnt something new	265-266 & 270
Development of skills – attunement. Linked to relationship with grandad	I've learnt horse communication and working with them. Got better, I'm terrible at starting up conversation unless we have something in common	303-304 & 308
Sense of belonging, connection and engagement	I've never been able to work with horses until this course came along with this wonderful opportunity. I have absolutely loved working with the horses	349-350
Emerging resilience and assertiveness	I tried again in a slightly different way, if that didn't work then I might feel a little disappointed but I wouldn't give up. I would keep on trying. In other words I never gave up!!	354-355
Recognition of abilities, feeling good, high self-esteem	I felt really happy when I got them to do what I wanted one example would be when I got Cinnamon to walk with the lead rope or when Biscuit stand patiently next to me	358-359

### Sub-ordinate themes relating to developing relationships super-ordinate

#### theme

Sub-ordinate theme	Quotation	Line
Getting to know them	umm, they looked friendly, then D stroked one of them, so I did too	25
Nurturing	D said we should get some food, so we looked for something for them to eat.	35
Getting to know them	Easy when you know their names	97
Communication and connection	Yes you can communicate with them better because they've already been trained with those specific name it can help you have a bond with them instead of calling them something that they are not	101-102
Friendship	Pretty well, think I got on better with Biscuit rather than Cinnamon	111
Recognition of different relational aspects	Just the attitude just the yeah	115
Closeness to cat	I have a cat, I'm lying on my sofa on my phone and he comes up and cuddles and watches my phone with me	132-133
Comfort from horses	I did give them a hug today...It was nice	137 & 141
Bond broken	They are going to miss us	145
Recognition of differences between the horses	But with Biscuit, little Biscuit she's more active whereas Cinnamon wasn't	153

Mutual activity	I think grooming is bonding	158
Emotional regulation	Calm...happy...umm, yeah, I relaxed on her	167 & 171 & 176
Connection	No, no, dunno, I know them now	180
Total engagement	I can't sing when I'm walking around, I can hum but I can't sing	220
Feeling good	Yeah, we were all happy	225
Feeling at peace	Cinnamon is nice and calm, chilled time	229
Sense of belonging	Company, but I have a different version of company to other people, I don't actually have to talk to them to be in their company	229-230
Sense of attunement with the horses	Sometimes maybe, communication is very clear and it's easy to think it	234
Rapport and development of knowledge and ability	Yeah, like Biscuit telling her to go faster and stop, I just sort of moved	238
Attuned behaviour	Brushing her, she liked that, she stood still and nudged me, but she stood still all the time I brushed her. She liked that, it made her happy... I just felt good and still	246-247 & 251
Calming environment	I think just being in a calm and relaxing environment really	255
Pro-social – offering to help	Struggling a bit but it's not surprising as Cinnamon is quite tall... team work...I don't mind, helping is a good thing	274, 286
Getting to know the horses and how to interact with them. Emerging attunement with the horses	We worked on being around the horses, we stroked the horses and talked to them. We worked with one each at a time, this is because we didn't want to overwhelm them.	338-339
Attuned behaviours, connection and mutually enjoyable.	My favourite activity was brushing the horses and leading them around the arena. I loved these activities because it made me happy as well as the horses.	363-364

### Sub-ordinate themes relating to Identity super-ordinate theme

Different view of herself	My grandad thinks I'm in my element	63
Family history and connection	He loves horses and, because he makes wagons for the horses to pull, he's done that since he was young	67-68
Taking on the role, doing something that fits with Grandad's life	I agree, I really want to ride them, I don't mind grooming	75

Connection to granddad, doing something that suits her	He believes that I am in my element	71
Connection to granddad	Yeah, like I can do it, I don't know, but my granddad says he's never ridden a horse, when he was younger he used to want to ride. He still makes the wagons and wheelbarrows. I think he is a bit disappointed that we can't ride them	294-295

## Appendix 3: Ethical Approval

### Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

#### Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review.** To do this, email the complete ethics form to [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). Once your registration number is received, add it to the form\* and submit it to your supervisor for approval.

