

# Making Hay While the Sun Shines: Using the Cause of Equine Welfare as a Platform for Teaching the Skills of Information Literacy

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## *Abstract*

This paper will tell the story of how a librarian's involvement in a cause served as a catalyst for a whole new way of thinking about teaching, learning and the entire information seeking process. Grounded in community service, this teaching model is based on the principles of service learning and embedded librarianship, continuing to evolve as it literally carries its tools "out in the field", using mobile technology to teach new skills to users in unexpected environments.

Having begun her career as a public librarian, Elizabeth Lorenzen was always interested in outreach. During her undergraduate years at the Herron School of Art, IUPUI, she came up with the idea of having "a place in the country where I could take in horses that no one wanted, giving them a wonderful life." Her concept finally came to fruition when she founded Peacefield Equine Sanctuary, Inc. (PES) in 2008. While realizing that "we could never save all the horses that needed us, our only hope was through education, and teaching the right way to care for our equine friends."

When the Philosophy Department at Indiana State University reached out to Peacefield in 2011 to allow students to receive classroom credit for community service at an animal shelter, the concept continued to evolve, and Lorenzen has not looked back. Youth groups all over the Wabash Valley have participated in PES's ever-expanding volunteer program, from Scouts and 4-H clubs, to at-risk youth in the schools and members of substance abuse rehab programs. Participants learn, not just about the cause of equine welfare, but how to care for these majestic animals while using different types of technology to mine and gather the information, increasing their information literacy skills in exciting and stimulating ways.

Peacefield has been honored nationally for the impact it has made on its community, and beyond. In addition, a new contribution to the community is developing as Peacefield is assisting with training and information dispersal for large animal disaster response.

## *Introduction*

The decision to start a non-profit horse rescue was not an easy one, but one that took about two years of thorough and careful planning, mainly because of the understanding of the expenses involved in caring for horses. Finally, though, it happened,

with the Sanctuary receiving non-profit status in the summer of 2009. The decision to create a nonprofit corporation came from the business plan, and the need to go after private funding for the project. During this time, federal laws changed that prevented horse slaughter, and there was an all-time high number of homeless horses in the United States, so the services were in high demand by the time the horse rescue was established.

Although Peacefield's primary mission was to rehabilitate horses and provide sanctuary for them, education was always at the heart of the mission. We could never save all of the horses that needed us, so our only hope was to educate the public about the right way to care for them, so that horses would never have to be rescued in the first place. In addition, one unfortunate reality of the horse world is that there are all kinds of horse owners who would not be considered on the surface to be abusers, but who inflict pain on their animals out of ignorance. Providing information to this group was also something that was greatly needed. In addition, there was a need to educate the public intelligently about horse slaughter issues without any political bias. What better person to do this than a librarian? So, it was inevitable that the educational mission would play a central role, and that the author's career in librarianship and academic education would integrate with her passion for horses. I just didn't see how it was going to play out right away until the situation actually came around to presenting itself. This project is all about context, about taking a learning process and changing its venue in order to present the adventure of information seeking in a new and creative way. So, in addition to telling about Peacefield's beginnings, this article will illustrate through a series of vignettes a few of the educational programs that have been developed, and introduce the reader to some of Peacefield's wonderful volunteers, telling what they learned about information literacy and the stories of their favorite equine friends.

## *Peacefield's Educational Mission*

*Peacefield Equine Sanctuary exists to care for horses that need both medical attention and/or behavioral training, with the goal of making them good equine citizens. Their care will be tracked throughout their entire lives in order to ensure their permanent safety. The Sanctuary also exists to educate the public about equine care and rehabilitation, and about the politics of the abolishment of horse slaughter.*

From Peacefield's beginnings, there were always plans in place for educational programming. It was felt that through fully educating the volunteers about horse care, we would begin to grow our own potential future adopters and advocates for our cause. We also simply realized that the organization would never get off the ground without a sound volunteer base. Volunteers could teach each other once they learned a new skill, thus solidifying what they learned in their own minds. When the organization began, there was not yet a realization that there would be a community engagement component that would eventually reach all four local colleges and universities; that part of the program formed later as faculty learned about Peacefield through the librarian. Educational seminars for the general public also formed as the volunteer base developed and collaboration to develop the programs could transpire.

