

Horses provide children opportunity to build confidence, life skills

By Cindy Cowen

What we so often hear about in our daily lives centers around negative happenings in our community: abuse, drug related crimes, students failing in our education system. We hear about children in trouble and the lack of resources to help.

One program that is tending to the emotional, social and personal needs of our youth in the Lake Tahoe, Carson Valley and neighboring communities is Between Horses and Humans, a small nonprofit that pairs able bodied children with equine partners to develop leadership and communication skills. Through leadership group classes or private classes, children learn the value of dedicated perseverance, clear communication, and generosity of heart. Working with horses enhances the children's ability to understand how to approach new situations with confidence, handle miscommunications without frustration or anger, and respect others.



Horses help youngsters develop more the equestrian skills. Photo/Provided

Directed by Barbara Slade, a talented horsewoman and teacher,

Between Horses and Humans operates mainly out of Skyhawk Ranch in Gardnerville. Slade explains that the highly sensitive horses, through their actions and responses, mirror back to the children the state of their emotions. The children learn how to modify their behavior and responses in order to successfully work with the horses, who give them unconditional love and acceptance.

With kindness, firmness and intuitive coaching from Barbara, children learn techniques and leadership skills with horses that, beyond the joyful mastery it gives them, teaches them how to deal with their life challenges in new, positive and life affirming ways.

Parents and children are thrilled by the changes in character that the horses inspire. A young mother, whose husband had died, struggled with her child's debilitating grief over her father's death. Between Horses and Humans classes have changed the child's life.

One child, in the throes of family and self-esteem issues, has attended private classes for several months. She uses her equine partner as a personal motivator when difficult situations come up in her life. She said horses have taught her about inner-strength, patience and trust.

Teachers report that students in the leadership classes made marked improvement in behavior and social interactions, and show greater focus and determination in academics.

Between Horses and Humans targets able-bodied children and young adults from age 8 and up. Children are referred to the program by a variety of sources such as social agencies, educators, therapists, counselors and private individuals.

On Oct. 20, Between Horses and Humans is hosting a fundraiser at Skyhawk Ranch. Students will demonstrate their new leadership skills with their equine teachers. Following the demonstration, there will be a luncheon and silent auction.

If you are interested in learning more about the program or the fundraiser, call Barbara Slade at (775) 265.0901 or go online.