**Farm Mindfulness with Horses Intro Course scripts**

**Week 1 Horses, Nature and Mindfulness intro 10/15 mins**

First of all, a little bit of background for people who don’t know what Horses Helping People is all about. We’re a therapeutic horsemanship centre, which means people come to us to spend time with our lovely horses, out in nature, to help those people feel better in some way. We welcome people of all ages, who may have mental health issues, learning disabilities, autism, caring responsibilities - anyone who can benefit from being at Sunrise Farm – which is pretty much everyone. We have 7 horses here at the farm - if you look through the windows you can see some of them out there. They all have their own personalities, and you’ll be getting to know them during your time here.

So, how come we’re doing mindfulness with horses? How could horses possibly help us with mindfulness?

We found that people who came to us for therapeutic sessions would benefit in areas such as confidence, calmness, communication skills and a sense of community. So we knew that being around horses could help people in a lot of ways – and, crucially, that didn’t have to involve riding them. Taking that a step further, we discovered that horses could really help us with our mindfulness sessions – here’s how…

Well, just by being horses, they live life mindfully, and one reason is because horses are prey animals. Imagine life as a wild horse, not knowing when a predator might appear. You have to be constantly aware of your surroundings, living in the moment as you use all your senses to scan your ever-changing environment. Is that something moving in the hedgerow? What’s that strange sound on the breeze? It’s this awareness of what’s happening in their environment now that keeps the horses safe.

It seems like it would be quite scary to have to constantly live with the knowledge that a life-threatening attack could happen at any time. But one of the amazing things about wild horses is that they don’t usually suffer from the same stress conditions that humans do – heart attacks, ulcers etc. They are aware, but that doesn’t tip into hyper vigilance. Their bodies are brilliant at balancing their needs – for example, their life is generally led at a slow pace, conserving energy for when it’s unexpectedly needed to run from danger, while their diet of eating little and often means that their digestive system is never overloaded, and therefore ready for a fast escape. Those bursts of adrenalin filled energy, when they run from a threat, actually work to disperse the adrenalin, so they’re not carrying the stress around all the time. They have no control over a threat which may or may not happen, but their bodies physically are in a state of gentle preparation, and mentally they are in the moment and aware of their surroundings. All this time, they are continuing to live their everyday lives of relationship, family, food and shelter.

In other words, horses live in the moment, and that is one thing we are trying to achieve with mindfulness. Not worrying about the past or planning for the future, but fully aware of the present.

Another reason that horses can help us with mindfulness is the fact that just being in the presence of a horse can feel really calming for humans. A horse’s heart is 10 times the size of a humans, and they have a well developed limbic (emotional) system. The magnetic energy field of a horse is large, and being within that field can feel comforting to a human, helping them to regulate their own systems.

There’s also the fact that being in the horses’ presence usually means being close to nature. Research shows that just 2 hours a week in a natural environment has a positive effect on our wellbeing. There’s a lot of talk about the need for people to connect with nature, but of course we ***are*** nature, so when we lose contact with the natural world, we lose something of ourselves. Horses can help us tune into the natural rhythms of the days and the seasons, and how the weather affects us, which can help us feel more balanced.

By this point you might be asking yourself, what’s in it for the horse? For a domesticated horse, there are quite a few perks. I think one of the most interesting is the fact that it gives the horses a chance to spend time with humans whose energy is regulated and calm. We’ve found time and again that horses are drawn towards the energy of people who are meditating – to the horse this feels safe. The life of the mindful horse is also compatible with a lifestyle that allows the horse to follow natural behaviours, spending all or most time outdoors in the company of other horses. A lifestyle which is inclusive of all horse ages, and most personalities. We might contrast this with, for example, the life of a racehorse, travelling in a lorry to race meetings, to an unknown place with strange sounds and smells, and spending a lot of time in a stable without being able to make physical contact with his friends.

Another perk is that there can also be the element of choice in this activity. For a lot of domestic horses, life consists of being told what to do, and being valued for how submissive you are. We’re interested in what horses do when they have a choice, so when we were developing how we were going to combine mindfulness and horses, we spent a lot of time seeing how different horses reacted to being involved, and trying different practices and locations. The horses are all individuals, and we like them to be able to express that. So when our youngest playful horse clearly found the whole meditation thing boring, we listened and made sure she wasn’t expected to join any practices she didn’t want to. What we did find though, in sometimes surprising ways, was how much the horses were drawn to us when the energy was calm – and this has also extended to other animals on the farm, including a wild rabbit who joined Debbie for a 20 minute meditation.

