

**On the Positive Side: Horses As Teachers - Living the "Herd Way"**  
**November 15, 2009**

A small herd of horses in Las Cruces is changing the lives of local families by serving as their teachers and mentors. By just being themselves and modeling herd behavior, they provide a mirror for the children and families who interact with them to gain insight into their own behaviors and to change them if they choose.

The herd includes Lenny and Starr (age 4), Cruz and Czar (age 24), Sage (age 12), Katy (age 15) and her son, Sunshine (age 6 months). These horses were brought together from different circumstances over the past four years and have formed an adopted herd family. As prey animals, they know how to be present and in the moment and they know that working/playing together as a herd often improves their quality of life. It is obvious that they love their job of teaching people about "living the herd way."

In a safe outdoor environment and with the help of human professionals, the herd interacts with children and families in experiences designed to address self-esteem, personal confidence, communication, interpersonal effectiveness, trust, boundaries, limit setting, and group cohesion. All horses have innate characteristics that appear similar to humans in their behavioral responses and social structures. They respond to human arousal or emotional states in much the same way that people respond to the emotional states of others. By their various natures, the horses encourage children/families to develop their capacity to see things through the eyes of another (insight) and to learn to regulate their own affect. "The herd way" provides opportunities for persons to identify and understand emotions, develop empathy and a sense of responsibility, and to succeed in new undertakings. Meeting challenges presented by this herd often enables persons to build honest relationships, increase their confidence, learn problem-solving skills and stay focused in the present moment. .

Over the past six years, this local equine program, under the direction of G. Ann Remick-Barlow, NMLISW, has provided a venue for more than 1,500 individuals to experience this horse-human interaction. "Helping Kids Be Kids Foundation," (a non-profit organization) is now assisting more individuals and families to participate in these learning experiences.

\*G. Ann Remick-Barlow, is a New Mexico Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice. She offers other programs through her private practice that include life coaching, consulting, and counseling with individuals, couples, and families. For further information you may contact Ann at 575-526-6040.