



November 15, 2006
STARFISH Celebrity Chats
Presents
Franklin Levinson,
Executive Director of Way of the Horse

Donna Gilcher , Executive Director STARFISH Advocacy Association Moderator (DG)	Mr. Franklin Levinson grew up around horses and learned early on the calming benefits found in the interaction between humans and horses. Mr. Levinson's mission is to enhance and enrich the horse/human relationship wherever and whenever possible by teaching humans how to compassionately and effectively interact with their horses. Mr. Levinson studied as a music therapist before combining his love for horses with his talent for teaching others to connect with themselves and others through learning and practicing relationships with horses. He is located in Snowmass Colorado and runs clinics throughout the world. Please join me in welcoming Franklin to STARFISH Advocacy Association.
Question 1:	What got you interested in EFL?
Franklin Levinson, Executive Director Way of the Horse (Speaker)	I was a music therapist at a private institution in S. Florida many years ago. This was before the days of degrees in music therapy. It might have been called Musically Facilitated Learning. That did get me comfortable working with special needs individuals, with very severe challenges. Some were dangerous to themselves and others. This sort of work is not for everyone. I had an ability to do it. It made me feel good inside. So, it was a natural evolution for me to begin to provide EFL sessions once I was in a position to do so.
Question 2:	Since studies show that Equine Facilitated Learning is very calming especially for children with emotional and mental disorders, do you have any recommendations for how to get an extremely anxious child who is afraid of such a large animal, to engage with the horse to receive the benefit of its presence?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	This is done one little step at a time. Perhaps allow a comfortable distance between the child and the horse. Then ask the child to hold the lead rope for a little while until he gets more comfortable. Then, little by little, move them closer together. Then a gentle touch...

Question 3:	What helped you to discover the correlation between horses and calming relationships with special kids?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	I knew I was more peaceful and calm when interacting with a horse. This is because to become successful with horses, the more patience, calm and quiet energy I could bring to the horse, the more successful its training became. This is true for all humans just being around horses. Clinical studies of the calming effects for humans of simply being around horses are well documented. Our heart rates go down and in the moment anxiety seems to dissipate when in the company of horses. Think about it. When you have watched or viewed horses, wasn't it sort of a captivating experience? Didn't it bring you very much into the present moment and quietly? This is a common and universal response to just the image of the horse.
Question 4:	Do the effects of EFL last longer than the duration of the therapy itself or is it necessary for therapy to be ongoing?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker))	Absolutely...however, immediate benefit is had...Increased self-esteem, self-awareness, immediate enhanced cognitive skills, better motor, and more...
Question 5:	Do these special horses bond with some kids better than others?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Just as some people get along better with certain individuals, horses get along better with some humans more than they do with others. I think that's part of the nature of all 'beings.'
Question 6:	Is there normally a waiting list for persons wishing to sign up for EFL?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	This depends on where the program is being held. Therapeutic riding or riding for the handicapped is a much more widely provided program than EFL for learning disabled individuals. In fact, it can be difficult to find these programs. The North American Riding for the Handicapped Assoc. (NARHA) has a mental health arm. It is called the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Organization (EFMHA). They can be easily found online and can provide information on the whereabouts of EFL and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) programs. This is where I send folks wanting to find programs in their area. I also suggest they contact www.adventuresinawareness.net . This organization was founded by one of the originators of this work named Barbara Rector. She founded the very first EFL program for those with addiction issues at Sierra Tucson, in Tucson AZ many years

	ago. Barbara is a close friend and has mentored me in this work for a long time. I suggest folks contact her very often.
Question 7:	What is the most enjoyable experience you've had with Equine Facilitated Learning?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Having a mother tell me all the terrible challenges a child has and all the things the child cannot do. Then, within a few minutes, you see the child guiding a horse thorough an obstacle course or lunging a horse over a low jump. The child immediately begins to carry themselves with real self-esteem and improved confidence. They become focused on the horse and the movement. It truly is miraculous! Again, this is an eye watering and emotional experience graphically demonstrated in the Training Thru Trust DVD.
Question 8:	What kind credentials should parents look for in locating a proper facilitator for equestrian therapy?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	The normal model for this work is a psychologist or mental health professional, a horse professional and a suitable horse (which the horse professional determines). The health professional credentials part is easy. It's the horse professional part that is the most challenging to find. There are so many novice horse people who would love to do this, but they are not sufficiently knowledgeable about horses to not just use the horse inappropriately. The horse is an equal partner in this work and should be honored and treated as a respected partner. The vast majority of horse people really do not understand what this means. They 'use' and objectify the horse in the process. They use the horse like a living inkblot test. Many of the exercises in EAP (Equine Assisted Psychotherapy) are so inappropriate that I get a bit irate and angered by the, now international organizations that have been created since the bandwagon of EFL and EAP got rolling. I caution all people interested in Equine Assisted or Facilitated programs to be wary of exercises and programs that do not honor the horse. Your gut feelings will tell you if the program is appropriate. If it feels 'yucky' and inappropriate, it probably is. You should watch and investigate all programs offered and all individuals involved at the professional level.
Question 9:	Are there normally high costs involved in matching a child with a horse?
Franklin	I gave away most of my children's programs as most agencies

