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UKAg collaborating with horses to teach emotional intelligence

LEXINGTON, Ky., (Feb. 6, 2014) – In March, University of Kentucky researchers will launch a second study of the effectiveness of Equine Guided Leadership Education, a process of using horses to teach emotional intelligence and leadership competencies to nurse leaders.

The encouraging results of a similar pilot study completed in November 2012 by the UK Center for Leadership Development in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment and UK HealthCare helped to make this next larger research phase possible. The new study's objective is to explore innovative ways to develop emotional intelligence skills in nursing directors and nurse managers. This includes competency in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management, which create effective professional relationships and are critical to running safe, efficient and high performance hospital units.

"We are so pleased to be working again with the nurses at UK HealthCare on this larger study. With around 60 participants, our data should be more conclusive as to whether working with horses develops emotional intelligence competencies in humans," said Lissa Pohl, the center's assistant director and project lead.

The study will compare the before and after emotional intelligence assessment scores of both a control group and an experimental group. Those nurse managers and directors who participate in the one-day Equine Guided Leadership Education workshop will also complete a qualitative survey that will provide information on what skills the nurses acquired.

The basic premise of equine-guided education is that horses provide in-the-moment feedback about leadership skills, and therefore allow the development of insights that can be applied both in professional and personal lives. Participants will take part in exercises conducted from the ground that could include observing herd behavior, leading horses, grooming and picking their feet, and moving unrestrained horses through an obstacle course or into an enclosure without touching them.

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The Horse Institute, a New York-based provider of equine-assisted learning programs, is partnering with UK's Center for Leadership Development to publicize the research and raise funds for the study.

"We see again and again the amazing results our corporate groups and executives have when working with the horses," says Marie-Claude Stockl, executive director of The Horse Institute. "This is why we will match up to \$2,500 for every dollar donated to this important research."

Information on the results of the previous pilot study and about how to contribute to the new study are available at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/CFLD/research.php>. All contributions are tax deductible and will be used solely for the purpose of research in Equine Guided Leadership Education.

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