

THESIS

KEY PRACTICES FOR SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EQUINE RESCUE
AND ADOPTION PRACTICES

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Science

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2021

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ABSTRACT

KEY PRACTICES FOR SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EQUINE RESCUE AND ADOPTION PRACTICES

Estimates predict there are now 602 rescues and sanctuaries in the United States which can accommodate only 24,000 of the excess 200,000 unwanted horses every year. It is predicted that 138,000-160,000 of the unwanted horses are sold on the international meat market but increasing opposition from the public could end the practice. Equine industry leaders state that rescue and sanctuary organizations could play a key role in accommodating the excess horses, but the number of horses served must drastically increase to close the gap. Research revealing elements which may increase the quality or quantity of equine adoptions is deficient. Further, the human-horse relationship is unique from other companion animals and the factors surrounding successful equine adoptions is largely unreported. Using data extracted from semi-structured interviews with key informants from highly accredited equine rescue and sanctuary organizations, this study aimed to gather a common definition of “successful adoption” while identifying practices in general equine management, adoption procedures, finance, and marketing which may help lead to more successful equine adoptions. The analysis revealed that a successful equine adoption is a partnership between horse and adopter in which the horse meets the adopter’s specific and appropriate needs, the abilities and limitations of horse and adopter are appropriately balanced, and the adopter puts the needs of the horse first resulting in the adopter caring for the horse through the duration of the horse’s life. The data argues that successful equine rescue organizations have the ability to build relationships, maintain trust and

transparency, facilitate supportive community including providing pre-adoption and post-adoption education, promote conversation-based adoption processes, and continually act as a resource for adopters throughout the horse's life. It was found that the most significant hinderance to growth was availability of funding resources which influenced the marketing ability of participating organizations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all my committee members for their support, encouragement, and mentorship during the entire research and writing process. I am appreciative of Kellie Enns for her insight and dedication to my success, Jerry Black for his continued mentorship over the past 6 years, and Caitlin Cadaret for sharing her experience and wisdom. We thank the participating rescue organizations for their dedication to increasing welfare for all equines. Special thanks to my family and partner for allowing me the opportunity to pursue my dreams and providing the funds for an insurmountable amount of coffee.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the horses who gave me the courage to try, the perseverance to finish, and the wings to fly.

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CHAPTER 1/RATIONALE

Introduction

The economic impact of the equine industry in the United States is significant as \$50 billion is directly contributed to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and \$122 billion of value is contributed into the economy (The American Horse Council [AHC], 2017). A study by the American Horse Council in 2017 found that the industry directly employs almost 1 million people and indirectly contributes to 1.7 million jobs. Support for the equine industry is represented by the 38 million households in the United States which contain horse enthusiasts and the 17.3% of all US households which own horses or participate in horse activities (AHC, 2017). It is currently estimated that the nation contains 7.2 million horses while 200,000 of these horses are falling through the cracks every year (AHC, 2017; Weiss et al., 2017).

The equine industry today is facing a crisis. Every year, over 200,000 new horses become 'unwanted' and face an uncertain future (Weiss et al., 2017). Estimates from 2010 predicted 326 active and registered nonprofits who had capacity for 13,700 horses annually (Holcomb et al., 2010). Current estimates predict there are now 602 rescues and sanctuaries across the country which can accommodate 24,000 of the excess horses (AHC, 2017). These estimates show a potential increase in the number of rescue and sanctuary facilities but leaves about 126,000 horses unwanted. Previously, the United States had active horse slaughter plants and was an active participant in the international market for horse meat, though it was never actively consumed in the U.S (Ahern et al., 2006). Due to public opposition, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act passed in 2006 which outlawed slaughter on U.S. soil. Though there was a surge in publicity surrounding the unwanted horse in the early 2000's, concern for the

issue has resurfaced. In 2019, the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act (H.R. 961) was proposed which would have outlawed the transport of horses across borders for slaughter (GovTrack.us, 2021).

Other options for excess horses include shipping horses into Canada or Mexico for slaughter. In 2011, it was estimated that 138,000 horses from the United States are shipped across the border for slaughter (GAO, 2011). According to Dr. Temple Grandin who has spent her lifetime studying animals bound for slaughter, “the worst outcome from an animal welfare perspective is a horse going to a local Mexican abattoir” (Grandin, 2012). She additionally stated in 2010 that by supplying horses for slaughter across the border, the animals face worse fates than slaughter on US soil due to longer transportation times, substandard conditions in Mexico, or abandonment and starvation in the desert which has increased over the years due to rising hay and grain prices (Grandin, 2010). While shipment to slaughter in Canada or Mexico does occur regularly, the general population does not view it as an acceptable option as shown by the nearly 80% of Americans who stand against horse slaughter (ASPCA, 2012; Lawler & Geyer, 2015).

Moral and ethical standards in American society have shifted and evolved dramatically within the past few decades as tastes and preferences have evolved (Morris, 2013). The American public has taken a stance to increase animal welfare with both companion animals and those utilized for consumption. The public eye largely views equines as companion animals due to their use in history during war, transport, construction, and farming. Additionally, people view horses as providing social benefits through use in therapy, recreation, competition, and companionship (Yorke et al., 2008; Wipper, 2000). Recent studies have found that horses contribute a great deal of emotional fulfillment to humans through many different activities. In a study conducted in 2000 focused on the horse-rider relationship, it was found that the horse-

human relationship was seen as a ‘partnership’ in eventing competition. Riders used the term “ ‘partnership’ to describe the relationship they strive for with their horses. Compatibility as well as mutual respect, trust, confidence, and close communication...” (Wipper, 2000). In other narratives, horse participants commonly portray their equine encounters as interactions which make them happy, aide in common-place stress, and act as personal forms of psychotherapy. Many individuals who participate frequently in equine activities report that the horse has ‘healing power’ and can enhance or maintain a human’s sense of well-being. (Lee et al., 2015).

These emotional and therapeutic effects can be elucidated by the physical, psychological, social, and developmental frameworks that the equine connection may offer. Physical touch and animal-related activities may work together to increase the release of endorphin hormone while decreasing heart rate and blood pressure (Herzog, 2011; Wells 2009). Psychologically and socially, the bonds formed with companion animals may offer relationships which are positive, dependable, non-judgmental, and create an outlet for humans to be nurturing, kind, empathetic, and may reduce the feelings of loneliness (Fine & Beck, 2015; Wells 2009). These horse-human relationships have been seen as true friendships as some handlers refer to their animal partners as a ‘best friend’ (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2105). Developmentally, it has been found that children’s attachment to companion animals can be associated to increased mental health, well being, higher quality of life, and can teach empathy and positive attitude and behavior (Daly & Morton, 2006; Fonseca et al 2011; Marsa-Sambola et al., 2016). Growing research into human-animal and specifically human-horse relations is continually evolving and shifting the American perspective on equine welfare within the United States. These shifts likely solidify the anti-slaughter beliefs in America and proliferate support for alternative solutions and options for the unwanted horse.

In a 2008 panel by the United States Department of Agriculture, potential solutions and options for these unwanted horses were discussed. It was stated that, "...when it comes to America's unwanted horses, imaginations really must come into play; we all have to think outside the box" (Lenz, 2008; Persechino, 2008). Potential options and solutions included increasing general education on the issue and causes to the unwanted horse while utilizing every housing option available. This could include friends with suitable land who may be willing to house horses, donating horses to colleges and universities who could utilize them in teaching and research, repurposing them into new careers to educate and support a younger generation of horse enthusiasts, or providing affordable euthanasia for those horses who may suffer from unmanageable pain or pose a threat to the safety of other horses and humans (Persechino, 2008).

Rescue and retirement facilities also may be a potential key to aiding in the unwanted horse issue. (Lenz, 2008; Pereschino, 2008). However, general research on equine rescues and their practices is lacking. A single study from the University of California, Davis aimed to obtain comprehensive data about nonprofit equine rescue and sanctuary organizations including case demographics, economic impacts, and case outcomes. Results showed that additional resources are needed to expand and provide quality care to the excess horses along with a need for additional studies moving forward (Holcomb et al., 2010). Additional guidelines for these facilities need to be established to create a standard within the industry and ensure the horse's best interest (Pereschino, 2008). In order to create useful and practical standards for rescues, a census of current effective strategies by highly accredited equine rescues must be compiled and recorded.

The United States today is facing a growing and increasingly urgent crisis as 200,000 horses go unwanted every year (Weiss, 2017). The American public increasingly stands against

horse slaughter and views horses as companion animals who have played an active and vital role in our history while additionally providing us outlets for therapy, recreation, sport, educational development, and friendship. These horses face an uncertain future if the industry does not actively search for safe, humane, and sustainable solutions. Equine professionals are being called to think outside the box, but research into this area remains in its infancy. To address this gap in knowledge, research needs to be collected to learn more about equine rescue practices and solidify an industry standard definition of ‘successful equine adoption’.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify key practices and common threads within selected rescues with a high industry standard which may increase the quality or quantity of equine adoptions while gathering a common definition of ‘successful adoption’.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to provide a universal definition of “successful adoption” for the equine industry which will provide a common goal for rescues and adopters. The second objective is to use qualitative analysis to both better understand and describe unique and common practices which could lead to successful equine adoptions.

CHAPTER 2/ LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is an in-depth analysis of the current knowledge surrounding animal companionship, small animal and equine adoption, and nonprofit animal rescue organization practices within the United States. Included is an analysis of both small animal and equine adoption practices and how adoption of certain practices may improve equine adoption. Literature surrounding both small and large animal adoption is discussed as literature surrounding equine adoption specifically was minimal. General literature encompassing the benefits and challenges of animal companionship, the human-animal bond, and nonprofit media, marketing, and finance is discussed. The compilation of calls for future research and gaps in literature is highlighted to underscore the need for research in these areas which are deficient.