Levinson(Speaker)	and even the families themselves had little money for such a new and rather alternative program. For those families that are fortunate to have the where-with-all, the purchase of an appropriate animal is easy and par-for-the-course actually, with some professional help.
Question 10:	How long does it normally take a child/horse to bond?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	The bond is begun the moment the horse and child get in close proximity. Sometimes they can even be at some distance from each other. This is again due to the hugely empathetic nature of the horse. Once physical interaction begins, the bond gets bigger quickly.
Question 11:	What exactly is EFL and how did you get involved in it?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	It is learning about oneself through the success or non-success of interaction with a horse. A horse sort of mirrors specific things about whoever is with it. If there is an agenda of control the horse knows it. If the agenda is to just be there with the horse, this works to help the horse stay calmer...Children just want to be there with them...not necessarily to do something...I am a lifetime horseperson and developed seminars introducing horses to humans appropriately. There is a world of the horse that has nothing to do with the human riding it. It is and should be as much about the horse as the human....
Question 12:	Does the child/horse relationship normally last long term; or at least late teens?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	This is a difficult question to answer as it is up to the individuals involved. There really is no norm. Young girls tend to get involved with horses early on in their lives if exposed to them, only to abandon the relationship once they discover 'boys.' Boys, well, boy will be boys.
Question 13:	How do we go about finding EFL-trained persons in our respective areas?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Contact EFMHA and or NARHA. This can be done online NARHA http://www.narha.org/ or via the telephone at 800-369-RIDE (7433).
Question 14:	Is it normal for a child to be petrified at first meeting?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Occasionally, but not always. My personal experience is that the children are in such awe of the horse that they do not freeze.

	But, rather are attracted to this big furry animal. 'Special kids' sometimes use their intuition more than 'normal' children or even adults. If the horse is an appropriate choice for the program (not afraid or nervous), the child will tend to just be curious, attracted and unafraid.
Question 15:	Can this type of therapy work with other animals or do you believe that there is a special effect that is specific with horses?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	I do think other animals could do this work. Dogs and perhaps dolphins.
Question 16:	How many horses do you use for therapy at your ranch?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	At my Maui ranch I had 5 out of 15 horses that were suitable. I can have one horse partner with several children (one at a time) during day's sessions. Generally I like to not overdo it with a horse, preferring to allow only 2 sessions per day with a specific horse.
Question 17:	Are some horses inappropriate for this therapy?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Absolutely. This is the reason a real horse professional needs to be involved. Some horses are simply too high-strung, not acclimated to humans enough, not comfortable in different surroundings and more, to be suitable for this work. A horse professional should be able to sort out which horses are acceptable and which are not.
Question 18:	What training does a horse and child need to work together?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	What is required is an appropriate horse. One that is comfortable with humans, calm and quiet. No special training other than basic training is required. The child needs only to show up...
Question 19:	My daughter does therapeutic riding weekly. Is there anything that we can do at home that will add to the benefits that she gets from this program?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	I suggest asking about whether or not the facility will allow some EFL to be done along with the therapeutic riding. EFL happens on the ground only. If they say yes (which likely will not be the case), you would have an open door as to topics for discussion and exploration with your child. Even with just the riding going on you could discuss feelings associated with the experience, things the child may have discovered about themselves and the

	horse, techniques the child used to stay balanced, guide the horse, etc. You can play the part of the horse yourself and ask the child to guide you around using string for reins, etc. There are lots of things a parent can do at home to 'keep the ball rolling' so to speak and reinforce the experience for the child.
Question 20:	Do you find a particular breed of horse best suited for therapy work?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	There are cold blooded horses and hot blooded ones. Hot blooded horses are thoroughbreds, Arabians, gaited horses (Paso Finos) and a few others. Cold-blooded horses are quarter horses, Morgans, and draft horses and cross. Cold-blooded horses are often better suited to this work as they tend to be calmer by nature. However, I have known several Arabians who were great at it....
Question 21:	Are there age restrictions for either kids or horses?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Not for horses but for children depending on how severe the disability. Under six they can be too immature to derive great benefit. For the BP and autistic children I work with they are older than six generally.
Question 22:	My daughter has multi-dx was very close to my horse until we moved out of state, I have thought of putting her into a program, How do you know it is a good program? What do you look for?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	I would talk to other people who have taken their kids to the program...get references. If it's a new program I would check with officials in the mental health program and the horse professional to see their credentials. It is a three person model...mental health professional, horse professional and the horse. Check all references. A good resource is an organization called the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association. It is the mental health arm of NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association). These organizations will assist you in finding local programs.
Question 23:	Is the therapy usually an individual experience, or does it work in groups?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	It depends on the specific issues of the children. I have worked with multiple children who have Downs Syndrome, in a group of 5. Autistic children must be one on one (at least that's my experience). For bipolar children I have done two to three together occasionally. But generally one-on-one. For ADHD no