If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Section 1 Project details		
a	Project title	Experiences of an equine facilitated learning programme: A multi-informant perspective
b	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)	Cath Stracey [REDACTED]
c	<b>*UCL Data Protection Registration Number</b>	Z6364106/2019/01/102 Date issued 21/01/2109
c	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	Dr Frances Lee and Dr Amy Harrison



d.	Department	Psychology and Human Development	
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD <input type="checkbox"/>	EdD <input type="checkbox"/>
		DEdPsy X <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
f.	<b>If applicable</b> , state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	N/A	
g.	Intended research start date	02/01/2019	
h.	Intended research end date	01/08/2020	
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in  <i>If research to be conducted abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be <b>required</b> before ethical approval can be granted: <a href="http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx">http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx</a></i>	England	
j.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?		
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:	
	No X <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:	
<b>If yes:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.</li> <li>– Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Note:</b> Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the <a href="#">National Research Ethics Service</a> (NRES) or <a href="#">Social Care Research Ethics Committee</a> (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.</p>			

Dear Cath,

I am pleased to inform you that your research project '**Experiences of an equine facilitated learning programme: A multi-informant perspective**' for the year 2 research project on the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, has been given ethical approval. If you have any further queries in this regard, please contact your supervisor.

Please note that if your proposed study and methodology changes markedly from what you have outlined in your ethics review application, you may need to complete and submit a new or revised application. Should this possibility arise, please discuss with your supervisor in the first instance before you proceed with a new/revised application.

Your ethical approval form has been logged and will be uploaded to the UCL IOE database.

**Appendix 4: Information sheet and consent form**

**Experiences of an Equine facilitated psychotherapeutic intervention: An IPA study.**

**Start date: February 2019.**

**End date: August 2020.**

**Information sheet for: Young people.**

My name is Cath Stracey and I am inviting you to take part in my research project, “Experiences of an Equine facilitated psychotherapeutic intervention: An IPA study”.

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (Year 2, Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology), UCL Institute of Education. This research project will be my thesis, that I am required to complete, as part of my professional doctorate in order to qualify as an Educational Psychologist. The doctoral programme has been developed to provide rigorous and comprehensive training in applied educational psychology. The programme follows the British Psychological Society’s criteria for accreditation. The Institute of Education UCL research in education and social sciences is world leading and aims to raise the standard of educational research.

I am hoping to find out how an equine facilitated intervention is experienced.

I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don’t hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

**Who is carrying out the research?**

I will be carrying out the research and I will be supervised by Dr Amy Harrison and Dr F Lee.

### **Why are we doing the research?**

The aims of the research are to explore how the intervention was experienced and to understand:

- a) How did the young people make sense of the intervention.
- b) To what extent did the young people value the experience of the programme.
- c) How did the adults around the young people experience them whilst they were attending the intervention and their reflections?

### **Why am I being invited to take part?**

You are being invited to take part as you have accepted a place on the intervention.

### **What will happen if I choose to take part?**

At the end of the equine programme, I will also invite you to take part in an interview that will last approximately 30 -40 minutes. The interview questions will be about how you have experienced the intervention. The interviews will be audio-recorded for the purpose of data analysis. The audio- recording will be stored in an encrypted digital device. I and my Research supervisors will be the only persons accessing this device. This audio-recording will be deleted on completion of my thesis. You will also be asked to record your thoughts in a book and take some photographs that we will talk about at the end of the intervention.

Some of your responses or actions may also be recorded on a template or booklet of notes. This is to be used to summarise or help me remember key pieces of information. Some of the information might be shared in my report but it will be anonymised before sharing. The other will be disposed of on completion of my thesis.