Animal Companionship

Animals have played important roles in the lives of humanity through the story of human existence (De Waal, 2010; Amiot & Bastian, 2015). Through the use of food, clothing, and materials to construct buildings and tools, they have helped pave our path toward survival and have allowed us to thrive. In the more recent thousands of years, animals have accompanied us and have become dependent on us through domestication (Zeder, 2012). Human-animal relations have additionally been studied within almost every aspect in academia including sociology, economics, geography, history, literature, philosophy, and more (Amiot & Bastian, 2015). Today, it is estimated that 67% of all American households own pets (The Human Society, 2021) and more than \$55 billion is spent annually to maintain or improve their welfare (American Pet Products Association, 2013) The role animals have played in the history of mankind is

significant and their current role in the daily life of Americans is no less paramount, though the role has shifted as global concern over animal welfare has increased.

Benefits of General Animal Companionship

It is a common belief that pets play a crucial role in owner's lives and can improve overall health and happiness while decreasing feelings of loneliness and depression (Crawford et al., 2006). This provision of social support is considered to potentially improve health both psychologically and physiologically as even the act of stroking an animal can cause decreases in heart rate, blood pressure, and feelings of anxiety and stress (Shiloh et al., 2003; McConnell et al., 2011). In some correlational studies, it was found that those with pets had a lower death rate within 1 year of having a heart attack (Friedmann & Thomas, 1995) and elderly Medicare patients with pets had fewer physician visits than elderly Medicare patients without pets (Siegel, 1990). Though these studies do not prove that owning pets caused these outcomes, they do spark interest into the possibility of pets increasing the health and welfare of humans.

Other studies suggest that pets may be a mental 'safe zone' for owners during stressful events. In a study using 240 married couples, the partners were individually put through a stressful situation using mental arithmetic and cold pressor task (2 minute submersion of hand in ice water). It was found that, compared to those couples without pets, those with pet present had the lowest reactivity during the tests and the quickest recovery time as compared to the presence of their spouse alone (Allen et al., 2002). Furthermore, when induced to have feelings of social loneliness and isolation, simply thinking about a pet proved as effective as thinking of one's own human best friend on improving negative feelings and suppressing the sting of social rejection (McConnell et al., 2011). When attachment anxiety and avoidance was tested with people's relationships with their pets, it was found that differences in individual's attachment to a pet

directly influenced a pet's ability to provide a safe haven and security for the owner (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). This mirrors similarly to the ability for human-human relationships to provide emotional and social security according to one's attachment orientations. The evidence supports that pets may serve as a major source of social support to improve overall mental and physical health. These connections may even be as strong as, though may not completely replace, foundational human connections.

The ties binding the human-animal connection are powerful and are displayed particularly through the loss of companion animals. Reinforcing the significance of the human-animal bond is the intense grief felt by owners when their companion passes away (Amiot, 2015; Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011) which are reportedly as strong as losing a fellow human connection (Knight & Edwards, 2008; Reisbig et al., 2017). The sting of losing a companion can be devastating and holds true for equine owners as well (McGowan et al., 2012). Loss of a companion animal additionally holds unique factors and decisions that are not usually faced when losing a fellow human. These decisions include euthanasia which can leave an owner or caretaker with feelings of guilt, second guessing one's decision, and the blaming oneself for the death of a beloved animal (Reisbig et al., 2017). The grief and loss in death of companion animals, including horses, underscores the benefits companionship, friendship, and emotional connection made between humans and these animals who are often considered members of the family.

Benefits of Equine Companionship

Though general companion animals offer supports and resources such as lowering heart rate, decreasing blood pressure, providing social outlets, and creating emotional security, equines in particular offer significant outlets for therapy and emotional connection (Hemingway et al., 2015; Pendry et al., 2013;2014; Yorke et al., 2008). Equines have been used regularly for specific

therapeutic practices which have gained increased research and public interest over recent years. Additionally, physical, mental, and behavioral benefits offered to equine participants are available for a wide range of ages and include many with and without physical or mental disability and disorders (Frewin & Gardiner 2005; Lee Davis et al., 2015).

Equines have served a therapeutic role in the recovery of trauma and aided in the improvement of behavior and social capabilities of traumatized and incarcerated people (Hemingway et al., 2015; Yorke et al., 2008). The emotions of horses can be difficult to interpret to some and practicing communication skills using horses can enhance the ability to interpret human communications, behaviors, and emotions (Saslow 2002; Russell 2003). In a psychotherapy setting, research suggests that human-equine relationships might have unique therapeutic aspects- beyond those of small animals used for therapy. Equines may enhance the overall therapeutic experience and help the client confront a range of problems such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem (Yorke et al., 2008). The relationship built with the horse through a psychotherapy setting allows the client to enter a space free from judgement or criticism and encourages them to practice nurturing skills which offer safe intimacy, collaboration, physical affection, development, a sense of accomplishment, and empowerment (Burgon, 2011; Frewin & Gardiner, 2005; Hemingway et al., 2015) . The unique culture of Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies has created an environment for those seeking specific therapies to flourish.

Research further suggests that equine therapies may be beneficial for the mental and social health of at-risk youth and youth within the criminal justice system. Challenges facing youth within the criminal justice system include violence, bullying, and conflict which result in issues controlling temper, managing impulsivity, and contribute to a reoffending rate of 56.1% (Hemingway et al., 2015). Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) has shown promising results in

teaching confidence, a sense of mastery, self-efficacy, and empathy toward the thoughts and feelings of others (Burgon, 2011; Pendry & Roeter, 2013; Trotter et al., 2008). Participation with the horses consequently transferred into other parts of the youth's lives. Incarcerated youth reported having a sense of calmness, relaxation, and significantly affected their behaviors and relationships with others in a positive manner (Hemingway et al., 2015). For at-risk youth, the experiences and relationships built with the horses resulted in the participants gaining a sense of control, understanding, confidence, and empathy which were previously difficult to understand due to the changing and unreliable human relationships which may have failed them previously (Burgon, 2011). Research suggests that youth participating in EFL may lower their daily cortisol levels which would have a significant effect on basal neuroendocrine functioning (Pendry et al., 2014) and may be an effective tool to support positive development in youth.

Adults and those not seeking specific therapies with a human therapist also benefit from connections with the horse on a social, developmental, and personal level. In a series of interviews focusing on the rider-horse connection by Lee Davis (2014) it was stated that,

“Riding is my life, long and short of it. It is joy. It is therapy. Before horses I was extremely depressed... (horses) are always there. I can always go out and cry with them if I need...every time I feel stressed or frustrated or upset I just throw it aside and go ride a horse. There's the feeling of freedom where nothing else matters.” (Lee Davis, 2014).

The value of having a connection with a horse is rarely taken for granted. The participants reported the relationship with their riding partner as a piece of them which helps them sort through problems, establish self-development practices, and maintain a sense of happiness and well-being (Lee Davis, 2014). The connection between horse and rider is established through trust, patience, understanding, and mutual respect. It is considered a ‘partnership’ where complex

negotiations occur and both horse and rider must compromise toward a common goal (Wipper, 2000). The development of these virtues within a rider builds an understanding of communication strategies, awareness of others' perspective, and a sense of trust and confidence within another (Birke & Hockenhull, 2015). Research has been able to postulate horses as sentient beings with their own opinions, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward the world we share. Relationships built with these animals are deep and dynamic-sharing an equally complex set of qualities, benefits, and interactions as those relationships shared with people, though not completely replacing the need for human-human bonding (Brandt, 2004). Building these partnerships with the horse may prove to be a form of therapy for the rider and those involved in equestrian sport of all disciplines, improving other aspects of riders lives outside the arena.

Challenges of General Animal and Equine Companionship

Maintaining companion animals composes its own set of roadblocks through various avenues. The finance and maintenance of providing good welfare to companion animals can be difficult and costly with both money and time (Enders-Slegers & Hediger, 2019). Current housing and industrialized, urban lifestyles in which renting is becoming increasingly popular can make it difficult to find housing which allows small companion animals (O'Haire, 2010). Additionally, animals are often prohibited from the spaces they may be best suited for such as hospitals, nursing homes, and educational facilities unless special permission is granted (Beck & Katcher, 2003). These restrictions can make companion animal ownership difficult for many people depending on their residence, place of work, or life circumstances. These challenges are even greater when considering equine companionship.

Equines offer a unique set of challenges as they are larger, more costly to maintain, and require a more specific set of skills from handlers than small animal companions. Equine

activities are not suited for everyone as the size and power of horses may be intimidating and not everyone has an innate fondness for horses (Burgon, 2011). There may also be limiting factors such as underlying common health conditions (allergies, asthma, etc) which may prevent participants from interacting with animals (Yorke et al., 2008). Equine activities, especially horseback riding, is one of the most dangerous sports (Thomas et al., 2006; Ueek, 2004) as horses can be unpredictable, powerful, and may become frightened easily. Beginners in equestrian activities may especially be at risk as they have not learned to master communications with the horse. Due to their unpredictable nature, insurance for therapies which utilize horses and for instructors can be costly (Bowers & McDonald, 2001). Though there may be challenges to companion animal ownership, interaction, and therapies, the benefits of the partnerships may still outweigh the costs.

