

# GUIDELINES



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## Introduction

The youth play an important role in our society in which people with special needs are some of the most vulnerable. Each community takes measures to support people with special needs. In the core of these efforts are different types of therapies. For various conditions equine-assisted therapy (EAT) has proven to bring a lot of improvements. This kind of therapy has very positive effects on the youngest. On the other hand, its format allows for young people and young professionals to take part in it and make their own impact for the community. To provide more practical information on the matter a group of organizations—Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation Bulgaria, Association For You, Quality Education for Sustainable Social Transformation, and Creativi108, all interested in the topic created the project Youth in Equine-Assisted Therapy (YEAT) and the YEAT Guidelines.

## WHAT IS EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY (EAT)



Humans discovered the healing power of horses in ancient times. Today we continue to partner with horses aiming to improve the health and wellbeing of people under the guidance of professionals.

Horses can help humans by establishing connection and/or physical interaction which is considered a therapy. The human can be on the ground, on the back of the horse, or using a device.

The main benefits of EAT for the humans are emotional, physical, cognitive, social, and self-improvement.

## Who is the Youth in Equine-Assisted Therapy Guidelines designed for?

The YEAT Guidelines is designed to serve beneficiaries of therapies, young professionals, organizations, and newcomers to equine-assisted therapy.

All beneficiaries, especially young people with disabilities and their families can find in the upcoming pages detailed information on EAT, its benefits, what to expect if they decide to take advantage or participate in EAT, examples, and other useful information.

The YEAT Guidelines will be useful for specialist from different fields such as therapists – speech, physical, mental or others; youth workers; teachers, and anyone interested in incorporating EAT in their professional practice.

Current and future young professionals in a private practice or within an organization can find in the YEAT Guidelines basic recommendations regarding practicing EAT, the experience of organizations from different countries involved in the YEAT Project, and case studies.

All that information was gathered within the YEAT Project, supported by the Erasmus+ Program.

## How to navigate through the Guidelines?




Each chapter of the Guidelines is focused on one of the groups involved in EAT:



PART 1 - Young people with disabilities and their families;

PART 2 - Specialists who wish to use equine therapy;

PART 3 - Current and future professionals in equine-assisted therapy.

Even though, every part is focused on a specific group they contain interesting and valuable information relevant to all.

Look for the symbols	What does it mean?
	Pay attention to...
	Case study – experiences of YEAT project and international research done by the project partners in Bulgaria, Belgium, and Italy
	Idea

	Remember
	Give it a thought

### About the YEAT Project

The YEAT project is created to explore the ways young people can be included and benefit from EAT.



It gathers organizations from different sectors and embark upon together a journey to better the quality of the work, activities and practices of the entities in the field of YEAT across the partner countries – Bulgaria, Italy, Belgium, France, the rest of the European Union and internationally. The project advances the capacity of the participating organizations, builds bridges between different sectors, addresses common needs and priorities in YEAT, creates and spreads innovative approaches in YEAT, serves children and young people with disabilities.

During the YEAT project the partners were gathering information regarding YEAT in Bulgaria, Belgium, France, and Italy, and organized a learning exchange activity. The event gathered 21 participants from Bulgaria, France, and Belgium to explore the topic of YEAT, exchange knowledge and experience. The organizations’ team and the participants in the YEAT project have been working together to create the YEAT Guidelines.

Partner organizations that stand behind the YEAT project are Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation Bulgaria, Association For You, Brussels Outdoor School, and Creativi108.

More about the project can be found here:

<https://www.pqfbulgaria.org/youthinequineassistedtherapy>

### Glossary of terms

Term/Abbreviation	Definition
<b>YEAT</b>	Youth in Equine-Assisted Therapy
<b>EAT</b>	Equine-Assisted Therapy
<b>EAP</b>	Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy
<b>EAL</b>	Equine-Assisted Learning

