

Presenter's name: Linda Wong

Degree, affiliation: PhD Student, Deakin University AND Honours BA of Mathematics with Business and Information Systems, University of Waterloo

Curriculum vitae:

Linda combines over 25 years of professional consultancy and industry experience, which has developed her into a well-rounded, dedicated and astute business woman. With strong strategic thinking, Linda combines her broad experience in complex environments to execute and deliver outcomes. Her dedication to people has often seen her leading large change programs. Linda brings great drive and tenacity to programs requiring rigour, but also provides a good mix of empathy. Using effective communication and observation skills, Linda builds rapport across all levels of an organisation. Her strong sense of commercial acumen has demonstrated success in identifying opportunities, developing relationships, and operating businesses from the ground up. Over the years, Linda has combined her three biggest passions – people, learning and horses. She established a charity organisation in 2016 called Hands of Change Limited (www.handsofchange.org.au), where she is a director and chair of board.

Category: Oral presentation

Topic: Horse related topic: Human-horse interaction and communication

Authors:

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Title: CAN THE DELIVERY OF EQUINE ASSISTED SERVICES (EAS) THROUGH VIRTUAL REALITY SIMILAR BENEFITS AS FACE TO FACE EAS

Keyword 1: Horses

Keyword 2: Virtual reality

Keyword 3: Wellbeing

Abstract:

Objective: The research project “Improving Individuals’ Health and Wellbeing through Horses and Virtual Reality (VR)” aims to bridge the gap between existing theoretical frameworks and approaches used in Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) and Social Care. A scoping review completed as part of this project identified knowledge gaps, of which two related to accessibility and the use of technology.

Design: Due to the exploratory nature of this research, an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) technique was used to determine if a purposive sampling of individual participants identified an improvement to their overall health and wellbeing through interaction with horses, either face-to-face or via virtual reality.

Data collection and analysis was conducted in three stages:

- Stage 1 consisted of participant interactions with horses using virtual reality (VR) only.
- Stage 2 consisted of participant interactions with horses in a face-to-face environment only.
- Stage 3 consisted of Informant interviews conducted with either authors or facilitators in the industry.

Results: Preliminary results indicate a strong link between the benefits found from the scoping review to the benefits identified from the virtual reality case studies. These benefits have been mapped to the scoping review findings, which were 1) regulating emotion, 2) sense of connection, 3) Mindfulness, and 4) Physical well-being. There is also alignment to the theories explored which were Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory.

Conclusion: The findings from all three stages of data collection will help decisions about the use of virtual reality in Equine Assisted Services (EAS). This inclusion can hopefully increase the accessibility of EAS to a broader range of participants but can also be used to complement existing face-to-face EAS. Ultimately the outcomes and benefits for participants will be an improvement to overall health and wellbeing.