There is always more to learn about caring for our equine friends, and Peacefield now spends a significant amount of time and energy bringing professionals into the immediate geographic area to educate the public about issues such as farm and pasture management, dental care, feeding practices, and other aspects of horse husbandry. The list of topics to be covered for the future is endless! The process of documenting all of the programming, while largely resting with the librarian, in the future will also involve the students as part of their information literacy training.

#### *Why Use Horses as Teaching Tools?*

Even though rescuing the horses was always the primary goal of Peacefield Equine Sanctuary, we soon realized that we could never even begin to save them all, so education was going to have to be key—and teaching information literacy skills in the context of the horses would fuel an interest in learning that might not otherwise happen, cultivating a future knowledgeable horse owner and animal rights advocate. But, the question still remains: why use horses as a teaching tool? Horses have long been recognized as being invaluable therapy animals, being used in work with every kind of group from the physically handicapped child, to the at-risk young person, and the wounded war veteran. Countless studies have been done in the world of science to try to document what it is about being around horses that is inherently therapeutic, and they are far outside the scope of this article; but at the end of the day, their connection with human beings is in part a mystery, having gone on in history for centuries. However, we do know from experience that:

- Working with horses requires focus, emotional control, and self-awareness;
- Learning responsibility for and engaging in work with a horse puts a person in a state of openness to learning new ideas;
- Working with abused and injured horses teaches personal responsibility and organized thinking; being herd animals, horses crave daily regular routine;

- Being around horses is just fun and makes learning no work at all!

When Peacefield began, it was always of prime importance to its founder that the horses receive the very best of care and attention on par with that of a permanent home. It was also important to be very selective about adoptions. Teaching these goals to students helps them to understand many different things about life, from philosophy and ethics of animal care to what it means to run an organization with personal integrity. Once acquired, these skills translate to the development of the ability to create a research plan and see it through, effectively using the information to meet a goal. It might even take a volunteer on a journey to a new career path.

“Seeing horses as our teachers awakens a level of trust, relationship and respect that goes both ways, and in so doing, shifts our relationship to the world.”—Linda Tellington Jones (Lieberman, 2007)

#### *Why Was ISU a Perfect Setting for this Project?*

As soon as Peacefield acquired its non-profit status in the summer of 2009, work began to identify students from all four colleges and universities who would be interested in participating as volunteers, the main goal being to have enough manpower to care for at least eight horses on a daily basis. One local college, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, has an equine studies program, and those students in particular were tapped for internship experiences. Students could not be offered pay, but were given incentives for volunteer hours, from riding hours to personal reference letters, to encourage compliance with the program. Success was mixed, though, until the Philosophy Department at Indiana State University contacted its departmental liaison, who was also the executive director of the Sanctuary, about allowing students to have an experience at the facility that would result in a written reflection on empathy and their experiences with the horses there. With an assignment that required a set number of hours of participation and a grade, compliance was more eminent, and the relationship between Peacefield and ISU's Philosophy Department began.

Ironically enough though, there was no interest on the part of the Philosophy Department in integrating information literacy concepts into the Peacefield experience. It is the author's opinion that it was seen as something that would intrude into the syllabus and rob the instructor of time to cover other topics. The positive side of this challenge, was that it created an opportunity to think of some creative alternatives and integrate some information literacy related activities into the volunteer experience, while the students were actually working hands-on with the horses.

Indiana State University has a long history of campus community engagement activity, and has actively cultivated a culture of service learning among both students and employees alike. Recently, within the past few years, it has received awards from the Washington Monthly College Guide,

The Corporation for National and Community Service, and the U.S. Department of Education for its efforts.