## Part 1 – Young people with disabilities and their families

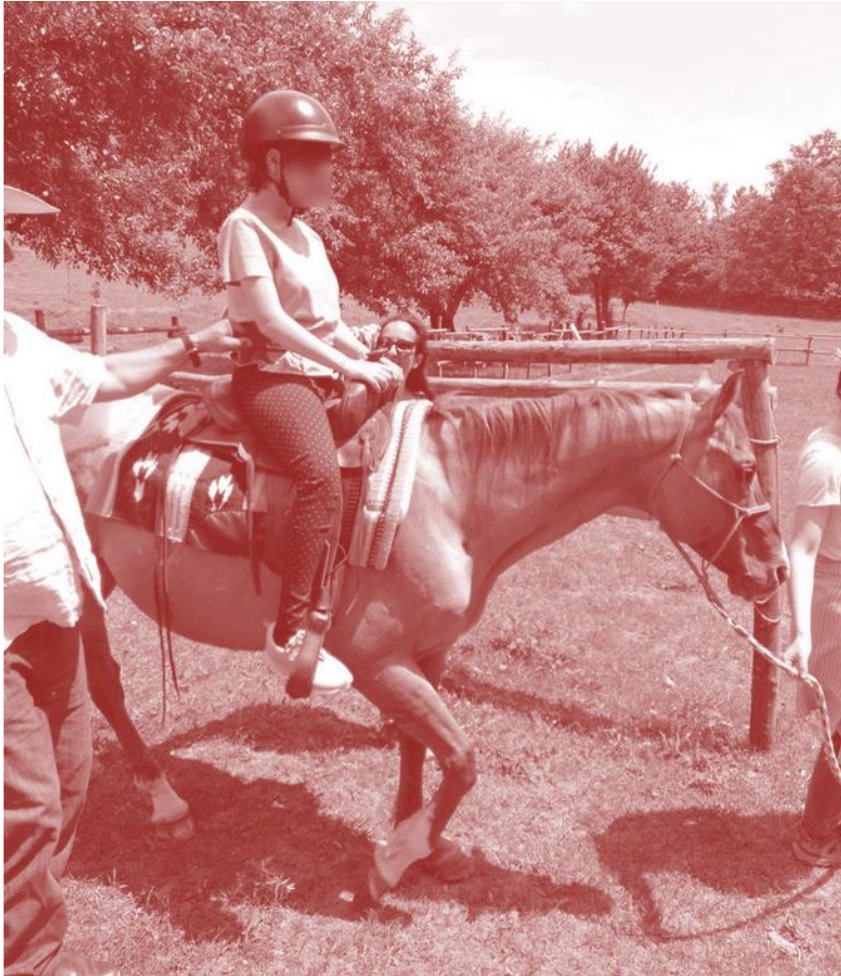
### What is equine-assisted therapy?

The popularity of therapy with animals is growing every day due to the many benefits it provides. Horses are one kind of animal that humans have found to have a recuperating effect on their mental and physical health. There are three main types of interaction with them.

The first one is from the ground. That includes being around the horse; spending time with it or the entire herd; touch it with hands; brush the mane, tail, and body; feed it food and/or treats; do ground work exercises and training.

The second type is being on the back of the horse. That includes riding and doing particular exercises and movements while being on the horse's back.





The third type is driving the horse, usually through a carriage. This type gives opportunity for interacting with the horse to beneficiaries with little mobility or other problems.

Depending on the age and the condition of a person, equine specialists choose the most appropriate type(s) of interaction.

## When is EAT helpful – disabilities, conditions, age?

Equine-assisted therapy is recommended for people of all ages. Statistics show that most effective equine-assisted therapy has been observed in children and young people aged 4 to 29. However, beyond that age range results are also very satisfactory.

# BENEFITS OF EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY

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SOCIAL



Sharing the experience of being in contact with the horse with others and interacting in groups brings the beneficiary social skills.

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EMOTIONAL



Horses allow space for emotional healing, improvement, and growth.

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COGNITIVE



Learning disabilities are treated by different methods while building skills of riding or driving a horse that responds to the rider.

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PHYSICAL



Equine-assisted therapy can target specific improvements of physical disabilities by interacting with the horse.

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SELF-ESTEEM



Successfully led interaction with the horse brings the beneficiary confidence in their abilities and boosts self-esteem.

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Below can be found a non-exhaustive list of most common disabilities and conditions that are treated by equine-assisted therapy:

<b>I.</b>	Disabilities:
	• Autistic spectrum disorder
	• Amputation
	• Attention deficit disorder
	• Hyperactivity
	• Cerebral palsy
	• Developmental delay
	• Down syndrome
	• Learning disabilities
	• Muscular dystrophy
	• Multiple sclerosis
	• Paralysis
	• Spina bifida
	• Spinal cord injury
	• Strokes
	• Terminal illness
	• Traumatic brain injuries
	• Visual and auditory impairment
<b>II.</b>	Youth at risk
<b>III.</b>	Weight Control Disorders
<b>IV.</b>	Reactive attachment disorder
<b>V.</b>	Behavioral disorder
<b>VI.</b>	Psychiatric disorder
<b>VII.</b>	Mental health issues
<b>VIII.</b>	Substance abuse
<b>IX.</b>	Relationship/social issues
<b>X.</b>	Oncology issues

## Success stories



During the YEAT project event in the therapy centre of PQHFB in Bulgaria three young people with special needs experienced close contact with the horses and their first therapeutic riding sessions. They had both physical and mental challenges. For the two days and limited time on site they showed progress by being more confident, overcoming fear from the new and unknown. One of them with tremor reduced it after only one session. Another overcame the fear of animals.

The research done by QUEST in Belgium, Creativi108 in Italy, PQHFB in Bulgaria, and Association For You in Bulgaria shows the variety of practices of therapy organizations.