Companion animals are able to improve human's lives through friendship, social and emotional support, and therapeutic practices which can then improve human-human relationships and interactions. Though the benefits come with challenges and limitations, it is the responsibility of humans to care for and maintain the welfare of these animals as the human race is responsible for their domestication and they have served us for thousands of years (Zeder, 2012). The American public has grown in concern towards animal welfare (Morris, 2013) and the public eye views horses as companion animals along with dogs, cats, etc. Due to the responsibility of humans to care for these domesticated companion animals, rescue and adoption nonprofit organizations have become a vital part of the animal welfare system (Holcomb et al., 2010; Peterson, 2015; Reese, 2015).

Companion Animal Adoption

Equine Adoption

In a 2016 survey, it was estimated that there are 200,000 excess horses within the United States every year and 602 equine rescues and sanctuaries can accommodate 24,000 of these horses (American Horse Council, 2017; Weiss et al., 2017). According to surveys in 2009, 2010, and 2012, equine managers and caregivers labeled the unwanted horse issue as the most pressing and important problem within the equine industry (Stowe, 2010; 2012). It is widely believed that rescues and sanctuaries are near or at their capacity and may not be able to accept new horses into their facilities. However, nonprofit organizations focused on rescuing, retraining, and rehoming horses could be a vital part of the solution to mitigating the issue. There is a need to minimize the number of unwanted horses and maximize the number of horses adopted out into new families or careers. (Holcomb et al., 2012; 2010; Stowe & Kibler 2016; Persechino, 2008). Though research into equine rescue is minimal, there are some starting points relating to demographics of relinquishing owners, adopter demographic, relinquished and adopted horse demographic, and ideas for future research moving forward.

In a 2012 study by Holcomb, Stull, and Kass, it was found that those who relinquished their horses to rescues were primarily Caucasian females (95% Caucasian; 66.7% Women) and half of all relinquishing owners had between 1-5 years of equine experience. Of the relinquished horses, 56.6% were purchased privately before relinquishment and only 10.8% had been previously acquired through a rescue, though 70% of the horses were originally acquired for less than \$1,000 and therefore were not considered expensive (Holcomb et al., 2012). It was found that 49% of the owners currently had one or more horses still in their possession and over 87% of relinquishing owners had owned horses in the past. Annual income did not seem to be a predictor

of relinquishment in this study as the owner's income was evenly distributed between categories between less than \$20,000- over \$100,000 per year (Holcomb et al., 2012). However, in a 2010 study it was found that the relinquishment of a horse more likely came from owner-related issues such as financial hardship and physical condition of the owner which were not the fault of the horse. Other horse-related reasons for relinquishment included health issues (almost half), the horse not being suited for the desires of the owner, and behavioral issues (Holcomb et al., 2010). Each relinquished horse cost the rescues an average of \$3,648 per year to maintain while the national average to maintain a horse was \$2,581 in 2011 (Holcomb et al., 2010; Renelt, 2011). It was reported that the increased cost incurred by the rescue could be a direct result of increased medical care and nutritional rehabilitation required by the relinquished horses.

Adoptive owners were primarily of Caucasian (94%) ethnicity comprising of families and couples (62%), individual women (25%), then individual men (5%). Annual incomes averaged slightly higher for adoptive owners than relinquishing owners. Horses who were adopted were primarily used for pleasure riding or driving and companionship (Holcomb et al., 2012). About three quarters of the adoptive owners also owned other horses at the time and consequently may have better understood the financial and time commitment to horse ownership.

In Thoroughbreds, there were specific characteristics found that may make a horse more desirable for adoption. It was found that soundness was the most important factor which influenced the length of stay and those with the ability to do some jumping were adopted 50% faster than those with more limitations but were 4.5 times more likely to be returned (Stowe & Kibler, 2016). Grey horses were adopted faster but also returned at a higher rate than other colors of horse (Stowe & Kibler, 2016). These characteristics show that there may be factors in certain breeds which make them more desirable for adoption, but careful measures may need to be taken

to ensure the adoption is successful in the long-term. It was found that horses that were sound, trained for pleasure riding, or those that make good companion animals were adopted faster than those with health, lameness, or behavioral problems (Holcomb et al., 2012).

To improve longevity of adoption, a study of the Corolla Wild Horse Fund Adoption Program (CWHF) found that providing adequate staff support to answer questions and make proper adoption matches was important to potential adopters (Koncel, 2015). Providing security and support post-adoption through adopter interest and affinity groups gave them a constant support system where they could continue their education and be free to ask questions at all times (Koncel, 2015). Research suggests that thoroughbreds are more desirable with higher performance ability, horses with the ability for pleasure riding are more adoptable, and the mustangs are more adoptable with a solid foundation of handling (Holcomb et al., 2012; Koncel, 2015; Stowe & Kibler, 2016). Though the adopter demographic desired ‘untouched’ mustangs, there was greater success with those who had experience with training. This suggests that training a horse, no matter how slight, may add significant value in the adopter’s eyes and contribute to a faster adoption.

Small Animal Adoption

Though general research on equine rescues and their practices is sparse, many studies have been conducted with small animals on canine adoption and factors affecting these adoptions such as adopter demographic, animal training, and adoption success. Dog and cat shelters have faced an overpopulation problem before and have figured out how to mitigate the issue for long term success. In the 1970’s, it was estimated that 90% of all small animals entering shelters were euthanized which accumulated to 13.5 million dogs and cats in 1973 alone, or 20% of the entire U.S. population (Rowan & Williams, 1987). The cost of keeping and euthanizing these animals

was causing strain on the sheltering systems and national groups came together to solve the issue. Soon, sterilization programs were implemented into all shelters and sterilization was encouraged for all families who owned or were acquiring dogs and cats to ensure a decrease in total population (Rowan & Williams, 1987). Licensing animals with tags and encouraging microchipping for all pets provided secure ways for animals to be returned to their original owners if lost. By the 1980's, shelter intake declined by 50%. Today, it is estimated that 89.7 million dogs are currently owned in the United States which showed a gradual 20 million increase over a 17-year span from 2000-2017 (Rowan & Kartal, 2018; Unti 2004). Adoption rates have continuously increased while the rate of euthanasia in shelters continues to decrease (Rowan & Kartal, 2018). This increase in adoption may be due to the surge of media advocacy for the adoption of shelter companion animals which helped foster a societal shift in the perception of these companions and family relations.

Americans often view their dogs as true members of the family and describe their relationships with their dogs in terms such as love, friendship, obedience, acceptance, and trust (Salmon & Salmon, 1981). Though not much is known about characteristics of adopters, most of those who adopt dogs owned dogs in their childhood (Patronek et al., 1996) and those who wandered the dog shelter alone and spent more time looking at individual dogs were more likely to adopt (Wells & Hepper, 2001). It was found that dogs who spend the most time at the front of their enclosure, remain quiet, and are alert and attentive to people passing by or interacting with them are more likely to be adopted (Wells & Hepper, 2000a). Keeping dogs engaged and socialized with humans also increased their likelihood to be selected (Wells and Hepper, 1992). One factor affecting long-term adoption success was having access to training and support systems post adoption which decrease the likelihood of the dog being returned to shelters and

increase the likelihood of the family keeping the dog by 500% (Diesel, 2008; Patronek et al.,1996).

While some adoptions are happy and flourish, others can fail. Factors which negatively affect dog adoption success include behavioral problems, young owners, the dog not meeting the new owner's expectations or the dog needing more care than expected (Diesel, 2008). About one quarter of new adopters report behavioral problems with their companion in the first month, though it is unclear if there is a trend with the reported issues or if the owner had unrealistic expectations for the dog (Wells & Hepper, 2000b; Marston & Bennett, 2003). Other factors for returning the animal are problems with a previously existing animal in the household (which usually occur within the first week), the adoptive owner moving, breakdown of relationships, health problems with the dog, or behavioral issues such as separation anxiety (which usually occur after longer than one-month post-adoption) (Marston et al., 2004).

It is possible that investing into programs for education and support for new adopters both before and after adoption could mitigate post-adoption problems (Diesel, 2008; Patronek et al.,1996). Informing adopters on what to expect with a new dog or interviewing them to learn about their expectations (Mondelli et al., 2004), educating them on how to properly handle behavioral problems when they arise, and cultivating support groups may give adopters a support base and decrease the rate of return while increasing the adopter and dog's satisfaction and relationship. Education for dogs available for adoption can be beneficial as just 20 minutes per day of positive training and social interaction with humans can increase their adoption rate (Luescher & Medlock, 2009). Though most adopters have been satisfied with the adoption process (Protopopova et al., 2012), suggestions for improvement have included more information

about their dog, increased staffing, education on what type of dog may be appropriate, and increased post-adoptive follow up.

The reasonings for adoption failure are similar between dogs and horses as both have been relinquished for behavioral problems and the animal not meeting the expectations of the owner (Diesel, 2008; Holcomb et al., 2010). However, it is not known if factors contributing to the success of dog adoptions (education for owners, socializing dogs, increased marketing, etc.) is similar to those in successful equine adoption. This gap in literature contributed to the formulation of the purpose of this research: to better understand key practices which could contribute to successful equine adoption.

Nonprofit Operational Best Practices

Research and literature into nonprofit best practices is robust and extensive. For the scope of this review, an intensive search will not be conducted.