### **Will anyone I know have been involved?**

The findings of this study may be shared with my colleagues from the UCL Institute of Education, or other form of publication or presentation. However, all information provided will remain anonymous. Your name will be anonymised to protect your confidentiality and identity. Your educational setting's safe-guarding policy will be followed. This will

include reporting any concerns that I might have about a child's welfare, to the school designated safe-guarding officers and deputies.

### **Could there be problems for me if I take part?**

It is not envisaged that the research will make you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. If at any time you do feel uncomfortable then we will stop and either finish at that point or come back to the research when you feel you want to.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

Your participation in this research is hoped to help develop some ideas and provide evidence on the use of horses. This could be used to specifically support the well-being of children or young people and help them develop new skills and confidence. Some of the data will be used to provide all participants with an outline of the project, or the data may be used to form a research article that may get published in an academic journal. All data will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

### **Do I have to take part?**

You may choose not to participate in this research if you do not wish to. No adverse action will be taken against you. If you choose to participate, you will retain the right to stop participating at any time without giving a reason.

### **Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The data controller of this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving processing of personal data and can be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here:

[www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice)

The legal basis that would be used to process your *personal data* will be the performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to

process *special category personal data* will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent.

*Your personal data* will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data that you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data where ever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

### **Contact for further information**

If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [Catherine.stracey.17@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Catherine.stracey.17@ucl.ac.uk) or my supervisors:

Dr. Frances Lee at [f.lee@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:f.lee@ucl.ac.uk)

Dr. Amy Harrison at [a.harrison@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:a.harrison@ucl.ac.uk)

If you would like to be involved, please complete the following consent form and return it to me.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IoE Research Ethics Committee.

### **Consent to participate:**

#### **Parental Consent for young people under the age of 16 years**

Please  
tick

I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. ?

I know that I can refuse to answer any, or all of the questions, and that I can withdraw from any interviews at any point. ?

I agree for the interviews to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). ?

I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports (these will be anonymised). ?

I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise us as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what you have told us. ?

Name:.....

Relationship to YP (or job title):.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name of researcher:.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

## Appendix 5: Intervention Waiver Form

**Consent and Waiver of Responsibility Form**  
**Session – Learning with horses with [redacted] (KS 3 provision)**

Please read the following statement before signing:  
We at [redacted] hereby request that the client/s named below be accepted into the equine assisted growth and learning programme operated by [redacted]

I acknowledge that [redacted] service personnel have fully explained to me the scope of the equine assisted growth and learning programme, including the potential for injury, which can occur from caring for horses and being involved in therapeutic/learning activities that include horses. Because of the potential benefits of the growth and learning programme, I hereby waive any claim which I or the client may have against [redacted] officers, personnel, employees, volunteers or contract personnel arising out of any injury which the client may sustain while involved in the equine assisted growth and learning programme, unless caused by the wilful misconduct or gross negligence of [redacted] services, officers, personnel, employees, volunteers or contract personnel.

The undersigned assumes the unavoidable risks inherent in all horse related activities, including but not limited to bodily injury and physical harm to horse, participant and spectator.

In consideration, therefore for the privilege of working, participating in activities around horses with [redacted]

We the undersigned does hereby agree to hold harmless and indemnify further release them from any liability or responsibility for accident, damage, injury or illness to [redacted] Undersigned or to any horse owned by the undersigned or to any family member or spectator accompanying the undersigned on the premises.

Please note we are continually reviewing and improving our services and may take photographs during the session which will be used for training purposes. We may take photos to provide feedback to the project funders and to promote the project. We only use photos where faces are not included. Please tick which areas you would be happy for us to use these images:

- On social media
- On our website
- In project evaluations
- In display adverts

By signing this form you agree to the release of images for this purpose.

[redacted]



EPP KS3 / INT

15<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Dear Parents / Carers,

**Off Site Visits**

As you will be aware, we often take our students out on visits in connection with work in [redacted]. These may include physical, Cultural and educational activities

For all activities we must ask for your consent. In order to make the organisation of activities less complicated, I would be grateful if you would sign the consent form below to cover any activities for the period your child is at the unit.