In Belgium the court ordered youth to benefit from EAT, seeing the great potential in it. One professional - educator specializing in psycho-educational support, had a success story to share: She made a 9-year-old girl, Léonie, with multiple disabilities, who is walking only in a wheelchair, walk from her horse to her chair at the end of the sessions. The Belgium therapist stressed on the importance of other people to be involved – young people, trainees, other professionals, and the importance of choosing the beneficiaries by the professional. The organization “Rennes de la Vie” with over 40 years of history had a great progress with an autistic child, part of a big group. The child was afraid of the horses, screaming when it was time to go on it. Then 1 year in, the group has become completely homogenized. This was possible because they stretched and adapted the framework of the class. This particular boy loved Toy Story, so the trainers would place Toy Story figurines on the horse. Little by little he fell in love with it. And what is interesting is the contrast with the educator staff from their school, who are very square, do strict coaching, who had to stand back and watch this flexibility in the framework. They saw the results and couldn't deny it. So the process was also changing them.

In Belgium Isabelle Hubain works with youth that have been placed in institutions by judges, being separated from their parents. The EAT is court ordered and the judge imposes it on the kids. For some of them traditional therapy does not work. They have seen many different psychologists, social welfare system workers, educators, all kinds of people and they are fed up. They were told about the option of therapy with horses and they wanted to give it a try. She focuses the equine therapy on work with their emotions, on how they feel about their family of origin, about their host family or about the boarding school that they've been put in and they try to work around that. She tries to put the focus on pleasure and enjoyment.

In Bulgaria Irena Metodieva, a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist and certified hippotherapist, shared that from her experience the range of diseases that are favourably affected by the method of hippotherapy are: cerebral palsy, grade I and II scoliosis, autism, hyperactivity, Down syndrome, post-stroke conditions and urological diseases. Viktor, a 34 year-old beneficiary of EAT suffering from light form of cerebral palsy and epilepsy shared:



“It affected me well for the spine and the posture, and helps a lot with cerebral palsy. It’s important for the therapists to communicate a lot with the parents so they can be aware of the specific case.”

In Italy C.F., a member of “I’m possible”, professional in EAT, shared his success stories: “A paraplegic girl who can only move one arm came in. We have been able to work so well with her horse that now we have even managed to get her to participate in races with the horse. We have built a system to control the horse in order to compete alone. Then, another quadriplegic boy gave me the results of his medical examination which reports an improvement in his body structure thanks to the work with the horse.” F.Z. working for a volunteering organization that offers only equine-assisted activities shared the benefits for his beneficiaries: “ In my opinion, the best outcome is the increase in verbalization. The excitement and the joy of working with such animals give the users the power to express themselves more easily. I recall this time that a user that was remaining in silence for most of the day started asking me when we would have been able to come back for another session. This left me speechless.” Zampa Amica, a centre for pet therapy with more than 10 years of history, collaborates with departments of pediatrics, oncology and psychiatry to assist people treated there.

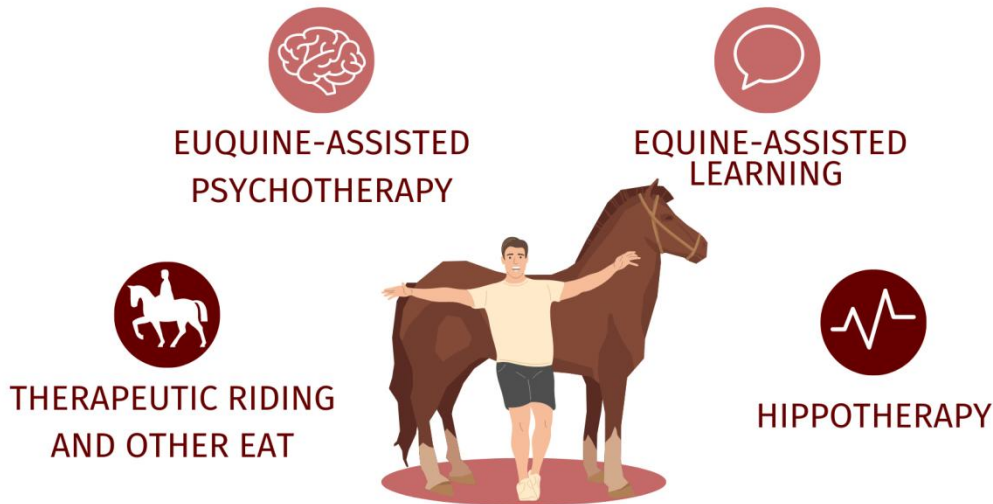
Another success story from Il Paddock, Italy, was shared “(There was) a boy diagnosed with autism in high school who started riding six months ago. Yesterday, for the first time, he told me directly “I want to gallop”. This was strong in the sense that the boy asks for it. The father told me that, since he comes on horseback riding, he has not yet entered into relationships with his companions but has started chatting with the professors. So for the parents too, these are exceptional results.”

### **How an equine-assisted therapy is done?**

For easier understanding we will divide equine-assisted therapy in four categories which all involve the horse in a different way combining the above described positive effects. Those are: equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP); equine-assisted learning (EAL); hippotherapy; therapeutic riding and other equine therapies. Each of the types of EAT involves different activities with the horses. The therapists set different goals.

## TYPES OF THERAPIES INCORPORATING EQUINES

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### 1. Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)

Horses provide an essential sense of peace during psychotherapy appointments, not least of which is due to the sessions happening outdoors. Counsellors also use the horse as a reference point to help the patient explore their emotions or painful situations through the horse's eyes. Many people find discussing difficult emotions more comfortable with a horse present, which works particularly well with children and young adults.

