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Curriculum vitae:

Mag. Renate Deimel, MSc. has been working as a psychotherapist and special needs educator for many years in equine assisted grief, trauma and palliative accompaniment at Lichtblickhof (ray of hope farm) in Vienna, Austria. She is also on the Executive Committee of HETI and Section head deputy of "Curative educational and therapeutic support with horses" from the "Austrian Board of Trustees for Therapeutic Riding" (Österreichisches Kuratorium für Therapeutisches Reiten). In addition to her therapeutic work, she enjoys dedicating herself to international networking in order to strengthen scientific and professional development in the field of horse/animal-assisted therapy. A research focus of her and her team at Lichtblickhof (ray of hope farm) is the training of therapy horses and the development of methods to increase the welfare of the animals in therapy settings and in their leisure time.

Category: Oral presentation

Topic: Horse Related Topic: Human – horse Interactions and Communication

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Title: EQUINE ASSISTED THERAPY WITH THE HORSES' CONSENT? TEACHING THERAPY HORSES TO SAY "YES" AND "NO"?: AUDIBLE EXHALE COMMUNICATION

Keyword 1: equine welfare

Keyword 2: animal consent

Keyword 3: horse training

Abstract:

Objective: The training concepts behind these questions about animal consent in EAT comes from dog and zoo animal training and are described, e.g., under "cooperative care" or "choice and control". It involves consented stress modulation via horses' audible exhales and is based on the fact that control over a situation is one of the most effective stress-reducing factors. This leads to higher experienced self-efficacy, a sense of control and optimistic expectations. Therapy horses should be trained to be as predictable as possible, not to overreact and to approach difficult situations calmly in order to increase safety for clients. Horses may benefit from support through learning proactive strategies to reduce their stress level. They should be given permission to have a say in the therapy process, to express their feelings and to show their consent or to exercise a veto.

Design: In a pilot project, we started a training program at Lichtblickhof, Vienna: 20 therapy horses learned the so-called "Audible Exhale Communication" (AEC), which is based on natural physiologically

positive and healthy body processes and incorporates human breathing and relaxation techniques, while therapists responded to the signals.

Results: After six months of training, we could show that horses had successfully learned this method. They showed a higher number of audible exhalations in the last training session than in the first. Neither age, years of training or therapy experience had a moderating effect. The horses used this newly acquired tool in various situations and showed fewer signs of stress, more relaxed feelings and more positive emotions in behavioural observations.

Conclusion: Training horses to use AEC could be an important way to help therapy horses to reduce their stress and increase their self-efficacy. This subsequently improves safety for clients, the human-animal relationship and opens up new possibilities for improving therapeutic procedures and animal welfare.