So, I hope you can now see that when you’re spending time with horses, you’re in the presence of masters of mindfulness. We’ve found that meditating alongside the horses, and spending time with them in their natural environment has certainly enhanced our mindfulness practice. On this course, our aim is to for you to experience something of that too.

**Week 1 Health & safety before stable meditation - meeting the horses**

And now we’re going to meet two of our horses, as we’re going across to the stables for a meditation.

Just a quick word about safety around the horses. We’ve designed the course to be safe for people who have no previous horse experience, so we don’t go into the same enclosures as the horses. Although they might be close there is always a fence between us. When we go across to the stables, the horses will know we’ve arrived, and I’ll introduce them to you. You might want to say hello, which you can do simply by sending a silent message (horses are really good at picking up on that) or saying hello verbally. If you want to make physical contact with them, if they are by the door, offer them the back of your hand to sniff. If they stay near you, you can try stroking them on the side of their neck. If they don’t come to you, please don’t reach over the door or wall into their space - it means they don’t want physical contact at this time. That’s quite common for horses. who don’t tend to seek out physical contact with humans in the same way dogs do.

When we go in the stable, find yourself a chair and we’ll be ready for the meditation. At this point we leave the horses to do their own thing –sometimes they relax and listen to the meditation, sometimes they lay down, sometimes they just eat their hay and fart – it’s up to them.

So let’s go over and meet the horses!

**Week 2 Horse Movement 20 mins**

We’re going to visit the horses to get some inspiration for our mindful movement which we’ll be doing after this – and because they’re lovely to look at!

Today we’re visiting …*(horses’ names)*

*Set the scene of what you see in the paddock – introduce who you’re looking at, and briefly what they’re doing.*

We’re looking at horses moving freely rather than being ridden.

Horses’ bodies are brilliantly evolved and balanced for the life they lead. A foal is up on its feet within an hour of being born, because the ability to move can be the difference between life and death. Therefore it makes sense to have a body that is supple and agile, and remains so for as long as possible.

Today you can see horses grazing, which is what they spend a lot of their lives doing – horses eat for around 17 – 18 hours a day. If you watch their movement here, they’re moving slowly forward and eating in an arc around the front legs. There’s no wasted energy going on here!

Horses sometimes move faster. That might be because they sense danger, so need to put as much distance between themselves and a predator as quickly as possible. Therefore their bodies are designed to move quickly, with long legs, and a digestive system with a small stomach that will never weigh them down. And much of life is spent standing, even dozing with a locking mechanism in their legs, ready for a fast get away. They will also sometimes play, often with short bursts of speed, keeping their bodies tuned up for those survival moves.

And they do also use movement for self care. Rolling on the ground is their form of grooming, getting rid of itches, while using their muscles to roll right over on both sides keeps those muscles working well. And it’s all finished with a good shake.

But most of their life is lived slowly and purposefully.

Let’s enjoy some time watching horses being horses, and maybe the ease and freedom of the horses’ movement will inspire you as we join in some mindful movement with Chris.

If anyone’s got any questions, feel free to ask as we watch them.

**Week 2 Intro to co-being**

Do you remember in the introduction in week 1, we said how just being in the same space as the horses can feel calming?

We’re now going to do just that – hang out alongside the horses for 10 minutes, just sharing space. There is no goal for this, nothing is supposed to happen. Earlier we saw the horses in the paddocks, and how they shared space with each other. Use that as your inspiration. You’ll be in a stable next door to a horse, or outside the ponies’ pen. Maybe sit in the chair or lean against the back wall, and just breathe. Perhaps see what you notice. If you find your mind wandering and would like something to focus on, see if you can tune in to the horse’s breathing by watching the rise and fall of their breath where their body joins their back legs. Their breathing rate is slow, usually 8-12 breaths per minute.

If the horse comes over to you, you can stroke them if you want, using the introduction you learnt last week – *(recap meeting guidelines)* – but you don’t have to make physical contact. The horses in the field would not usually be seeking out physical contact with each other, so will be content without.

Remember there is no goal. Feel free to communicate silently with the horse by sending messages or calm energy their way. The two things we ask you to avoid are staring intensely at the horse esp their eyes/head (that can feel like a predator), instead have a soft gaze over a wider area. Also remember to not physically invade their space by leaning over the fence/wall.

Enjoy!

**Week 3 Energy connection between horses 20 minutes**

*At the paddock, introduce the horses and set the scene. Be prepared to go off script if somebody does something different like rolling or even walking across the field.*

Today we’re looking at our horses living together as a herd, in other words a big horse family. Living in a herd provides security and safety for horses who are vulnerable to predator attacks. If you are one of 10, you have a better chance of survival than if you are on your own.