Caring for a horse is also part of EAP. It builds routine and provides a positive focus for patients whose lives would otherwise be taken over by grief, trauma, or mental health problems. Grooming, for instance, is cathartic and can help calm distressed patients. Equine care works in conjunction with mindfulness and the concept of being present, further aiding recovery.

Example of organization dedicated to this type of EAT is Eagala<sup>1</sup>.

### 2. Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)

Equine-assisted activities aid development in personal, social, and professional contexts. It is used amongst high-risk teenagers and to improve academics. The facilitator uses concepts and metaphors to help students understand personal skills, such as anger management or concentration. However, EAL can also be used with adults to improve professional skills, like teamwork and mindfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eagala.org/index>



In both cases, EAL involves observing the horses' reactions to the group's behaviours. These observations can then be analyzed with a view to improvement.

Example of organization dedicated to this type of EAT is PATH International<sup>2</sup>.

### 3. Hippotherapy

Working alongside occupational and physical therapies, hippotherapy is also known as adaptive riding. Hippotherapy is also used to enhance speech therapy. Adaptive horseback riding improves the posture, coordination, and movement of the rider. It is often confused with therapeutic riding, but hippotherapy revolves around medically necessary therapy.

Example of organizations dedicated to this type of EAT are American Hippotherapy Association<sup>3</sup> and PATH International.

### 4. Therapeutic riding and other equine therapies

EAT refers also to all other activities involving therapies such as therapeutic riding, therapeutic carriage programs, horses used as service animals and many more. Therapeutic riding refers to teaching people with special needs how to ride. Carriage programs are very suitable for people with little mobility teaching them how to navigate the horse.

Example of organizations dedicated to this type of EAT are National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy<sup>4</sup> and Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation Bulgaria<sup>5</sup>.

Activities and methods from all 4 types can be combined to meet the needs of the beneficiary. The type of equine-assisted therapy to choose depends on many factors such as the person's physical and mental condition. That determination is done both by the beneficiary or his/her family and the specialist in the field of EAT.

During the Learning Exchange Activity /LEA/ of the YEAT project we were able to apply, observe and analyze the effect of establishing connection with a horse and first lessons of therapeutic riding on different groups.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://pathintl.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nceft.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pqfbulgaria.org/>



### The story of Mario

Mario was a young man working actively with youth as part of our partner organization QUEST. He is very open-minded, determined to explore the world and himself. During the LEA it was his first close interaction with a horse. His task was to simply lead the horse within the pasture from one point to another using a halter and a lead



rope. He greeted the young mare that was assigned to him. He approached her very gently and found the strength in him to be confident to take the first step leading her in the chosen direction. Every time he was hesitant about what he was doing she would stop following him. The moment he felt confident again she would go by his side gladly. Mario felt for himself that the contact with the horse required him to observe and control his own feelings and emotions in a healthy way, building a relationship based on trust and confidence.



### The story of V.


V. was a young girl with developmental delay and other issues living in institution. She participated in the LEA and had her first therapeutic riding lesson. Her first contact with the horse was scary for her as she was standing next to that big animal. With a lot of support for only one day she managed to get close to the horse, express her interest in the horse. With the help of two therapeutic riding instructors she went on the back of the horse. Overcoming the new environment, new animal, new people in the face of the therapists was a major breakthrough for her. Her caretaker later shared that she did not expect V. to be able to accomplish so much and was convinced the horses were the reason. V.'s first lesson was aimed to introduce her to the activity. It left such an intense positive experience that on the next day V. couldn't wait to get on the horse. Usually

she moves only accompanied by somebody but that excitement got her to explore the area around the riding arena by herself. Most importantly, she took the lead rope of her horse and led him by herself. Taking initiative, responsibility, and building such confidence only for a day was a major breakthrough for her.




Steps to start with Equine-Assisted Therapy


# Get started with EAT

- 


**Step 1**

Get informed about EAT.
- 


**Step 2**

Search what types of therapies are available in your area - that can be an organization or a private therapist.
- 


**Step 3**

Visit and choose a therapist and/or organization. Ensure the chosen therapist has the necessary credentials and experience in the field. Search for other people that used/know the therapist for double check.
- 


**Step 4**

Ensure you can meet the administrative requirements and can afford to attend regular EAT sessions at the chosen location.
- 


**Step 5**

Consult with your therapist about their work plan, so you know what to expect
- 


**Step 6**

Consult with other medical and non-medical professionals working on the beneficiary's condition how EAT will relate to their work. If possible connect them with your new therapist.
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**Step 7**

Go regularly to the EAT sessions.
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**Step 8**

Observe and share any progress or issue before, during, and after each session with the therapist. If necessary keep a simple diary of yours or your child feedback.
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**Step 9**

