

NEWS UPDATE

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Cold Lake First Nation's Young Adult Leaders Attended a Learning Through Horses Team Building Workshop on August 5,6,7, 2008

Cold Lake First Nation, Human Resources Department, contracted the Cartier Equine Learning Center, of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, a specialized equine-assisted learning program, to provide a unique three-day team building/leadership skills development workshop for a selected group of young adult leaders in the community. The Cartier Equine Learning Center is internationally known for being the first nationally recognized certified EAL program; a curriculum with enough diversity to facilitate youth and adult programs, ranging from behavioral modification to leadership development.

The Cold Lake First Nations' youth leaders attended this unique horse assisted team building workshop, "*BECOMING HERD SAVVY*" Tuesday through Thursday, August 5,6,7, at the Cold Lake Agriplex. "The focus is placed on developing individuals in group interactive exercises," says Tamara MacKinnon, program director, "but change comes through a personal perspective when they clearly understand how every action effects others on their team."

Equine-assisted learning exercises are designed around practical and effective communication that enhances the participant's presence and influence on others. "Not only are horses used as barometers to aid facilitators as they identify the hidden messages, but the defining moment comes when participants realize that the horse is part of their team," says MacKinnon, and that every member of their team, including their horse, has value. "It wasn't easy," says one of the CLFN participants, "but by the end, I knew why we were here. The bonus was working with horses, we were learning valuable skills without realizing it."

Cold Lake First Nation's youth leaders worked through a specially designed building block curriculum, formatted for each to work on their team building skills, known in the horse world as, "becoming herd savvy". As they learned how to put aside "the manure" that typically blocks a team's overall productivity, each group became more successful over the three day course. The Cartier's EAL facilitators broke down, how to identify individual communication components to compliment each of their strengths for the betterment of their team. Thus effectively working as one unit.

What is EAL?

The Cartier's equine-assisted learning programs have the ability to be a powerful journey of learning and understanding. Horses in this program are powerful teaching tools that immediately respond to what the participant is doing. Trained facilitators watch for "teachable moments" that horses identify. Quite simply the horse does the teaching, facilitators are there to provide an explanation and offer guidance to individuals while working in a group to find a solution.

Why Horses?

The single most asked question is why are horses used? Horses are extremely sensitive, aware of their surroundings and quick to react. For their mere survival a wild horse must constantly be on guard. Nature provides them with instincts and senses that are very astute. They watch for the slightest movement, looking for threatening body posture. They know how to discern the difference between a calm non-threatening approach and anxious nervous energy. However every horse is different and teaches each participant something unique about themselves.

"To understand how this process works we must first realize how horses learn and understand their own rules of survival. In a horse's world the rules are clear, easy to understand and dealt with swiftly and decisively if challenged. By realizing this about horses we can alter our facilitation techniques to become more efficient," claims MacKinnon. Team work is a necessity to the survival of the herd, it is not only expected but respected. Horses respond favorably to positive stimuli, gaining trust and respect through herd training. They don't judge but they don't forget. Participants must earn their relationship(s), they provide honest and instant feed back, never allowing participants to cheat.

Horses are tough and steadfast dance partners and if participants are willing to listen, they can assist with guiding groups to becoming better individuals, team players and leaders. Learning to listen to what horses have to say is powerful and acts as the stimulus to individual change. By including horses in specially designed experiential exercises, equine-assisted specialists have proven repeated success to each participant's journey of self discovery.

Quite simply . . . Equine-assisted learning works.