But when we watch the horses in the field, they are not necessarily standing or grazing next to each other. They might be spread out across the pasture, or just with one friend, seemingly in their own individual worlds.

However, these separate horses somehow remain connected to each other, so if one of them spots danger, such as movement in the hedge over there, the herd can immediately bunch together for safety, either checking out danger ready to run, or they meet already running.

How do they do know to do this? There’s no verbal warning, no equivalent of a human shouting ‘fire’ – for a prey animal, making a noise draws attention to you, so it’s not safe. Do they see one horse reacting and follow their example? This could actually lose them valuable seconds as they each watched and copied another horse – this could be the difference between life and death.

So let’s think of the herd as having an invisible web of energy, with strands connecting all the horses however separate they may seem. The connection may be very subtle, but if you spend time watching the herd you might see the signs that the horses are aware of each other. You might notice mirrored body language between horses at opposite ends of the field. One horse might start to move and immediately another quietly heads in the same direction. You might observe one horse summon another one simply with a fixed stare –Goldie and Corran are masters of the piercing gaze which can make you turn round even from a distance.

So when a sudden threat appears and one horse notices it, that energy web immediately tugs at all the members of the herd. Debbie has a story of when she experienced this for herself. She was in the field one day, not observing the herd, but just busy with the repetitive job of clearing up the muck – a never ending task with horses, but one which in this case put her in a meditative receptive state. Suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, she felt a jolt in her solar plexus. Before she could work out what was going on, she became aware of the horses running past her. Something had startled them, and she was privileged enough to be part of their alarm system, experiencing this direct and immediate connection of the energy of a community.

One day when we were doing this part of the course at the farm, we were lucky enough to witness the web in action when there just happened to be a loud bang nearby while we were watching the herd in the paddock. What was fascinating in this case was that the 6 horses immediately all connected with their individual friend before the partnerships came together as the herd. It happened instantaneously and seamlessly, as if it was a pre-planned choreographed dance – but it was just a beautiful example of the strands of the web pulling the herd together.

So, when the horses are at opposite ends of the field, physically far apart, they still feel a connection. Maybe, now you’re aware of it, you can feel something of that connection too. Maybe you feel the comfort of the herd? Maybe you feel a stronger sense of connection towards one of the individual horses? Let’s take some quiet time to see what comes up for you then, in a few minutes, I’ll invite you to walk back to the stables silently, holding any connection in mind.

**Week 4 Sensory Trail observation at the fields**

*Sensory walk, led by Mindfulness Teacher, opening one sense at a time. Arrive at paddocks.*

We’ve just walked to the paddock focusing on sense at a time. Now we’re going to look at how the horses use their senses.

The horses here might just look like they’re grazing and not much else is happening, but if we look a bit closer we can see that there’s a lot more going on. As prey animals they need to be constantly using all their senses to scan their environment for potential threats. But notice how relaxed they are as a

Let’s look at how they use their senses.

Their large eyes are positioned on the side of their head so they can see nearly all the way around them. While they are quietly grazing, they vision is slightly hazy, but they can bring it into sharp focus if they pick up something unfamiliar in their environment that needs checking out, such as unexpected movement.

Now have a look at their ears, They work like satellite dishes, moving around to pick up and locate sounds, familiar and unfamiliar. A horse can hear sounds from several miles away, and higher pitch noises than we can.

Their nostrils are also hard at work, taking in information brought to them on the breeze, or on the ground. Their sense of smell is around 50 times better than a human’s. (Their sense of taste is also very well developed. Horses don’t have the ability to be sick so need to make sure anything they are eating is safe.)

They are also taking in information through touch. A horse’s skin is sensitive enough to feel when a fly lands on it, so she can get rid of it before it bites. Can you see their fur, or manes and tails, being ruffled by the breeze? Their body is tuned into the weather, being more vigilant if the wind is gusty, and aligning their bodies side on to the sun in the morning to absorb the heat over a big body area.

If one of the horses noticed something that needed closer attention they would bring their head up to concentrate all their senses, ears pointed to the possible danger, eyes bringing the haziness into sharp focus, nostrils dilating to bring as much of the strange scent in as possible.

When they had checked out the possible danger, they would either respond by leaving, or return to gentle awareness.

All the time, they are in the moment.

Now we invite you to walk back to the stables, this time experimenting with opening all our senses together, trying to experience the world as the horse experiences it, with full physical awareness. You might experiment with feeling part of a moving herd.

When you arrive at the stables, two more horse members of the herd will be waiting for you as you take your seat.