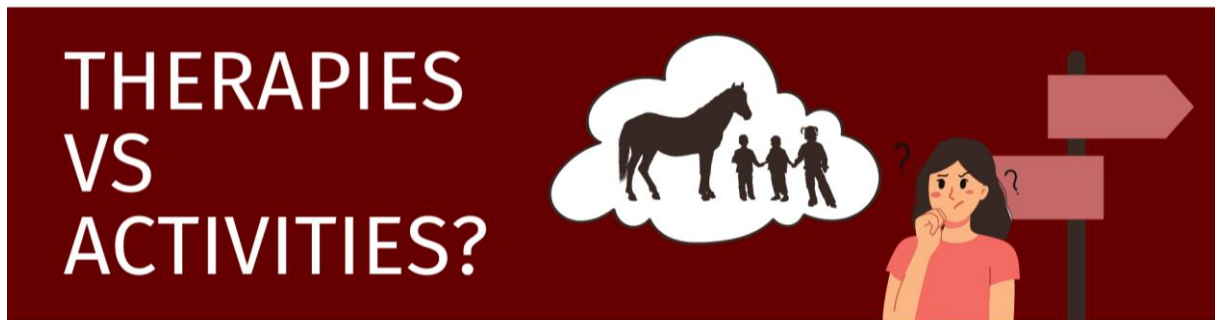
Enjoy the benefits of EAT and the contact with horses as much as you can!  
Remember it's individual and there is no fixed timeframe for achieving results.



## Part 2 – Youth workers and other professionals who wish to involve equine therapy into their practice

### What are the benefits of equine therapy? Why should you try it?

There are therapies and activities with horses. You can choose one or both, combine mix and match to best fit your abilities and the needs of the people you are working with.



### Therapies Incorporating Equines

Related to the broad area of therapy, licensed therapy professionals may incorporate horses in five distinct therapies: **counselling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychotherapy and speech-language pathology**<sup>6</sup>.

The interaction with the horse under the guidance of a trained equine professional can result in the improvement of a person's health and well being. Working together with another therapist could advance that level of improvement even more.



<sup>6</sup> Source: PATH International



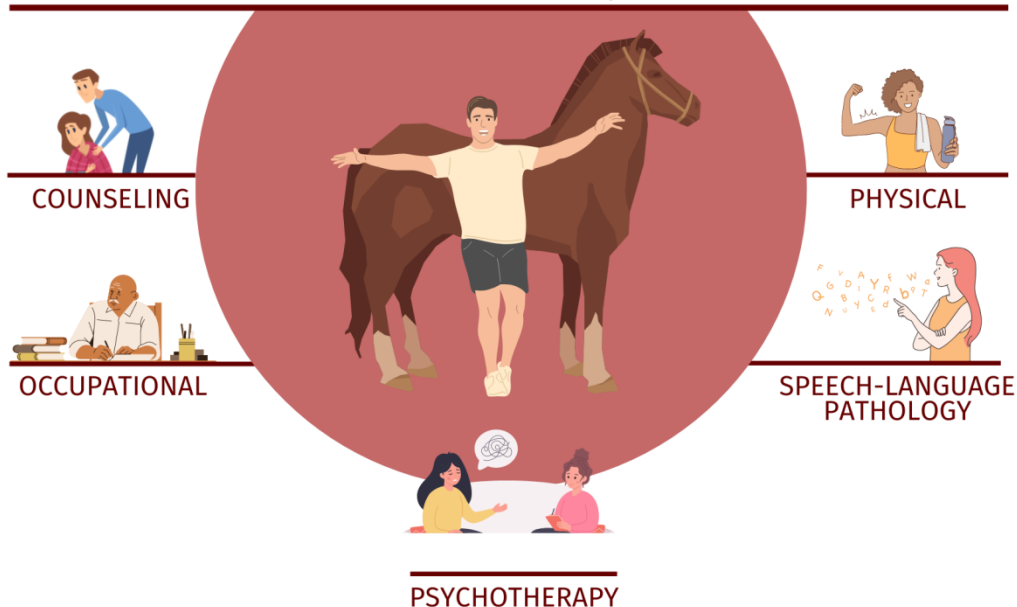
Youth workers should be partnering with equine professionals or have the expertise to work with the horse.

Such an example is a psychotherapy performed with the help of the horse. The main professional working with the patient is a psychotherapist. To involve interaction with the horse an equine professional can join the team or the psychotherapist can specialize in equine-assisted psychotherapy. For the patients the interaction is helping in approaching emotional challenges. In this case equine therapy can help build trust; empathy; social skills; personal and social awareness; confidence; and much more.



Zampa Amica, Italy shared their practice: “We take care of assisted interventions with animals and, in this case, the horse. Obviously, to implement therapies we support and collaborate with physiotherapists and psychologists to carry out more specific projects. For example, with the physiotherapist you work on your posture or motor difficulty so it becomes a sort of "gymnastics".

## TYPES OF THERAPIES INCORPORATING EQUINES



### Activities Incorporating EAT

Equine-assisted activities can be part of many programs, especially for young people. Interacting with horses involves outdoor activities and close contact with nature in addition to the benefits for the person or group's mental and physical state. For that reason youth workers can turn to EAT in their individual or group work with young people. Such an example is equines involved in actions of youth for environmental protection/care.