Such visits would be either on foot, by staff car or by minibus, and we would have the requisite regulation number of staff supervision and cover. On those occasions when visits involve any kind of cost, or if your child will be returning later than usual, you will be notified accordingly.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]  
Head of School

## Appendix 6: Letter feeding back findings to all participants

Dear X,

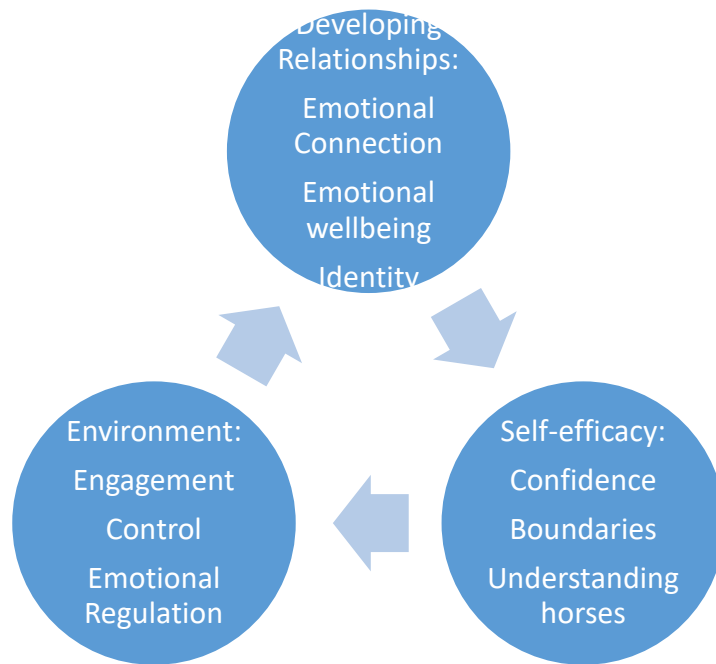
Last summer you kindly agreed to take part in some research I was carrying out, exploring how an intervention with horses was experienced.

You may well remember that we spent some time talking about your own experience of the horse intervention. This was to help me understand what it was like, as I wanted to find out what it is like for individuals, like you, to take part in an intervention that used horses. I would like to thank you once again for agreeing to take part in my research.

I have now completed gathering all my information and am writing up my findings in a report. I thought you might like to know what I found out and what the main themes were identified in my analysis.

The analysis revealed that there were many shared experiences between the participants which helped me understand how the intervention was experienced. Three super-ordinate or main themes were identified, which are *developing relationships*, *environment* and *self-efficacy*. Within these main themes there are a number of sub-themes, which are emotional connection, emotional well-being, identity, confidence, boundaries, understanding horses, engagement, emotional regulation and control.

The diagram below illustrated how all these themes are connected:



Areas that could be improved were also identified, and I am hoping that this research will help other schools and professionals understand what is good about an intervention that uses horses, and how more young people can access one.

If there is anything else you would like to know about my research or anything else you would like to say about it, then you can contact me through xxx

It was a real pleasure to meet with you and spend time hearing about your experiences and views,

Best wishes,

Cath

Trainee Educational Psychologist.

**Appendix 7: Letters thanking the participants**

July, 2019

Dear x,

I am writing to say a big thank you for taking part in my research into the horse course and what it felt like to be on it. I wanted to let you know that I am extremely grateful that you agreed to talk with me about the course.

Over the next few months I will be writing up what you told me and looking over the journals and pictures that you put together. Please remember that if you change your mind and you would rather I did not include your work, just let me know before the start of next school year, as I will be writing it up from September onwards. If you need or want to get hold of me, let x know and she will be able to contact me and I will get in touch with you.

It has been a real pleasure meeting and working with you, if you are in when I next visit I will pop in and say hello - you can always come and find me too! Have a fantastic summer and I look forward to catching up with you in September.

Many thanks and best wishes,

Cath

Trainee Educational Psychologist.