Finance, Media, and Marketing

It has been reported that funding is usually the greatest challenge for nonprofit equine rescue (Holcomb et al., 2010) and other nonprofit animal welfare organizations (Maguire, 2016). Funding by nonprofits usually operates on a continuum from ‘primarily donor-funding based’ to various ‘earned income-oriented activities’ (Anderson et al., 2002; Weerawardena et al., 2010). Long-term recommendations for stability and success have been suggested and are readily available through books, articles, classes, and reports. Maguire (2016) suggested that long-term success can be supported by adequate record keeping, inventory tracking, adherence to industry standards, proper cost allocation, and effective fund raising. Accurate record keeping satisfies requirements by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and generates transparency which is crucial for increasing donor confidence and likely increasing donations (Maguire, 2016). It was also

recommended that social media is utilized along with websites to expand presence and name recognition. Those nonprofits which are increasingly competitive have adopted a competitive posture and are proactive in recognizing new opportunities (Weerawardena et al., 2010). These competitive nonprofits may have additionally been pressured to become sustainable and are therefore forced to adopt revenue-enhancing and cost-reducing strategies to achieve greater operational efficiency.

Marketing was not adopted by nonprofits until 1960-1970 and traditional marketing strategies do not work for nonprofits who usually focus on gaining donors, volunteers, and funding (Pope et al., 2009). Online marketing has become a popular avenue for nonprofits to strengthen their advocacy, build relationships, and communicate with the public, and raise funds (Hart, 2002) though 82.4% of nonprofits do not have a specific target market for fundraising according to a study by Pope, Isley, and Tutu (2009). Some nonprofits have troubles with poor ‘capture efficiency’ or the failure of search engines to display their website near the top of the page and were concerned with brand recognition (Wenham et al., 2003) but this can be mitigated by registering the website with certain search engines (Hart, 2002). It is common for nonprofits to lack the time, expertise, technology, or staff resources needed to invest properly into media and marketing (Pinho & Macedo, 2006; Pope et al., 2009). However, marketing for nonprofits is critical and organizations should be contributing time and money into their efforts. If time or money is not available, then selecting appropriate board members could help close the organizational gap (Pope et al., 2009). Marketing for nonprofits is different than marketing for profit businesses and marketing efforts should be focused on examining and understanding donor’s motives and incentives for contributions.

Calls for Future Research

There is a pressing need for research into equine rescue, relinquishment, and adoption as many of the shelters are becoming limited in space (Holcomb et al., 2010). Research is also essential to improve the welfare of retired racehorses and gain understanding into the desires of adopters to decrease the length of stay at facilities and optimize adoption success (Koncel 2015; Stowe & Kibler, 2015). Education into the issue may help spread awareness and help new adopters understand the financial and time commitments needed for horse ownership or to generate awareness on backyard breeding and how to prevent unplanned foals (Holcomb et al., 2012).

It was noted through the general literature that there is no equine industry standard for the definition of a ‘successful adoption’. In small animals, it is widely understood that these companions are considered members of the family and offer unconditional love, friendship, and social support (Bonas et al., 2000; Salmon and Salmon, 1981). However, equines are more controversial as they are usually not kept on a life-long basis and often sold one they are not usable for the owner’s intended purpose or as desires and interest change (Dashper, 2014; Hausberger et al., 2007; Kilby, 2007). Conversely, there is also research suggesting that these horses can still be considered part of the family and owners or handlers become quite emotionally attached (Lee Davis et al., 2015; Wipper, 2009) This exposes a discrepancy within the equine industry as horses may be suitable to an owner for a period of time and considered part of the family to a point in which they become too costly medically with age or injury, the interest of the owner changes, or they are no longer suitable for the original intended purpose of the owner. It is commonly understood that if an adoption is ‘successful’ with dogs or cats, the adopter is satisfied, and the animal will likely have a stable home for the rest of its life. However,

this definition may not be suitable for equine adoption as broad research suggests that fulfilling the owner's desires may be the most critical factor to a happy and long-term partnership which may not be possible during the complete cycle of a horse's life. This discrepancy should be investigated and understanding the unique factors surrounding a fulfilling equine partnership is needed to generate an accurate common definition of 'successful equine adoption'.

Conclusion

In the 1970's, dogs and cats were facing an overpopulation crisis as nearly 20% of the total population was euthanized annually due to overcrowding and a lack of resources (Rowan & Williams, 1987). Leaders within the field were able to combat this issue by enforcing sterilization and identification policies which decreased the population while improving the ability to reunite with original owners if lost or stolen (Rowan & Kartal, 2018; Unti 2004). These policies were met with a massive movement to promote the adoption of shelter dogs and break the stigma against these animals as being undesirable. Today, the equine industry is facing a similar crisis as over 200,000 horses go unwanted every year while rescues and sanctuaries can accommodate only 24,000 of these horses (American Horse Council, 2017; Holcomb et al., 2010; Weiss et al., 2017). The unlucky horses sold at auction often go for meat and are shipped to Mexico or Canada to be slaughtered and sold on international markets (GAO, 2011). This practice is largely not supported by Americans as 80% of the public is against horse slaughter due to the horse's nature to provide people with unique benefits in psychological and physiological therapies both in and out of a professional therapy setting (Burgon, 2011; Hemingway et al., 2015; Lawler & Geyer, 2014; Lee Davis et al., 2015; Yorke et al., 2008).

Therefore, there is a pressing need to find humane and publicly acceptable solutions for the excess 158,000 horses who face an uncertain future every year (Morris, 2013). Equine rescue

organizations may provide a critical solution to this problem, but they are currently at or over capacity (Holcomb et al., 2010; Stowe & Kibler 2016; Persechino, 2008). Examining the ways small animal rescues were able to mitigate their overpopulation situations may help equine rescues generate ideas to help reduce their unwanted horse population and increase adoption rates. It is known that adopted horses are most often used for pleasure riding, driving, and companionship (Holcomb et al., 2010). However, it is also known that horses are most often relinquished due medical and some behavioral limitations which may make them unsuitable for riding. The positive effects of general animal companionship are known and well-studied, possibly making these horses which may be unsuitable for riding prime candidates for general companionship. Those horses without physical limitations may cater to those looking for pleasure riding and are adopted at a faster rate (Stowe & Kibler 2016). Media, marketing, and education may have played a significant role in reshaping the public opinion on shelter animals in the united states during the early 2000's. However, due to financial and staffing constraints, there is a continuing need for better advertising and fundraising (Holcomb et al., 2010; Maguire, 2016). Conceivably, investing into media and marketing may have a profound effect on the success of equine adoption as well if finances permit. This may uncover a cyclical problem as financial stability is needed to afford marketing and marketing is needed to be financially stable in a nonprofit.

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CHAPTER 3/RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

The United States today is facing a crisis. Every year, over 200,000 new horses become ‘unwanted’ and face an uncertain future while 602 rescues and sanctuaries across the country handle about 24,000 of the excess horses (AHC, 2017; Weiss 2017). Estimates state that 138,000-160,000 horses from the United States are shipped across the border into Canada or Mexico to be slaughtered for meat and sold on the international market (Dolan, 2016; Lawler & Geyer, 2015; Welfare, 2011). According to Dr. Temple Grandin who has spent her lifetime studying animals bound for slaughter, the horses shipped for meat face worse fates than slaughter on US soil due to longer transportation times, substandard conditions in Mexico, or abandonment and starvation which is the worst outcome from an animal welfare perspective (Grandin, 2010; 2012). Previously, the United States had active horse slaughter plants and was an active participant in the international market for horse meat, though it was never actively consumed in the U.S (Ahern et al., 2006). However, the general population does not view horse meat as an appropriate food source and nearly 80% of Americans stand against horse slaughter (Dolan, 2016; Geyer & Lawler, 2013; Hazard; 2008; Morris, 2013). Due to public opposition, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act passed in 2006 which outlawed slaughter on U.S. soil. Therefore, there is a pressing need to find humane, effective, and publicly acceptable solutions for the excess horses who continually face an uncertain future (Morris, 2013; Pereschino, 2008; Stowe, 2010; 2012).

The public eye largely views equines as companion animals who provide social and emotional benefits through use in therapy, recreation, competition, and companionship (Lee et

al., 2015; Yorke et al., 2008; Wippen, 2000). The horse-human relationship is seen as a 'partnership' in which riders strive to have a relationship built on trust, respect, confidence, and close communication (Dashper, 2014; Wippen, 2000). Horse participants commonly portray their equine encounters as interactions which make them happy, aide in common-place stress, and act as personal forms of psychotherapy (Lee et al., 2015). The bonds formed with companion animals may offer relationships which are positive, dependable, non-judgmental, and create an outlet for humans to be nurturing, kind, empathetic, and may reduce the feelings of loneliness (Fine & Beck, 2015; Wells 2009.) These horse-human relationships have been seen as true friendships as some handlers refer to their animal partners as a 'best friend' (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2105).

In a therapeutic setting, equines aide in the recovery of trauma and in the improvement of behavior and social capabilities of traumatized and incarcerated people (Hemingway et al., 2015; Yorke et al., 2008). The emotions of horses can be difficult to interpret to some and practicing communication skills using horses can enhance the ability to interpret human communications and empathize with the behaviors, emotions, and thoughts of others (Burgon, 2011; Pendry & Roeter, 2013; Russell 2003; Saslow 2002; Trotter et al., 2008). Developmentally, it has been found that children's attachment to companion animals can be associated with increased mental health, well being, higher quality of life, and can teach empathy, positive attitude and positive behavior (Daly & Morton, 2006; Fonseca et al 2011; Marsa-Sambola et al., 2016). These cultural perspectives and modern uses for the horse solidify the anti-slaughter beliefs in America and proliferate support for alternative solutions and options for the unwanted horse.