*Try organizing a cleaning session/treasure hunting in the forest with the horse and the young people.*



*Try Building soft skills by organizing role playing games and include the horse in the activities*

### How a youth professional approaches EAT?

First, youth workers shall identify what are the needs and the results they want to achieve with their target groups. The results can be emotional and/or physical improvement of the young person(s)' condition.

Second, the youth worker needs to locate a number of EAT professionals in their area, approach them, and select the most appropriate one. After initial selection they can also **involve the young person(s) in the process** of choosing the EAT professional and the location.

The youth worker and the EAT professional can create a work plan of the activities including the specific goals they wish to accomplish.

Next, the youth worker and the young person(s) can begin their equine-assisted activities under the guidance of the EAT professional.



*It is important that the youth worker keeps track of the results associated with the young person(s) and communicates them regularly with the EAT professional. In that way adjustments to the work plan can be made.*

Make sure to receive regular feedback from the young person(s) and include him or her in the process of planning. That will guarantee their interests are fully met and they benefit the most from the EAT.

Finally, the youth worker can broaden the application of EAT in their work by promoting the method to others.

## Youth Volunteering Programs and Other Involvement in Equine-Assisted Therapy or Activities

Young people can become part of EAT in a very direct and rewarding way. By assisting EAT professionals in their work they can contribute to the process and learn a lot about all aspects of EAT and themselves.

### INVOLVEMENT IN EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY OR ACTIVITIES

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VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMS

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INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

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PART-TIME JOB

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FULL-TIME ASSISTANT JOB

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Volunteering programs on national and international levels are accessible through EAT organizations or youth programs. For all youth programs available, young people can turn to a local, regional, or national youth organization that can assist them in selecting and applying for the right program. Such an example is the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+. Volunteering programs are great chance for a young person to experience EAT and get to know other communities and cultures.

Youth workers from Bulgaria that were interviewed during the YEAT project had little knowledge about the applications of EAT but saw the biggest potential in volunteering programs considering the needs of young people.



Association FOR YOU helped PQHFB receive the help of international volunteers on field. As a result for 3 years PQHFB carries out a volunteering program for young people from around Europe who wish to dedicate their time to helping children with disabilities through therapeutic riding. The young volunteers gained experience in

structuring and undertaking therapeutic riding lessons. They became confident in interacting with children with special needs whilst overcoming the language and cultural barrier between each other. Together with the PQHFB team a total of 21 volunteers from France, Germany, Portugal, and Luxembourg made it possible for children with disabilities to benefit from free equine-assisted therapy.

A great example of volunteering opportunity taken is Isabelle Delannoy from Bonheur dans le Prés, Belgium that started as a volunteer and gradually became a hippotherapist. By profession she was a primary school teacher but decided to change her field for greater impact.



In Italy one of the organizations shared their experience of volunteering: “ We have fairly stable volunteer support. We have an agreement with the University of Modena. So we have several students who come to do the training internship with us and we manage to have a good turnover of students who are our "volunteer" for horse assisted therapy. At the same time, other young people who are members of the sports association also come to help us manage the horses and facilities (they are not involved in therapeutic activities).”

**What are the benefits for the young person assisting in EAT?**

Volunteers will acquire key competences for lifelong learning, as described by the European Union 2018 recommendations. Soft skills developed by volunteers, especially in international volunteering programs are all 21<sup>st</sup> century skills with focus on:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social responsibility;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaboration;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Citizenship skills;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personal, social, and learning to learn skills;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improving their communication skills;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improving their cultural awareness and means of expression;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Developing social and civic competences;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Building up sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acquire knowledge in a foreign language and cultures.</li> </ul>

## Part 3 – Current and future professionals in equine-assisted therapy

### How to begin a career path?

Young people that are interested in becoming professionals in EAT can take a variety of steps and shall take many factors into consideration. We will review a few of them to assist in making an informed decision.

First, the professional and personal background of the person lays the foundation for their future path. Involving yourself in any equine activities can be considered as a requirement before starting a professional career in EAT. That can include both types of interaction with the horse described in Part 1.



Such path can be the start of a young professional in therapeutic riding. The same shall have the necessary skills and knowledge about riding gained from another qualified instructor before incorporating elements of therapy. That can happen through formal study, private lessons, or another form of learning process.

A great example is shared by the Italian organization Zampa Amica: “ We are registered as an internship and vocational training institution in this field. We provide a selection of applicants in terms of job skills, job future prospects and work approach. Unfortunately, we have had experience of people who have been trained but then have not continued their journey. And this doesn't fit too much with our approach as we usually build a real relationship with our users.”



In Belgium Isabelle Hubain wanted a change in her career of neuropsychology and she wanted to return to her adolescent passion of working with horses. She also wanted to leave clinical therapy and theory and do something that brought people into their body, into the present moment, and into action. She is now a trained hippotherapist, and equicoach, does psychotherapy through equine mediation for adolescents (age 10-12 upwards) and adults with a private practice.