Now, the Center for Community Engagement (<http://www.indstate.edu/publicservice/>) serves as the front door to the campus, connecting staff and students with nonprofit opportunities. According to a press release from the ISU Newsroom, ISU was among a select group of colleges and universities from throughout the nation appearing on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with distinction, an honor that went to only 110 of the more than 640 institutions. The President's Honor Roll recognizes higher education institutions that reflect the values of exemplary community service and achieve meaningful outcomes in their communities. By the time the current academic year ends, an estimated 6,600 ISU students will have provided 1.1 million hours of community service, according to ISU's Honor Roll application.

Faculty and staff have joined students and Sycamore Service Corps (AmeriCorps) members in serving nearly 150 community agencies. During the first year of a new program that provides up to two days per year of paid leave to faculty and staff for community service work, 168 employees provided 1,200 hours of service to 68 Wabash Valley agencies. ISU maintains a goal for every student on campus to have at least one community service experience before graduation. "Indiana State has made community service a core component of what we do. It is embedded in our teaching, our co-curricular activities and our employee benefits and recognition. There is an expectation that if you are a Sycamore, you will be involved in community service," said Dan Bradley, president of ISU. "It is exciting to see that the hard work of the staff in the Center for Community Engagement and our faculty, staff and students has garnered the number one ranking in the nation."

Indiana State was also among the first universities in the nation to be recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in a special category of colleges and universities that are committed to both an academic approach to community collaboration and extensive outreach and partnerships (Taylor, 2013). In addition, another accolade for its commitment to community engagement has come from the Department of Recreation Management, with its certified and award winning Non-Profit Leadership program.

So, what does this mean exactly for Peacefield Equine Sanctuary?

- With this extensive infrastructure in place, it is much easier to notify students and staff of volunteer opportunities
- Since community service is integrated into the curriculum, course credit is attached to the activity, so motivation to follow through and complete projects is higher

- Staff, and in this case, fellow coworkers, have an opportunity they might not have had otherwise to volunteer, given their work schedules and family responsibilities, thus serving as another source for the volunteer base;
- Given Peacefield's educational mission, there is not just the opportunity to teach about animal welfare and horse care, but to give instruction in the use of the tools to find the information about said topics.

### **(UNIQUE) The Ethics of Animal Welfare: The Case of Jessica and Her Friend Pete**

When Jessica first became a part of Peacefield's volunteer program, it was as a member of a Philosophy class at Indiana State University called the Ethics of Animal Welfare. In addition to being interested in animal welfare issues, Jessica was also interested in pursuing a career as a veterinarian or other related field, and wanted to learn more about her options.



Learning about the many different special needs of the horses at Peacefield gave Jessica ideas for possible specialties to explore. For example, PES's attending vet also practices Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine and other holistic veterinary alternatives, giving Jessica the opportunity to experience firsthand the benefits of these methods. Utilizing our mobile devices out in the

barn, we researched veterinary schools that taught Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine, and learned about the philosophy behind it. It is not unusual for a volunteer to gravitate toward and befriend a particular horse at the Sanctuary, and Jessica was no exception. Her choice was Pete, a palomino pinto gelding who had become blind because of a chronic case of uveitis, an infection and inflammation of the eye. Pete also had an untreated leg wound upon intake which had caused much scarring and subsequent discomfort. Through learning to care for Pete's health issues, Jessica didn't just learn about empathy, but she also learned about issues related to equine healthcare, and whether or not she really wanted to be a veterinarian. Even after the course requirement ended, Jessica has continued to volunteer at the rescue so that she can be near her friend Pete. She has been helping further with his rehabilitation and training. Pete loves people and interacting with them, but has issues related to harsh treatment in the past that he has had to overcome. His friend Jessica is there to help him transition to his new life.

*We Know That Service Learning Builds Good Citizenship—So*

### *Why Is It An Ideal Model for Teaching Information Literacy?*

Students need to learn about being information savvy—how information literacy is important for everyday living. Service librarianship helps with that by making the information seeking process practical. It is in the “doing”, or the engagement in the activity, that its applications are fully realized.

