

How horses can help overcoming fear.

Philip is a 7 years old boy who starting coming to our Association for summer day camps, which are group activities around the horses: grooming, cleaning, feeding, riding, vaulting, walking... Philip at the beginning was very frightened, he would scream to avoid riding the horse, refusing such activity based on fear. It was then proposed to the mother to start an individual project, to support Philip in overcoming this fear and its attitude towards it. Even though Philip was still scared, he found a different approach, a place where it was not imposed to him to ride, the focus of the session was not riding but work together, and together with the horse.

The first times Philip, fearful, would stay far away from the horse, so he started with simple tasks. Then the main task was to train the horse, in this way the focus of the project was taking care of the horse, helping the horse, not his fear. He would lead the horse from the ground, have him do exercises and figures in the riding hall. Day by day, Philip got more comfortable around the horse and the riding hall, he was finally able to notice and use the tools in the arena (barriers, cones, games...), he would also invent games to practice with the horse, leading him in trails designed by himself, and finally making the horse jump little obstacles (always at a walking pace).

In order to get Philip to overcome his fear of getting on the horse, his task was once again to teach the horse to go in the spot where the ramp is, leading there the horse, alone. The next steps were to get Philip closer to the top of the horse, to touch it, leaning on him, finally he sat on him (both legs on the same side), lengthening the period of contact with the horse, gaining confidence. The day he was finally able to take his leg to the other side, to hug the horse from the top, did mark a milestone in his path. He started with support from the ground, then he held the hand of the teacher, finally he let go and now he is able to ride alone, with the teacher close to him.

This moment was very important, not only for his project at the Association, but he took this new confidence outside, in school and relationships, the mother was amazed by his changes and improvement. His path towards independence is still long, but thanks to the horses and a psycho educational approach Philip was able to feel a little taller, a little bigger, finally able to walk confidently and with his chin up.