Two young professionals in EAT participated in the YEAT project and shared their experience. They are assisting an EAT professional at an organization near Brussels, Belgium, as part of their mandatory internship during their formal study of physiotherapy in university. Through their work with the EAT professional they are gaining valuable experience about equine-assisted therapy. It prepares them for a career in the field. During the YEAT project they shared how they see their professional development. One of them was hesitant about continuing practicing in the field. The second one became more confident about practicing EAT following her participation in the project. Finding a well-paid and stable job in EAT is a major concern not only for the two Belgium professionals but for many in the field everywhere in Europe.



Challenges to think about:



- *Where to get qualified?*
- *Are there suitable programs or job opportunities?*
- *What number and types of professionals I will be working with?*
- *Will I have a mentor to guide me? Can I find one?*
- *What professional paths are available?*

### **Professionals in EAT looking for expanding and improving their work**

Every EAT professional is looking for improving their skills and knowledge. It is the natural vocation to provide better services and pass knowledge further. Professionally, that can be in the framework of universities, national and international professional organizations, special courses and programs done by individuals. On the other hand, there are other ways of improvement. One of the very best ones is through working with young people directly or through youth workers. Young people are a source of energy and new perspectives which can be combined and applied in EAT. Professionals can rely on youth organizations, networks, European and International programs to connect them to the young people.



*Remember to nurture the relationship with the young people you choose to work with.*



Each professional chooses its team but we would like to turn the attention to the potential of working together with young people either with or without any experience in EAT. Even though, they may lack professional background their potential and passion are most

of the times strong and bring a lot of benefits in EAT. Given the opportunity, they can bring

new ideas and give valuable feedback relevant for their generation. Young people can be very helpful in understanding young beneficiaries who are their peers and may have similar interests and points of view.

The involvement of young people in EAT can be set up formally or informally. Formal ways include volunteer programs, internship programs, university programs, low level job opportunities. Informally, young people can be involved as part of open days, individual volunteering, or as part of mentorship programs.

## Stories and Best Practices Organizations in Belgium, Italy, and Bulgaria

Practices of EAT vary in every country, region, even city. In this section can be found some of the stories of the organizations we encountered during the YEAT project research.

### Belgium

According to the data collected, EAT is not regulated by any legislation in Belgium. Unlike in France there no requirements for formal training or degree to practice EAT.

Isabelle Hubain shared a brief history of EAT in the Brussels area: “ Historically in Belgium, it was the 2 founders of the Equestrian Farm of Louvain La Neuve that started giving trainings for hippotherapy 20 - 30 years ago. There was no pre-existing training program available. One of the founders opened her own association called Anthe Anthesis, which is the Belgian Association of Hippotherapy. Based on their 20 years of experience, they offered a 2 year training program (not full-time). Meanwhile, the organization called Anthe Anthesis closed and got replaced into the organization called Equité, which is in full effect, and is managed by 2 psychologists. One of them is called Geraldine and is my supervisor. Currently in Belgium, there are two trainings: Hippotherapy and equine-coaching. These are not official trainings, they are not officially recognized, but they are recognized by the people who work in the field (by coaches or therapists). In practice, anybody can declare themselves hippotherapists. Sometimes they are coaches or even simply horse-riding teachers that once in a while welcome a group of handicapped kids in a rented arena. Today, there are many centres in Belgium, but there are







a lot of people that are working as individuals. For example, the year I did my training, there were 20 students in the first year, 12 to 14 the second year. There are only 4 that are truly practicing today in the field. But they are all in the French-speaking region in the south of Brussels. I am the only French speaking person practicing in West Brussels. Which is mainly a Dutch-speaking area.”

Astrid from Rennes de la Vie shares how the organization works. Rennes de la Vie was founded 40 years ago. They work with groups and individuals in sessions on hour basis, full day camps, or even week holiday camps. They highly adapt their framework to suit the group or the needs of the individual, which is why the work is very successful. Institutions bring groups of 2 or 3 together. A lot of physical re-education work is done as well. Everyone up to 18 year old is welcome for therapy or riding. Astrid explores the applicant individually to evaluate if the therapy is right for him or her.

### Italy

Italy imposes more strict requirements to centres dealing with EAT. Ravaioli Angela from Il Paddock shared: “ By having horses, we have a "stable code". So, we are indicated as a farm even if we are not an entity of agricultural origin. Since 2015, our activity has been recognized by the Ministry of Health to practice assisted therapy with horses as we comply with the required team and qualification criteria. Our president of the Volunteer Association is a medic experienced in horse therapy; I am a pedagogue, so I am referent for educational projects and interventions; our veterinary is a veterinary recognized by the Ministry of Health; then we also have a number of horse carers, always recognized by the ministry. We have the complete team and we can operate in all areas of the activity with horses.

It is the Ministry that indicates the workers who must operate in order for the team to be recognized:

- doctor;
- vet;
- carer of the animal;
- the intervention referent who must be from the healthcare field for everything related to therapies or from the psychological-educational field for the assisted education with animals.”

Their practice is well-structured: “ We work at specific times of the day, with personalized programs inserted into personalized life projects based on the user's pathologies. We work with individuals and sometimes small group interventions. If the requests are to work in a group and the beneficiaries should be able to manage a sort of autonomy in the saddle up to the sports phase. Therefore, we start from the individual up to the group, with programs that are in any case based on the achievement / recovery of autonomy.