In service librarianship, the librarian is embedded into the service learning project or effort so that research and learning about finding, evaluating and using relevant information happens at the same time as the service learning activity. By performing a service learning activity while learning about the concepts of information literacy, a volunteer/student gains a sense of purpose connected to learning through new experiences. This better prepares the student for life after college, possibly catapulting them into a new career (Barry, 2014).

In the context of Peacefield Equine Sanctuary, for example, the difference between the animal getting adequate care upon intake to the Sanctuary depends upon access to just-in-time information about equine health and knowledge of emergency care that needs to transpire before the veterinarian arrives. The real-world connection between the volunteer/student and the animal solidifies the importance of immediate access to correct information in a real-time setting. Experiential learning is nothing new, and neither is academic library instruction, but letting the horses be the professors in the learning process creates a unique mental and emotional playground for the learning that reaps great benefits. It also encourages the volunteers to take personal responsibility for their own learning processes, as it is essential to the welfare of the horse that is in their charge.

During the last few years as the program for student volunteers grew, there were many online resources collected for use by those working with the horses. In some cases these resources might be used in conjunction with immediate care of the horses or they might be used as tools for outreach programming. Many of the following tools are highly visual and utilize various social media programs. In order to make the information most relevant to the students, choosing tools that are accessible with mobile devices is imperative. Some of the tools that were utilized are illustrated in the article’s accompanying vignettes.

#### **Examples of Equine Teaching Tools for Information Literacy**

- Pinterest boards to collect and display information on animal husbandry <http://www.pinterest.com/liblore/>
- Pinterest boards to display book, art, and film information about horses, concentrating on trying to see from the

animal’s point of view (utilized for informal book talks)

- The next step in book talks is transitioning to digital storytelling to make the medium more interactive and easier to share with the general public
- Facebook as a communication and information sharing tool <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Peacefield-Equine-Sanctuary/74909584079>
- Animal Welfare LibGuide: <http://libguides.indstate.edu/animal>
- Peacefield’s web page as a source of information about the non-profit (<http://peacefield-equinesanctuary.org>)
- YouTube channel for sharing movies that tell Peacefield’s story, as well as information resources that are in the form of film. <https://www.youtube.com/user/PeacefieldEquine/>
- Mobile device apps for information gathering and sharing are investigated and evaluated for use by students, other volunteers, and members of the general public (see end of article for list of resources)
- I pads used in the field in conjunction with broadband mobile devices—excellent for displaying Pinterest boards of resources, as well as other social media tools.

#### **(UNIQUE) Peacefield as the Centerpiece of a Graphic Design Project –Taking Research about Horses and History Home**

Even when you are a subject liaison with a degree in the subject area, networking can still be difficult in a department, and the Art Department at Indiana State University has been no exception. Between staff shortages and the mandate to increase studio class sizes, along with shortages of funds for equipment, there have been many challenges for the department to face. But, in the midst of all of those things, there was an opportunity to connect with faculty who had an interest in giving back to their community and were exceptionally interested in animal welfare.

After years of networking, an opportunity presented itself to work with a senior level graphic design class with a community service component. Peacefield Equine Sanctuary was added to the non-profits list for a “Causes” assignment, where students would select a local non-profit as a client and then design promotional materials for that organization, such as billboards, brochures, business cards, and the like. One student chose Peacefield as her client and designed a business card, trifold brochure, and billboard for her finished project. During the process of creating the materials, there were multiple opportunities to get together in the library and work on the research for the project.

When working with art students who want to make contri-



butions for graphic design and advertising there is always an opportunity to show the research behind PES's branding concepts.

Peacefield was the name of President John Adams' farm in Massachusetts, and was chosen as an homage to the director's family name. The theme behind all of the publicity therefore stems from research about 18th century America and its art, and gives the perfect opportunity to show a practical use for research concerning this period of time in American history.