In the 1970's, dogs and cats were facing a similar overpopulation crisis as nearly 20% of the total population was euthanized annually due to overcrowding and a lack of resources

(Rowan & Williams, 1987). Leaders within the field were able to combat this issue by enforcing sterilization and identification policies which decreased the population while improving the ability to reunite with original owners if lost or stolen (Rowan & Kartal, 2018; Unti 2004). These policies were met with a massive movement to promote adoption and break the stigma against these animals as being undesirable. By the 1980's, shelter intake declined by 50% and dog ownership grew by 20 million between 2000-2017 (Rowan & Kartal, 2018; Unti 2004). Taking a critical look at successful processes used in managing the small animal overpopulation issue could generate ideas about ways to move forward with the unwanted horse problem.

It has been stated that, "...when it comes to America's unwanted horses, imaginations really must come into play; we all have to think outside the box" (Lenz, 2008; Pereschino, 2008). According to surveys in 2009, 2010, and 2012, equine managers and caregivers labeled the unwanted horse issue as the most pressing and important problem within the equine industry (Stowe, 2010; 2012). Potential options and solutions have included increasing general education on the issue, understanding the causes to the unwanted horse, and utilizing every housing option available including rescue facilities which may be a potential key to aiding in the crisis (Lenz, 2008; Pereschino, 2008).

Rescue and rehoming facilities are a critical component in helping horses transition into new homes and careers, but they are not without significant challenges. The finance and maintenance of companion animals to provide good welfare can be difficult and costly with both money and time (Enders-Slegers & Hediger, 2019). Equines offer a unique set of challenges as they are larger, more costly to maintain, and require a more specific set of skills from handlers than small animal companions. Costs for relinquished horses averaged \$3,648 per year which is \$1,067 above the 2011 estimates for annual costs to maintain a horse (Holcomb et al., 2010;

Renelt, 2011). This difference in cost could highlight the increased need for medical care and nutritional rehabilitation which is incurred by the nonprofit organizations as over half of the relinquished animals into rescues are considered ‘unhealthy’ (Holcomb, et al., 2010). Routine medical care such as deworming, vaccinations, hoof care, dental care, nutrition, and some rehabilitation is commonly offered to horses before rehoming (Holcomb et al., 2012), but it is mostly unknown of other medical or alternative therapies are offered to equines through the rescues.

Research suggests that educational programs for both the adopter and animals may increase the quality or quantity of companion animals while certain physical characteristics may increase the adoptability of certain equines. Thoroughbreds are more desirable with higher performance ability, horses with the ability for pleasure riding are more adoptable, and mustangs may be more adoptable with even a brief basis of handling (Holcomb et al., 2012; Koncel, 2016; Stowe & Kibler, 2016). This suggests that training a horse, no matter how slight, may add significant value in the adopter’s eyes and contribute to a faster or more long-term adoption. One of the biggest factors affecting long-term adoption success is owners having access to training and support systems post adoption. The presence of support systems post-adoption decreased the likelihood of dogs being returned to shelters and increased the likelihood of the family keeping the animal by 500% (Diesel, 2008; Patronek et al., 1996). Informing adopters on what to expect with a new animal or interviewing them to learn about their expectations (Mondelli et al., 2004), educating them on how to properly handle behavioral problems when they arise, and cultivating support groups may give adopters a support base and decrease the rate of return while increasing an adopter’s satisfaction (Protopopova et al., 2012).

It has been reported that funding is usually the greatest challenge for nonprofit equine rescue (Holcomb et al., 2010) and other nonprofit animal welfare organizations (Maguire, 2016). Funding by nonprofits usually operates on a continuum from ‘primarily donor-funding based’ to various ‘earned income-oriented activities’ (Anderson et al., 2002; Weerawardena et al., 2010). Long-term recommendations for stability and success have been suggested and are readily available through books, articles, classes, and reports. Maguire (2016) suggested that long-term success can be supported by adequate record keeping, inventory tracking, adherence to industry standards, proper cost allocation, and effective fund raising. Accurate record keeping satisfies requirements by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and generates transparency which is crucial for increasing donor confidence and likely increasing donations (Maguire, 2016). It was also recommended that social media is utilized along with websites to expand presence and name recognition. Those nonprofits which are increasingly competitive have adopted a competitive posture and are proactive in recognizing new opportunities (Weerawardena et al., 2010). These competitive nonprofits may have additionally been pressured to become sustainable and are therefore forced to adopt revenue-enhancing and cost-reducing strategies to achieve greater operational efficiency.

Marketing was not adopted by nonprofits until 1960-1970, but for-profit traditional strategies do not work for nonprofits who focus on clients, donors, volunteers, and funders (Pope et al., 2009). Online marketing has become a popular avenue for nonprofits to strengthen their advocacy, build relationships, and communicate with the public, and raise funds (Hart, 2002) though 82.4% of nonprofits do not have a specific target market for fundraising according to a study by Pope, Isley, and Tutu (2009). Some nonprofits have troubles with poor ‘capture efficiency’ or the failure of search engines to display their website near the top of the page and

were concerned with brand recognition (Wenham et al., 2003) but this can be mitigated by registering the website with certain search engines (Hart, 2002). It is common for nonprofits to lack the time, expertise, technology, or staff resources needed to invest properly into media and marketing (Pinho & Macedo, 2006; Pope et al., 2009). However, marketing for nonprofits is critical and organizations should be contributing time and money into their efforts. If time or money is not available, then selecting appropriate board members could help close the organizational gap (Pope et al., 2009). Marketing for nonprofits is different than marketing for profit businesses and marketing efforts should be focused on examining and understanding donor's motives and incentives for contributions. Media, marketing, and education may have played a significant role in reshaping the public opinion on shelter animals in the United States during the early 2000's. Conceivably, investing into media and marketing may have a profound effect on the success of equine adoption as well if finances permit. This may uncover a cyclical problem as financial stability is needed to afford marketing and marketing is needed to be financially stable in a nonprofit.

There is a pressing need for research into equine rescue, relinquishment, and adoption as many of the shelters are becoming limited in space and it is essential to decrease the length of stay at facilities while optimizing adoption success (Holcomb et al., 2010; Koncel 2016; Stowe & Kibler, 2015). Education and post-adoption support groups may help new adopters understand horse management, care, and understanding behavioral problems when they arise and decrease the rate of return (Diesel, 2008; Mondelli et al., 2004; Patronek et al., 1996; Protopopova et al., 2012). The practices which may increase the quality or quantity of equine adoptions is not well understood nor is there an industry standard for the definition of a 'successful adoption' which may or may not be similar to the accepted cultural definition of a 'successful adoption' for small

companion animals. The purpose of this study is to gather a common definition of “successful adoption” while identifying practices in general equine management, adoption procedures, and marketing which may help lead to higher quality or quantity of equine adoptions.

Materials and methods

This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interview data conducted by phone with key informants from highly accredited equine rescue and sanctuary organizations. All methods described including recruitment, gaining consent, interviewing, and transcription were performed in accordance with all ethical and privacy standards with Colorado State University and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB approval (Protocol # 20-10233H) is located in Appendix A.

Sampling

This study utilized homogenous purposive sampling to gather participants who would act as key informants to represent the rescue and sanctuary communities. Homogenous purposive sampling is a method of sampling in which all participants must share similar traits or characteristics which will help give robust insight into the interview questions (Etikan, 2016). Participants in this study ($n=9$) all have been in operation for at least 10 years, actively list horses for adoption on their organization website, have a description of the organization including goals and backgrounds located on the website, and are accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS). GFAS is a globally recognized organization which specializes in certifying animal sanctuaries and ensuring that “animals receive the highest standards of care during rescue, rehabilitation, and the rest of their life” (Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries [GFAS], 2018). Though GFAS organizations care for hundreds of species across the world and GFAS classifies them all as ‘sanctuaries’, they have a specific handbook

outlining the needs and expectations of equine rescues and sanctuaries which, for their purposes, are all housed under the term ‘sanctuary’. Standards for these sanctuaries cover equine housing, nutrition requirements, veterinary care, well-being and handling, rescue policies, and adoption and handling (GFAS, 2016).

Participants for this study were chosen through the United Horse Coalition’s website utilizing their public online ‘Equine Resource Database’. The United Horse Coalition (UHC) is a branch under the American Horse Council founded in 2005 by the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Its mission is to promote education and provide options for at-risk or transitioning horses through industry partnership and cooperation (United Horse Coalition [UHC], n.d.). The purpose of the UHC ‘Equine Resource Database’ is to register organizations who can provide services to horses at-risk including providing contacts to industry approved and supported rescues (UHC, n.d.).

There were 1,014 total entries registered with the UHC Equine Resource Database at the date of collection. From these organizations, 35 organizations were accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and chosen to continue through the screening process. To further narrow the pool of candidates, organizations were required to be affiliated with at least four of the following organizations: Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, The Right Horse Initiative, Equus Guardian, Homes for Horses Coalition, United Horse Coalition, A Home for Every Horse, and Equine Welfare Data Collective. These affiliations were chosen due to their leadership and strong reputation in the equine industry for advancing equine rescue. This reduced the pool of organizations by 15 leaving 20 candidates who qualified for the study. Any organizations who did not have a website, have a description of the organization including goals and backgrounds located on the website, or did not list horses for sale or adoption on the website

were eliminated from the list of qualified organizations. It was determined that 13 of these rescues would fit well into the study and were contacted individually. There were 4 nonrespondents leaving 9 participating organizations.

Conducting Interviews

Primary descriptive data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted via phone due to the geographical distance between participants and to decrease possible bias from physical locations, facial expression, participant appearance or dress, body language, or social connection with the researcher (Patton, 1999). The interview was comprised of 6 main categories: (a) declarative data, (b) introductory question, (c) general horse management practices, (d) adopter-fit strategies, (e) media, marketing, and finance, and (f) closing questions. There were 24 questions in total with the opportunity to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. A table with structured interview questions is located in Appendix B. Specific questions can be found in Appendix B and are available upon request. Interviews lasted between 30-70 minutes depending on the detail of answers as conversation was largely driven by the interviewees to facilitate open discussion.

