For Immediate Release

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$88,000 Research Grant Awarded to Slippery Rock U. to Investigate Stress Management for Young Adults with Autism

Research Team to Explore Equine-Assisted Activities as a Medication-Free Treatment

Chagrin Falls, Ohio, December 16, 2016 - Horses and Humans Research Foundation is pleased to announce its most recent grant award to Slippery Rock University's "***The Effect of Therapeutic Riding on Stress Levels in Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders".*** In addition to measuring stress reduction impact through Therapeutic Riding and HeartMath interventions, they will also study equine stress levels related to participants stress levels.

According to Principal Investigator Dr. Elizabeth Kemeny's proposal:

> "With a prevalence of 1 in 68 children, autism spectrum disorders (ASD) rank as the most prevalent developmental disorder. The core symptom areas are deficits in social communication and interactions, sensory issues, and restricted or repetitive behavior. Related to these core symptoms, social anxiety in adolescents with ASD often impedes independent function in adult life. For youth who are transitioning into adulthood, elevated stress levels and lack of coping mechanisms become barriers to health and quality of life. Finding evidence of an effective way, without medication, to address stress in young adults with autism, will have broad implications for health of the individual as well as their family members."

The study will use a crossover design to compare stress management techniques. Thirty participants will be randomly assigned to the order that they receive Therapeutic Riding protocol or the HeartMath intervention or no treatment control over a period of 18 months. In each research wave, 10 participants will receive each condition for 10 weeks. The measures of stress, including cortisol in saliva, heart rate, social responsiveness, social anxiety/stress, and perceived stress, will be collected before and after the interventions.

They will also assess caregiver and self report surveys as well as heart variability/coherence measures. A HeartMath Specialist will administer the individual stress management program, a standard instructional method, by following the HeartMath curriculum. A certified instructor will administer the Therapeutic Riding protocol using a standard instructional method (pre-tested in the pilot) which consists of one half hour of ground work (grooming, tacking, relationship building) and one half hour of riding (consisting of warm-up, teaching a basic riding skill, review, and cool down). The saliva and heart rate variability will also be collected from the horses at baseline on a non-riding day, and before and after each session.

It is anticipated that the project will be completed by the summer of 2018. Updates and additional information can be found at the Horses and Humans Research Foundation website horsesandhumans.org.

Horses and Humans Research Foundation (HHRF) is dedicated solely to funding research to support the equine-assisted activities and therapies field. Since its founding, HHRF has awarded $410,000 in professional research efforts led by nine research teams in the United States, Canada and Germany. HHRF is a non-endowed foundation dependent solely on donations. To make a donation and/or learn more about this and other Horses and Humans Research Foundation projects visit http://www.HorsesandHumans.org. Through investment in rigorous research, Horses and Humans Research Foundation will serve as a catalyst to advance knowledge of horses and their potential to impact the health and wellness of people.

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