Through the use of books, internet resources about 18th century art history, and materials telling the story of the horse in art through the ages, not only was the student engaged in helping Peacefield, but was gaining the tools to learn how to perform historical research by time period, and the use of historical timelines. In this particular case, the added bonus after the completion of the student's project was that she was hired by the library as a student assistant for the Public Services Department, and had already gained some basic training in research, so she was more than ready to go with regards to her work at the Information Desk—a solution that benefited all parties concerned.

#### **(UNIQUE) Teaching Empathy Through Community Service: The Anna Sewell Book Talk**

*"My doctrine is this, that if we see cruelty or wrong that we have the power to stop, and do nothing, we make ourselves sharers in the guilt." - Anna Sewell*

Evenings after feeding time are a popular time for group talks at Peacefield Equine Sanctuary. The volunteers and I may use the time to recap what we have done with the horses on the farm that day; or, we might talk about the students' impending writing assignments. An assignment that they all regularly have in common is to write a story about an interaction with an animal they have helped and show how it illustrates empathy.

In order to verbally illustrate to the students the concept of empathy, I enjoy telling them about the story of Anna Sewell, the author of a best-selling novels, *Black Beauty*. The novel was an innovation, as it was the first of its kind to put the horse's voice into the story as the narrator, thus putting the reader into the horse's point of view. Anna was born into a Quaker family, and prevention and alleviation of all forms of cruelty, which was a strong Quaker principle, was a strong belief and habit central to her young life (Gavin, 2004). Early in her life, she became lame and could not walk, as a result of an accident for which she may have not have received adequate treatment. In fact, she was plagued with ill health for a great portion of her life. She therefore depended greatly on horses for transportation, and had the chance to observe firsthand the ways in which they were treated by the society in which she



Solomon, Peacefield's own Black Beauty, with his person, Elizabeth. He was always present for the book talks and enjoyed weighing in on the discussion.

lived. *Black Beauty* was her response to that observation, and was written in the last six years of her life. After reading an essay on animals by Horace Bushnell, Anna stated that one of her goals in writing was "to induce kindness, sympathy, and an understanding treatment of horses." In talking with the students about the concept of empathy, it is often discovered that there is confusion between sympathy and empathy. It is one thing to feel sorrow and compassion for someone, but quite another to put oneself in their place. By working with the horses and hearing about their stories, students find that they can personally identify with an individual horse's life and misfortunes, and it can change their point of view about the world. Whether Anna knew completely the far reaching impact that her book would have we cannot know for sure, but in contemplating the plight of the horse and choosing to write her novel from his place, she really did make an impact. Critics of Sewell have accused her of being overly emotional and typically Victorian in her point of view regarding the feelings of the horse; yet, recent scientific studies have shown that not only are horses emotional beings, they develop attachments to their human friends and do not forget them, even after being separated for long periods of time (Viegas, 2010). Anna may not have had science to back up her perspective at the time, but observation taught her otherwise, and because of that observation she was able to create a work of art that turned the tide in her short lifetime regarding the treatment of horses. Students need to hear these kinds of stories.

#### *Conclusion*

Developing a passion and intense interest in a subject or issue can have a profound impact on a person's ability to absorb and learn about the information being presented. Horses have always been a part of the fabric of the human experience, and have a connection to human beings that cannot be easily calculated.

The therapeutic value of working with them has been seen time and again in the therapeutic riding centers, horse sanctuaries and rescues, and other similar facilities across the country. Through using horses a tool for learning, students derive purpose from the education that they are receiving, and the horses are helped at the same time. As Peacefield's educational programs grow, new ways to collect, organize and acquire information resources will grow as well. Peacefield's slogan is "Where Compassion and Education Meet." The results of the collaboration between Peacefield Equine Sanctuary and Indiana State University are a perfect result of the intentions behind this short yet powerful directive. And, not only has Peacefield transformed the students who have become friends with the horses, it has had a transformative effect on the life and career of a librarian, whose reinvention caused her life's work to be seen in a new light.

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