These interviews aim to answer the central questions (a) what a ‘successful (equine) adoption’ is and (b) what practices could contribute to higher quality or quantity of equine adoptions. Interview questions were created and refined through peer-review processes and to ensure the accuracy, appropriateness, and effectiveness of interview questions. Interviews were completed over phone by the main author and recorded to ensure consistency and correctness of the data. Before the interview started or was recorded, the interviewer read an oral consent form informing the participant of the subject matter, intent, and plans for the study. These interviews took place in a private room with no other individuals present.

Analyzing Data

Interviews were completed on different days of the week by the main author who has equine industry experience and instead lasted an average of 40 minutes. During the interviews, documents including adoption contracts, flyers and information about the organization, and information about programs developed by the organization were collected to compare with discussions during the interview. After the completion of all interviews, audio went through an intelligent verbatim transcription process using a computer-based program (Trint). The interviews and transcription were then verified minute by minute by the main author to correct any mistakes made by the automated system. After audio was transcribed into written text and verified for completeness and correctness, the original audio tapes were destroyed.

Transcribed interviews ($n=9$) were then printed and read by the main author who has comprehensive experience within the industry. Transcripts are located in Appendix C. These transcripts were re-read and highlighted for themes and codes. Codes were then reviewed again and combined into larger codes which underwent peer-examination. This exam was multidisciplinary and screened for any biases or outlying data points. Codes were confirmed to be applicable to many equine rescue organizations. The analysis of the data focused on extracting themes which could satisfy the primary and secondary objectives or prove to be a surprising theme.

Results

In the following sections, quotes from the interviews are used to support the themes and points extracted from the data. These themes and ideas answer the central questions and fulfill the purpose of this study to define 'successful adoption' within the equine industry and extract practices which may lead to more successful adoptions.

What makes a successful adoption

According to the interviews and data gathered, a successful adoption was comprised of three main aspects: (a) The horse has a specific purpose in the adopter's life and the abilities and limitations of the horse and handler are compatible. (b) The adopter puts the needs of the horse first while simultaneously the horse meets the specific needs of the adopter. (c) The outcome of the pairing leads to a life-long home in which the horse is cared for until death.

During the interviews, there was a common theme extracted in which the adopter needed to have a specific, realistic purpose in mind for the horse they are looking to adopt. This aligns with the knowledge that an adopter's expectations for an animal can influence their attachment, satisfaction, and likeliness to keep an adopted animal (O'Connor, et al., 2016). There was emphasis established on finding the "right horse for the right person" meaning that the abilities, limitations, knowledge, and skillset needed to align together in a correct manner. Whether the horse's purpose was to be a competition prospect or a non-riding companion, successful adoptions ideally had an adopter with a specific purpose to fulfill which was appropriate for the horse and in which the horse was set up for success. Setting the horse up for success had multiple underlying aspects as well including the adopter having the appropriate riding and handling skills, management knowledge, and financial ability to provide for the horse and create a safe, appropriate partnership.

"So success to us I think really means that we've got the skills as a rider or a handler, and knowledge as an owner, the financial means to care for a horse, and the desire to help horses. So all of those things, not any one of those things allows us to place a horse... The horse being the first priority, regardless of what somebody is looking for...If they have all these other factors, then we can be pretty sure we're going to have a successful adoption." (Interview 4)

Woven throughout the answers to multiple questions and present in every interview, there was a common theme of putting the needs and welfare of the horse first in every situation. The

expectations for the adopters proved to be no different. Concurrently, the horse needed to meet the needs of the adopter (utilitarian, emotional, etc.) to make a fulfilling partnership.

“...one (home/adoption) that provides excellent care for the specific horse meeting that specific horse’s needs, and that specific horse simultaneously meets the needs of the adopter, whatever they might be.” (Interview 1)

The importance of both horse and potential owner satisfying each other’s needs is further expressed through the multiple specific stories shared in interviews 3, 4, and 8 in which the potential adoption failed due to the needs of both horse and adopter not being met appropriately. These examples included an elderly woman who could not adopt a horse due to the limitations of the horse to trail ride and another woman who was not permitted to adopt because she could not provide the emotional or behavioral stability which the horse required to perform tasks safely.

Representatives explained that good adoptions lead to the adopter taking care of the horse and “keep[ing] the horse... including times of injury, old age, et cetera...” as summarized by Interviewee 9. This may mean that successful adoptions expect the adopter to keep the horse even when it may not be able to perform to the adopter’s desired capabilities anymore due to physical limitations. This again supports the theme of ‘putting the horse first’. Most interviewees presented the idea that the most successful adoptions will keep the horse for the duration of the horse’s life.

“a horse that goes to a forever home and dies in peace with the same family or human or whoever. You know, it's a lifelong home- we consider it a great adoption”. (Interview 7)

However, one of the organization representatives recognized that some adoptions may not be able to be life-long, but that may not be the direct fault of the adopters or the rescue.

“You know, we used to put a lot of stock in the 'forever' component of adoption in terms of gauging its success but have realized that simply is not always possible. And horses can be adopted into very caring homes that provide outstanding care for them and great, you know, a great life for a horse. But it can't be forever if that makes sense. Through no fault of the adopters or any foresight on our part or theirs...” (Interview 1)

Finding homes which can commit to and provide forever homes can be a challenging task. Sometimes the pairing does not work, but seven of the interviewees stated that have taken horses back as returns when the match does not work for any number of reasons.

It is summarized that the meaning of ‘successful adoption’ for equine is multifaceted and is a delicate balance between the horse meeting the adopter’s specific and appropriate needs for that horse and, in return, the adopter ideally always putting the needs of the horse first and caring for the horse through the duration of the horse’s life. It is recognized that an adoption may not always be a good match and could fail, but those most successful ideally result in the horse being properly cared for during the remainder of its life.

Adoption practices

The process of finding an adopter-horse match was comprised of multiple approaches and viewpoints but presented common themes such as the initial interaction, financial capabilities, and the ability for the horse to fit the adopter’s needs as predictors for the completion of an adoption. After adoption, the rescues remain a vital source for the adopters as they focused on building a village and encouraging opportunities for continued education and training for the partnership. If the adoption were to fail, the rescue remained as a safe landing place for the horse.

Adopter-fit strategies

The majority of organizations required an application to be filled before any in-person interactions took place. These applications inquired about financial stability, place of residence for a horse, background knowledge and experiences of the owner, and future goals with a horse. Some applications additionally required a site visit where one of the representatives from the rescue visits and determines the appropriateness of housing arrangements. In some cases, it was

stated that they work with the potential adopter to improve aspects of their application to make them more suitable.

“...the adoption team will identify to them areas that they'll need to improve before we can move forward and in the process. And then once they show that improvement, then everything's checked off...” (Interview 6)

The most frequently stated predictor of whether an adoption may or may not proceed further in the process was the initial encounter with the desired horse. This initial interaction allows the current handlers at the rescue to evaluate the skills and abilities of the potential adopter and allow the horse to show whether they are comfortable with the style of handling.

“...the initial visit is very important. It seems like there's either a match or not. And that's a very qualitative assessment. And I'm not quite sure how to explain that the people either feel a connection to a horse or they don't...our trainers try to make sure too that the adopter's encounter with a horse that they are meeting any holes or challenges that the horse has so that the adopter experiences them here with us and with the support of a trainer...” (Interview 1)

“The other area that's really important... people often overestimate their horse ability and their riding ability not because they're lying, it's just people are people and you know, sometimes we're more optimistic than we should be... they self-evaluate but when we talk to them and when they come out and ride, we can discern what level they're at and so we work really carefully to try to determine what the accuracy of what their ability actually is.” (Interview 3)

The initial visit was stated as important but may also be an opportunity for the adopter to meet other horses which may be more appropriate to suit their needs as seen through story examples from Interviewees 3, 4, and 8. If the initial pairing was not appropriate for any number of reasons, the organizations may encourage the potential adopters to meet other horses which may suit their needs more accurately. Additionally, if a potential adopter lacked the skills or experience to safely own a horse, their participation in equine activities was not discouraged. The rescues often encouraged the adopter to pursue education and experiences through clinics, lessons with trainers they recommended, or volunteering.

“I recommend that people start volunteering somewhere where they can work with horses, handle horses, groom horses, be around them, especially if they have actually no real in-person experience with horses. It's difficult to take on ownership as the very first step.” (Interview 4)

Inquiring about financial stability was a common theme and is appropriate due to financial hardship being the most significant owner-related factor for relinquishment (Holcomb et al., 2010). Having an appropriate income and showing financial stability may be helpful in ensuring the horse does not become at-risk due to financial reasons as horses are more expensive to maintain than other companion animals.

“The first thing is whether or not you're able to sustain the horse...we find a lot of people love horses in their mind, but their finances are not reflective of being able to own one...” (Interview 7)

“...application finances are an important part of the adoption application process. We want to make sure that people have the resources financially to take care of horses.” (Interview 3)

Due to the qualitative nature of matching a potential adopter with a horse and many of the varying aspects, all of the organizations embraced a conversation-based adoption strategy along with their applications. While the applications acted as a ‘screening process’, conversations with the potential adopters offered an in-depth perspective on the experience, knowledge, and goals of the adopters for informed decisions on which horses may be appropriate.