The program lasts one year. It starts in September until June. During this period, we carry out checks with the parents, with some of the children's health representatives. We also have our own evaluation boards that we have built over the years.”

Zampa Amica, Italy, is an organization breeding and doing interventions with dogs and horses. For training their horses for EAT they shared: “ When the horse is born on our farm, it is trained from the beginning. First of all, we try to make him understand that the human being is a beautiful thing, that it is a pleasant being to be close to, to play with, to be cared by. For example, the act of hugging the newborn foal is already a first step towards the work that the foal will be able to do when it grows up. In the case that we "import" a horse, we leave it some time to get used to the environment, (about a month) . It depends a little on the character and the predisposition that the horse has. Then, slowly, we begin to train the horse every day to be in proximity to people. We train the animals to get used to all those things they will have to endure when they are adults: being fed, being brushed, giving the hoof for cleaning, being combed, etc. Then we start teaching him about the relationship with the outside world. We go out and walk along the streets in order to get him used to the cars, the dogs barking, the wheelchair that passes by. It needs to be taken in consideration that in nature the horse is still a prey. Therefore, the horse tends to be afraid and can be unpredictable. The more positive experiences with the outside world the horse has, the greater the tranquillity of the horse when it is time to work.”

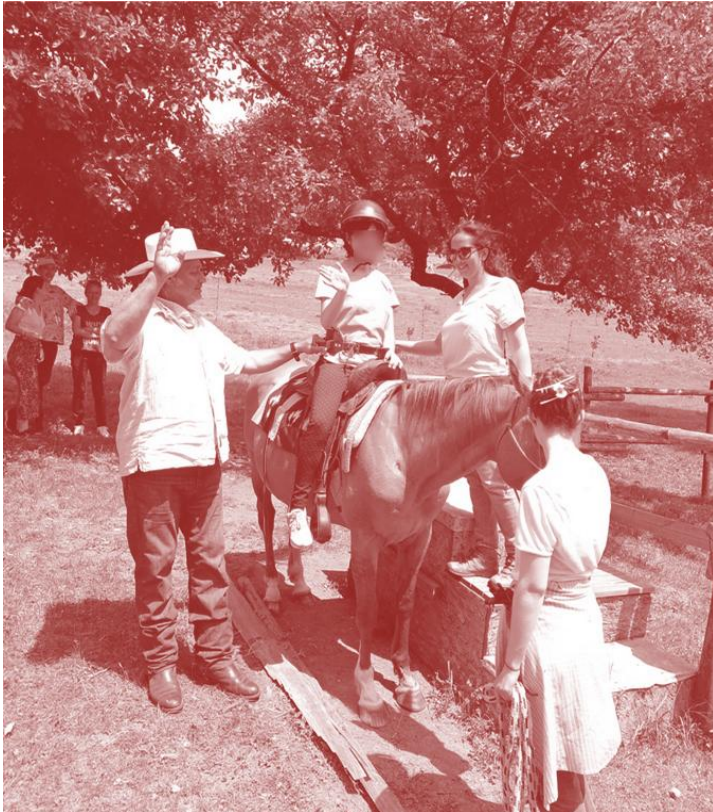
## **Bulgaria**

In Bulgaria EAT is not regulated by any legislation, similar to the situation in Belgium. Centres and private practitioners receive their knowledge and skills from organizations outside the country or in between each other.

Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation Bulgaria is focusing only on children and young people with special needs. It is the first and only organization in Bulgaria certified by the National Agency for Child Protection to provide animal-assisted therapy and therapeutic riding for children and young people with disabilities. They carry out a program that is free for the beneficiaries in order to allow participation of those with fewer opportunities. They shared the success story of a boy with autism and hyperactivity. The boy was 7 years old at the time and had never consciously drawn a picture. After only a month into therapeutic riding he went home and painted a picture of the horse he was riding and dogs running around them.

An expert from the Association of Young Psychologists Bulgaria shared: “ For various psychological cases, contact with animals generally has a therapeutic effect. Not only animal care, but also tactile contact plays an important role, for example, in sensory motor perception, develops emotional intelligence and many others. In contact with horses, especially when riding, not only therapeutic effects are observed both physically and mentally on disabled people, but also in various personal accentuations such as hysterics (they are difficult to influence in principle). In the latter, riding as an interaction between the

horse's personality and character helps balance and build an approach to interaction and helps build interpersonal skills. Striving for control at all costs hinders the personality in social interaction and socialization in general, such an important factor for mental health. Equine therapy helps build a trusting relationship and trains different approaches to interaction.”



## Conclusion

Young people are the future of our society. Involving them in different activities, striving to offer them professional growth, and help those in need receive the necessary therapy should be our goal at all times. EAT offers all that in a way that feels natural and brings the young people close to nature. The YEAT project was just one of the international tools to accomplish that goal. The partners to the project and everyone who got involved in continue to spread the word about EAT and the important role youth plays in its development.