

Simple Pleasures aid in forgetting pain of abuse

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Horseback riding, kitchen activities are part of ranch's healing process



Melissa MacLean, left, and Lisa Smith at The Lord's Ranch Ministry in Melvern Square. (GLEN PARKER)

MELVERN SQUARE — Horseback riding, farm chores and baking cookies on Sunday afternoon are bringing hope back into the lives of abused Annapolis Valley women and children.

That is because there is always something to do at the Lord's Ranch Ministry in Melvern Square, between Kingston and Middleton in Annapolis County.

If you have got a few hours to spare, owner Lisa Smith will be glad to hand you a horse brush, a shovel to muck out the stalls or a hammer to mend fences.

Smith is helping 25 women and 53 children who come to her stables from as far away as Bridgetown and Kentville.

"Our focus is on group therapy, with activities like making cookies and pies, and we're bringing back arts like canning and chocolate making," she said Saturday afternoon.

There is also assisted therapy that focuses on the horses. The Lord's Ranch Ministry has 11 horses and one donkey.

"If there's someone who can't afford to come here, we do an hour-for-an-hour trade — they do an hour of work and I do an hour with them on horse instruction," Smith said.

She doesn't have a lot of spare time. She is a Canadian Armed Forces radar technician at 14 Wing Greenwood and is working on master's degree at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville.

"I find myself running around a lot," Smith laughed.

"We are always looking for volunteers here at the stables."

Melissa MacLean, who started coming to the ranch a year ago because of trouble in her life, is doing her part.

MacLean has found a lot of common ground, relief and friendship with the other women. "My spirituality growth has been huge. I feel like I've found a place where I'm welcomed with open arms."

While she was not experienced with horses, MacLean has grown fond of the big animals. "There's a big trust issue with horses.

They mirror what you feel."

Smith agrees.

"So many of the people who come here are really scared and angry. When you put them up on a horse, they change."

Although she tries to match people with horses, Smith finds that they "kind of pick each other."

Riding takes place year-round, as long as it is not too icy.

Smith plans to put in a community garden, in the spring, which will yield fresh vegetables for participants.

"We welcome people who do not have faith. I don't force anything on anyone. Through our relationship and horseback riding, people find hope."

MacLean said she has received help, not just a handout.

"That's a big part of it. Everyone has to participate and everyone helps each other.

"It's a network of women working together . . . a good mix."

gparker@herald.ca

Derxw#kh@xwkrx»

By GLEN PARKER

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