“We use primarily a conversation-based adoption process. So, while we do have an application, which the potential adopters will receive very early in the process, our adopter selection is really based primarily on conversations with myself, the executive director, and with a potential adopter.” (Interview 1)

Adopter-fit strategies for the rescues were varied depending on their demographic of horse, demographic of potential adopters, and how their organization was structured. There were common themes which could likely predict whether an adoption may follow through or not. These predictors included the adopter’s financial ability to appropriately provide for the horse,

the initial encounter which revealed if the adopter had the skills and ability to effectively work safely with the horse, and the ability of the horse to meet the adopter's needs. The organizations did have mandatory applications to complete, but particularly fostered relationships through a conversation-based adoption strategy which allowed for in-depth conversation about the experience, knowledge, and expectations of the adopter. If the adopter-horse match was not appropriate, the organizations often took this as an opportunity to match the potential adopter with other more suitable prospects or to work with the adopter to gain the skills necessary for safe and successful horse ownership.

Building a Village

Post-adoption practices for the rescues showed an overarching theme of establishing a community around the adopter and horse to support the success and happiness of the partnership. Once a horse was adopted, the adopter typically assumed all responsibility for care including medical bills, training, and maintenance of the horse, though they were not without ample support.

Interviewees repeatedly expressed their encouragement for an adopter to continue education with a trainer from the community. Continuing education may be a vital part of adoption success as many horses who arrive at rescues have been seized by law enforcement due to poor condition, have been mishandled in the past, or have pre-existing behavioral problems (Holcomb et al., 2010). It has also been found that post-adoption education decreased the likelihood of returns by 500% in rescue dogs (Diesel, 2008; Patronek et al., 1996).

“...a lot of times prior to adoption, we explain to people that horses need to continue training and sometimes we make that a condition of the adoption, that they have to commit to that (training)...” (Interview 7)

Part of the post- adoption education and training consisted of the rescue helping to troubleshoot behavioral or management problems which were unpredictable at the rescue or surfaced after the horse arrived at the new home. Occasionally, trainers from the rescue may meet a new adopter with their horse at the new location (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4) or try to troubleshoot problems through video and phone calls (Interview 6, 9). The rescues were also available for questions on general management, making end of life decisions which are often considerably difficult (Reisbig et al., 2017), and any other problems the new owner may face. These aspects point toward the continuation of relationship-building post-adoption and the rescue acting as a ‘safe space’ to counsel adopters through decisions.

“(We) try to establish a relationship with our adopters so they know that we are for the life of their horse, a resource for them. If they need advice, if they need to problem solve, if they do run into a problem and need medical support- we could potentially be here for them to support the relationship with their horse...for the life of their horse if that makes sense.” (Interview 1)

“If you get into a high-cost situation or you get into a quality-of-life decision and you just need a resource, somebody to talk it over with, or if it is a financial situation for you... We're open to anything that helps. Keep that ambassador (adopter) for rescue horses feeling good about their decision to adopt from us...” (Interview 4)

If efforts fail and the adopter is still facing difficulties with the horse and it is not safe for the handler or the adopter does not wish to continue in the partnership, the interviewees stated that they will take the horse back without judgement.

“...my interest there is in making that adopter feel like you absolutely did the right thing. There is nothing wrong saying I can't handle this horse. We applaud you for recognizing that. And then, you know, on the other side of it, we'll take care of whatever the issue is before we move that horse, even consideration for readoption. But it happens. There are with all the best intentions with screening- I think you still have to allow for there to be mismatches.” (Interview 4)

The rescue acts as a safety net in every stage of a horse’s life from the initial intake until death. The end goal as described by the rescues is to ideally have an adoption be life-long,

though it is recognized that this may not always be possible. If there is a ‘mismatch’ and the adopter-horse pairing is not suitable, the rescues almost unanimously stated that they would take the horse back and continue to care for it or readopt the animal. This acts as a final safety net for the horse to likely not become at-risk again.

General Equine Management

The general management of horses at the rescues was aimed at improving both the physical and emotional aspects of the horse as it progressed through the rescues’ programming. The individual rescues embraced diverse sets of programming. However, the commonalities between each rescue again lied in putting the horse’s needs first and improving the horse through physical rehabilitation, emotional recovery, and training. Each rescue experienced the burden of financial impact during the intake and rehabilitation process, but some have developed avenues to alleviate the strain.

Intake, rehabilitation, and training

Upon intake of the horse, every rescue engaged in providing initial medical support for the horse despite the known or unknown history. The medical procedures for intake comprised of dental examination, assessing overall body condition, full rounds of vaccines, deworming, confirming or taking a Coggins test (detects antibodies to the disease Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA)), assessing lameness while taking x-rays or radiographs if necessary, or addressing any other unique problems that may be presented.

“They are getting a check-up, they are getting vaccines, which are then boosted again because we don't have good historical data. They're going to fecal deworming, Coggins tests, and those are just a baseline in addition to all of that, then they are getting anything that the veterinarian finds that they're in need of and most often it is teeth care- having them actually floated. There's often for those that have lameness or other limiting issues, there's evaluation of those to develop management strategies around whatever their challenges are...” (Interview 1)

Expenses for the initial medical examinations were significant. Four of the organizations reported that just the initial exam which included vaccinations, dental examination, and deworming may cost on average between \$200-\$400. Additional costs including x-rays, ultrasounds, and radiographs would easily add between \$200-600 extra. It was reported that the total bill for a single horse could easily accumulate to \$850-\$1,000 on average. Given that most horses were initially purchased for less than \$1,000 at time of relinquishment (Holcomb et al., 2010), the medical costs for intake of a horse may easily exceed the horse's monetary worth. Though these costs are substantial, quality care could result in increasing the quality of adoptions by promoting healthy horses. Growth in quality horses could grow the credibility of the rescue, producing increased quantity of adoptions.

Each rescue reported utilizing training techniques though those techniques were varied according to their individual programming and the horse's unique needs. One rescue focused primarily on natural horsemanship (Interview 8) while others engaged in traditional or mixed training practices. Most rescues had trainers and volunteers on site to engage with the horses (Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) while others reported utilizing outside training (Interviews 2, 8). Transparency was a key theme when talking about training the horses which could lead to greater long-term success with adoptions.

“we are very transparent and upfront with people when they come to look at horses and ride them. We explain their flaws and we explain their strengths and we want to make sure that that horse has a good, solid foundation so that people can continue working with it.” (Interview 3)

It was a common theme that training was individualized per the horse's needs and abilities. The trainers were commonly tasked with evaluating the horses and training them toward the discipline and level they may be most successful at. This supports the central theme that the interviewee's organizations centered around putting the horse's individual needs first. It

was additionally found that the trainers were transparent with the adopters when explaining skills and future directions for the horse.

Utilizing nontraditional practices

Every rescue reported utilizing non-traditional health practices for rehabilitation and maintenance of the horses. The most common reported practice was chiropractic work (7 of 9) followed by acupuncture (6 of 9), massage therapy (5 of 9), and reiki (3 of 9). Other forms of alternative practices included laser therapy, craniosacral therapy, shockwave treatment, chakra work, herbal remedies, aromatherapy, utilizing CBD products, and other forms of homeopathy. One rescue in particular explained that they try to keep an open mind with medicines and, if the service is free or discounted and it is doing no damage to the horse or anyone working with the horse, there is no reason to deny treatment.

“...it's certainly not primary, but it's also something that we don't totally discount. And if you have more weapons with which you can address the horse's needs, then we're open to using pretty much any of those that don't put ourselves at risk...” (Interview 4)

Rescues often recognized the emotional stress undergone by the horses depending on their background and experiences. Utilizing the non-traditional practices may provide a financially suitable avenue to attempt rehabilitation and continue fostering relationship with those in the community.

“...depending on what they've done to it, you might have a lot of emotional problems with it, a lot of fear issues. Putting weight on a horse is pretty easy. Emotion is pretty tough to fix.” (Interview 8)

Organizational practices and culture

A brief overview of organizational practices was examined including main funding strategies, media and marketing presence, and possible hinderances to organizational or operational growth. It was found that marketing and funding strategies were closely intertwined

together and a foundational part of rescue operation but were a point of improvement as confessed by multiple interviewees.

Funding and marketing

Though funding and marketing questions were inquired separately, results demonstrated that the two aspects were closely linked within the rescues. Often, the marketing strategies were targeted toward reaching new audiences for donations, volunteers, and advertising the horses for adoption. Funding strategies were focused on private and individual donations, attending or hosting events, and grant writing which was described as “not always reliable or helpful” while others implied that larger grants are partially effective. All efforts in marketing supported generating, strengthening, and maintaining relationships within the community which ideally resulted in supporting the rescue through donations of time or resources.

The most prominent funding source reported within the rescues was private or individual donations (7 of 9). Grants from family foundations or other organizations were commonly reported (7 of 9) but were also reported as unpredictable or insufficient to support the rescues in a long-term manner. Rescues additionally reported that having a specific assigned role designed to develop the rescue as an organization outside of daily horse care tasks was critical in advancing their missions and promoting growth.

“When I first got here, we didn't have a director of development. That was a really key position to fill because as the director... (they) couldn't do all of that (training, horse care, management) and grow the organization.” (Interview 3)

Other funding sources included utilizing international programming, contracts with law enforcement and counties, personal endowments, tack and thrift store sales, hosting and participating in events, individual horse sponsorship, and reaching out specifically into equine industry to seek funding. Funding additionally was reported as the biggest challenge to overcome

as stated by (8 of 9) of the rescues. Other challenges endured by the organizations encompassed signs of compassion fatigue (Interview 4, 1) and requiring larger facility size (Interview 9).