	more than two or three but frequently one at a time. It makes no difference if they are siblings.
Question 24:	I've heard that a strong bond between a horse and child will last a lifetime. Is this true?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	A strong bond with horses is developed over time and can last a lifetime. A bond can be formed during an initial experience but like any relationship needs reinforcement. Horses have very good memories.
Question 25:	Why is EFL not more closely associated with therapeutic riding programs?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Because one deals with putting an individual on a horse. The other, EFL takes place on the ground. The techniques and process are very different. The benefits of EFL come from the child becoming the leader for the horse and all that entails.
Question 26:	Is it too late to start EFL with a 16 year old boy who has not been around horses much? At his age since he has not had much exposure to horses, so I would have to push him a bit to give it a try. It would be nice if it just was available and it happened that way. Is it worth the push?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Absolutely! You are never too old to benefit from being with horses. The trick for him would be to just get him there.
Question 27:	What is the difference between the therapy done for the physically handicapped and the mentally/emotionally impaired?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	With the physical handicap it is called hippo-therapy or therapeutic riding and it involves the physical benefits of being on a horse and feeling the motion of the horse and moving with the rhythmical patter. With EFL it is more cognitive skills, communications skills, and the enhancement of self esteem, confidence and self awareness. The child has to move around on the ground and be guiding and or leading the horse at the same time. So it tends to be more self activating. The child gets to do things in sequential order, multitask and it is very proactive. It's not being done to the child. The child is doing it himself. It is self activated. They lead and guide the animal and direct the action and motion of the horse. They become leaders. It is very enriching for the lives of children to be able to accomplish something and to direct the movement of a big animal. Its startlingly beneficial.

Question 28:	Is there a recommended amount of time a child would participate in EFL?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	The more time the better. The more time available for this therapy the greater the benefit. But even small amounts of time will give wonderful benefit.
Question 29:	What do recommend parents tell there kids in preparation for meeting the horse/EFL?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	That's a good question. You don't really have to prepare the child. Just get the child to show up. It is the facilitator who will get things rolling. The horse does it but I am directing the action a bit. The Training Thru Trust/EFL DVD I have really give graphic demonstration of what is required.
Question 30:	How long is a typical session with the horse? How many times a week is appropriate?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Generally 20-30 minutes up to an hour max. An hour session for a BP child would be very long. Autistic children occasionally can go longer.
Question 31:	Do these programs ever let the child take the lead in what they would like to do, my daughter mostly had things to do with the horse while she was on the ground, I called it daughter was out playing with the horse
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	Yes, anything other than riding. Anything that is safe and appropriate for both horse and human. That being said I have put children on the horses and combined therapeutic riding and EFL but the facility must be prepared for that ... they must have the gear, helmets, side walkers, etc and prepare to keep the child safe. It is riskier. When you are working on the ground and the horse gets scared it just runs away, the child isn't in any danger.
Question 32:	I grew up with horses and loved them. However, one quarter horse despised me from day one even though I loved her very much. Do you think if was just a personality conflict?
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	No it was not a personality conflict. The horse was <u>not defying</u> you either. Horses are not supposed to be obedient. They are supposed to be like partners (dance partners). It is up to both partners in the dance to do their part. One person must lead the horse. What looked like defiant behavior was the horse looking

	<p>for its own safety and survival simply because you had no clue as to the necessity of being a leader for it or how to do that. <u>Never blame a horse or judge them as bad or mean.</u> The horse is resistant only because it is afraid pure and simple. They are innocent as babies. They either 'trust' or are afraid. There is little middle ground. <u>It is the human's responsibility to be the good, kind, skillful, compassionate and appropriate leader for the horse in every instance.</u> You did not know how to be the leader for the horse and gain its trust. He won't comply if he doesn't trust. You probably wouldn't listen to someone you didn't trust either.</p>
Moderator (DG)	<p>Thanks so much for joining us this evening! To learn more about Mr. Levinson and EFL please check out his website http://www.WayoftheHorse.org and his DVD " Training thru Trust: Intro to Equine Facilitated Learning". Please post on our follow-up board. Mr. Levinson has graciously offered to continue the chat with us for the next week or so!!</p>
Franklin Levinson(Speaker)	<p>I would like to thank Donna, Tracy and the Starfish Advocacy for allowing me the opportunity to share my passion for life enrichment through success with horses for both horse and human. Please visit me online at www.wayofthehorse.org. The Training Through Trust/EFL DVD is available through the website. Good Evening</p>
D.Gilcher	<p>Special thanks to Tracy Anglada for Scribing and assisting in arranging this Celebrity Chat!</p>