



Flying Change

Equine Therapy

Part One of A Three Part Series

Flying Change Equine Therapy is a nationally recognized 501(c)3 not for profit that uses unforgettable interactive experiences with rescued and retired horses to foster emotional, social, spiritual and psychological growth in people. Flying Change provides Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning with children, adolescents and adults for emotional growth. Our services include:

- Individual, Family and Group sessions
- Weekend Retreats
- Therapeutic Holiday Programs for Youth
- Corporate Teambuilding

FCET serves members of the community, schools, courts, and agencies that provide residential and outpatient behavioral healthcare. We have two Metro Atlanta locations, in Vinings and South Fulton, as well as a mobile program that takes therapy horses to those we serve.

Under the guidance of trained counselors and horse professionals with specialized training in the field of equine assisted mental health, our program provides clients with experiential opportunities to practice healthy life skills in a physically and emotionally safe environment, and the confidence to take those skills back into their family and life.

Flying Change Equine Therapy's approach is strengths-based and solution-focused. We believe in the dignity and self-determination of our clients and strive to offer them opportunities to discover their own wisdom and lead fulfilling lives.

Flying Change is run by Lissa Corcoran. The first part of our series is her story.



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I should have been born in a barn. I have loved horses for as long as I can remember, and have spent my life in a lust for everything related to them – riding, training, instruction, management - anything and everything to be near horses. The coldest nights of the year, I can often be found mixing warm bran mashes thick with molasses for my horses and warming their drinking water. When the radio announces a tornado watch anywhere within a five-county radius of the barn, and the entire world is headed up I-75 to get away from the storm, I'm that one crazy Honda Civic headed right for the heart of it. I am that ridiculous. Logic be damned, I have to check on my horses.

The evolution that led me to include horses in psychotherapy was a long one, but such a natural progression that in hindsight it is hard not to see that it was happening all along. I came to the field of counseling as a lot of us do, as a child in a very challenging childhood. Alcoholism, addiction, divorce and abuse. Individually and together, our family faced a lot of lessons, and ultimately succeeded in growing through them because of our great love for each other.

When I was eight, I was on a Brownies trip when a girl asked me about a well-hidden bruise she spotted while I was changing clothes. I don't know why I told her where it came from. Other kids who saw a bruise, I'd tell them it was an accident. Because that's what he told me to say, year after year. I had an accident. Well the accident was that my mother met my stepfather and fell in love with him, and so did I, believing he would be the father I hadn't had and had always wanted. That Girl Scouts trip changed my life irrevocably when my friend told her mother what she had seen. It was a very dark time for me and my family. My stepfather fled the country and we were left to try to put the pieces together again. I went through foster care and later a hospitalization for depression. It was no one's fault; predators exist by slipping under the radar and none of us could have known who he really was. In the fullness of time I have come to believe that my experiences were the path that led me to the rich life I have now. I wouldn't wish it on anyone, but for myself, I wouldn't change it either.



As a condition of my returning home from foster care, my family and I were required to get counseling. Within a year, the therapists told my mother they didn't expect me to live to be eighteen, as desperate and depressed as I was. I had descended into a barely camouflaged vortex of self-hatred; a feeling of powerlessness and isolation that was its own special room of hell with only my name on the door. Therapy kept me alive but only horses gave me hope. There wasn't much the therapists could do. They did their best to tie a knot that would never slip, but one way or another I always managed to untie it. In the first year I wouldn't talk; before long I

learned how to talk without truly saying anything. I knew therapy-speak well enough to know what my lines were - I could talk the talk, but I wasn't going anywhere on a real level. I spent my adolescence reading self-help books and going to personal growth seminars - I suspect that I may actually have held the regional title for consecutive number of visits to a therapist's office for my age group - but I didn't really get better, my pain just got more sophisticated. By the time I was fourteen, any ability I had to let myself be vulnerable with people was buried so deeply that a therapist couldn't see it and I couldn't feel it. Talk therapy couldn't help me, because I couldn't talk about what mattered. I told them just enough to make it a story but not enough to make it real, feel what I felt, know what I knew. There was so much that I couldn't say. There were times when I wanted to say it. Risk it. But my jaw clamped shut like the drawbridge to a fortress; it wouldn't come out. I just couldn't go there. There was a place so dark, so frightening, where everything broken in me lived, and I simply had no words for it.

In all those years of therapy, my time at the barn was really what kept me going and ultimately healed me - soft muzzles and warm breath, the sound of the horses chewing their hay - those horses could reach me and motivate me in a way that no time in a therapist's office could. I survived from week to week for the chance to go back to the barn. I literally lived for my time there. Horses taught me so much. I learned assertiveness. Communication. Teamwork. Responsibility. Empathy. Nurturance. How to listen to my gut. When to push myself through my anxiety and when to heed it. How to take safe risks. Unconditional love. I learned that a connection with someone bigger and more powerful didn't have to hurt. Horses taught me that if I could learn from hard knocks, I could learn from soft touches. I have a family who loved me with everything they had, and we all did everything we could with what we knew at the time. I was raised by these people I love and respect so much - and by a small herd of surprisingly wise horses.

In 1996, I founded Flying Change as I was transitioning out of my work as a traditional riding instructor and trainer. More and more I attracted clients who were really learning life lessons that were less about how they rode than how they lived and who they were. I began by trying to incorporate activities in their lessons that they could apply at home. We talked less about their success at shows and more about their relationship with their horse. Less about control, more about partnership. Less about equitation, more about balance. Less about form, more about content. Out of this evolved a thriving program which soon included equine assisted psychotherapy and equine experiential learning. Over the years what started out as an experiment with personal growth grew into a practice where children, adults, families and even corporations were introduced to themselves on a deeper level and discovered tools to live fuller, healthier, more meaningful lives.

Flying Change has been such a rich experience. We have been blessed to be a safe haven for people who are learning and healing. Every year our program grows and thrives, evolving as a result of the people who come through our program and make it their own. The clients, the horses - I have loved being part of their lives.

I believe that our lives are a series of lessons designed to guide us to the exceptional gift that we each have to give. Through Flying Change, I have been amazed and gratified to see kids who have given up and shut down begin to unfurl their closed hearts and let love in again, because it came from a horse. I was one of those kids once. I have been so blessed and fulfilled by this work, and I hope that if you ever come to the barn and meet our horses, that you will benefit from it as much as I have.



For more information about
Flying Change Therapy
Please visit
www.flyingchange.org

*Please mark your calendars for our
Trick or Trail event on October 26th
and join our campaign to
"Make a Change for Flying Change"
Just save your coins and bring them
to the event to help pay for the care
of our therapy horses.
Thank you!*