Data suggested that the need for funding consequently affected marketing ability and resources. Every participating organization had a functioning website with horses listed for adoption which was a common marketing goal between the interviewees. (8 of 9) organizations reported having an active Facebook presence while (7 of 9) organizations reported active Instagram accounts. However, only (3 of 9) interviewees reported having positions for paid employees who focus strictly on media and marketing. (6 of 9) interviewees reported not having a strictly separate position for media and marketing focuses, though most of them additionally reported wanting to make the position available but finances remained a hinderance.

Those organizations which did hold a paid position for media and marketing reported their marketing goals in terms of “telling the horse’s story”, “catering to new audiences”, and “enhancing the organization’s mission” while those who did not have a position strictly for marketing described their goals in terms of “seeking donations”, “recruiting volunteers”, and “providing for the horses”. Both those who did and did not hold paid positions used their marketing presence to advertise adoptable horses and engage with the community to continuously build relationships. The variation in these goals additionally highlights the difference between how an organization may operate with and without the appropriate funding necessary to function optimally. Those with appropriate funding may be able to invest into high quality media and marketing which could present a return on their investment and allow them greater opportunity for future success. Those who do not possess equal resources may be forced to focus on the more immediate needs of the horses such as food, shelter, or facility maintenance which may hinder future growth.

“We do have (a marketing manager)...it helps consistency so much and consistency in marketing and the use of your logo and the language is such an important part of how you're represented to the community. If you have bad spellers and you put a lot of stuff on Instagram and Facebook, you create a vision of what your organization is like... and so attention to detail is just really important. Sometimes you don't get a chance to rewrite that impression.” (Interview 4)

It was found that marketing for the rescues may be complicated as the organizations need to appeal to audiences of all ages depending on the desired result of the marketing campaign. It was a common theme that donors tend to be older than adopters and adopters averaged older than volunteers at the rescues. The variance in demographic demonstrates a plausible need to tailor marketing strategies toward the different age groups to generate optimal success in marketing efforts.

“...the majority of our adopters are either women or couples and then...we have a smaller percentage of men and children...at the age 35 to 60. That's not necessarily what we want to be our target, but that's what it ends up being. We are trying to reach out more to younger people...like 18 to 30... sometimes those folks are not at a financial level where they can own horses. But those people are eventually going to be in those positions, probably.” (Interview 3)

“So that's really interesting because we know that our donor audience is a mixed demographic...donors and financial support are typically 45-70 and female...volunteers and the people who follow actively on social media are typically younger men and women...it's kind of a dichotomy...if you are like somebody who is statistically looking at the demographics well, we got this group here, we go back there and there's a kind of a gap in the middle, you know.” (Interview 7)

Unique strategies and motivations

Self-reported ‘Unique Strategies’ utilized by the rescues were investigated as areas which could lead to the success of equine rescues with a high industry standard. It was found that the ‘Unique Strategies’ reported from the interviewees aligned with previous themes in earlier portions of the interviews. The most common ‘Unique Strategy’ reported were programs specific to the organization which were rooted in education. (3 of 5) rescues-maintained programs which

catered specifically to youth and (8 of 9) rescues specifically reported programs involving equine education for a targeted audience. These programs included training clinics for proper horsemanship, equine assisted learning programs, beginner and advanced horseman clinics, pre-vet classes, training for international volunteers, corporate engagement classes utilizing the horse, and education for law enforcement. These educational programs were diverse and specifically fostered community engagement. Specifically, education clinics tailored toward beginner horsemen or first time horse owners were the most popular of the reported programs.

“To meet some of those people's needs, this program will hopefully kind of bridge that gap and we don't want to turn those people away because they don't know anything. But...they also need some tools in order to make it a success.” (Interview 3)

Other ‘Unique Strategies’ reported included being openly transparent with finances to foster trust with donors and the community (Interview 5). Other ways to foster trust and transparency included listening intently to the needs of the adopters and horses individually as stated by Interview 1 and 3.

“...we strive to really treat each individual that comes to us, whether it's a person or an animal as an individual, and really try to find their individual skills and abilities and interests... And then we try to do the same thing with people, whether it's adopters or volunteers or donors, so that people can really find what they're looking for...” (Interview 1)

It is known that nonprofit organizations can be demanding in terms of labor and time investments but can be rewarding for those involved. Motivations for the organization representatives interviewed were diverse but deeply emotional and personal for the interviewees. The most reported inspiration for the representative’s job was being a part of the ‘success stories’ for the horses. This included seeing horses recover from their trauma, unite with new owners, and live better lives than when they arrived. These ‘success stories’ often included the

improvement in people's personal lives as working with the horses offered opportunities for self-improvement and personal therapy.

“I started rescuing horses because I just adore animals...And so I figured I could help one here and there... But I didn't realize how many people had a lot of depression and baggage with them and that actually the animals helped them more than them helping here. We've changed lives on quite a few people. It has been really remarkable to see the heart touch in some of these people...” (Interview 8)

Discussion and implications

The aim of this research is to gather a common definition of “successful adoption” while identifying practices in general equine management, adoption procedures, marketing, and finance which may help lead to higher quality or quantity of equine adoptions. The research argues that a successful equine adoption is comprised of three main aspects: (a) The horse has a specific purpose in the adopter's life and the abilities and limitations of the horse and handler are compatible. (b) The adopter puts the needs of the horse first while simultaneously the horse meets the specific needs of the adopter. (c) The outcome of the pairing leads to a life-long home in which the horse is cared for until death.

The purpose of a horse in an adopter's life may be variant per partnership, but this purpose should add value in the eye of the adopter. Holcomb et al., (2012) found the most common purposes for adopted horses to be use in pleasure riding or companionship. This partnership has often been described in terms of “compatibility”, “trust”, “confidence”, and “respect” while equine companionship has been reported to help maintain health, happiness, and a sense of well-being (Lee et al., 2015; Wipper, 2000 p. 67). Compatibility was an important aspect of the horse-adopter pairing as shown through the repeated statements of matching the ‘right horse with the right person’, having the skills and knowledge of the adopter properly align with the horse, and the stories shared by interviewees of adopters being redirected from desired

horses because it was not a right “fit”. With the rescue using their professional experiences to listen to the needs of the adopter, understand the needs and ability of the horse, and match them accordingly, this may facilitate an increase in the quality of adoptions and help decrease the rate of return.

Successful rescues seek adopters who can put the needs of the horse first in their decisions and keep the horse in times of injury, illness, and old age. This theme was saturated through the culture of every participating organization and displayed through their adopter-fit and post-adoption strategies. While the rescues worked to find compatible partnerships, they also act a “safety net” for that horse at any stage of its life if the adopter is no longer capable of providing adequate care. Rescues reported the importance of an adopter to monetarily provide for the horse which allows for financial stability to put the needs of the horse first in case of injury, illness, or age. In return, the horse may meet the emotional or social needs of the adopter even during physical limitations and fulfill a companion-animal role as a “best friend” (Lee et al., 2105; McConnell et al., 2011; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). Beyond mutually meeting needs in the horse-adopter partnership, commitment is needed from the adopter to fulfill the final aspect of a successful adoption. The outcome of a successful adoption is demonstrated through a life-long commitment to care for and provide for the horse. This aspect is unique to equine adoptions as compared to other high-level and competitive equine partnerships where the horse could be easily bought and sold in accordance to athletic capability (Dashper, 2014; Fox 2006). The data collected from this qualitative analysis argues that all three of these aspects must be represented within a horse-adopter partnership to have a long-term successful adoption.

The participating rescues continually demonstrated the importance of building relationships within the community and with their adopters to maintain operational ability

(recruiting volunteers, donations, etc.) and increase the quantity of equine adoptions.

Relationship building was demonstrated through conversation-based adoption strategies in which the adopter was able to convey knowledge, experiences, and expectations of equine adoption. Rescues were highly transparent with potential adopters and the surrounding community about the horses available for adoption along with general operations such as distribution of funds which is critical for building trust (Bothwell, 2001; Maguire 2016). Interviewees illustrated the importance of continuing to be a resource post-adoption through their counseling in training, behavior modification, health management, and making difficult choices such as end-of-life decisions.

Support post-adoption may increase the quality of adoptions as behavioral problems are reported to be the most common reason for return in dogs (Diesel, 2008; Marston & Bennett, 2003; Wells & Hepper, 2000b) and a common reason for initial relinquishment in horses (Holcomb et al., 2010). Continued education post-adoption has also been reported to potentially decrease the rate of return for adopted animals (Diesel, 2008; Mondelli et al., 2004; Patronek et al., 1996; Protopopova et al., 2012) and may lead to greater satisfaction in the relationship with the animal. It has been found that the expectations of companion animal owners are influenced by the adopter's lifestyle and education on animal care (O'Connor et al., 2016). These expectations can influence the overall satisfaction, attachment to their companion animals, and the likelihood of the animal to be kept (O'Connor et al., 2016). Previous research combined with the current findings argue that pre-adoption and post-adoption mentoring for potential and current adopters could drastically increase understanding of the requirements and commitments to horse adoption while addressing specific behavioral or training problems as they arise. These programs could generate higher quality of adoptions and a lower the rate of return.

Providing educational opportunities was not reserved only for adopters. The research shows that eight of the nine participating organizations were actively engaged in educating the community on horse training, behavior, or medicine. Educational programming was aimed at a variety of audiences including those participating in law enforcement, beginning and advanced horsemanship, Equine Assisted Learning, pre-veterinary medicine, international programming, and those within the juvenile system. Engaging the community in education creates a circular system in which providing education leads to building relationships, those relationships return support to the rescue, and the rescue is able to further provide resources into the community.

The most substantial hinderance to growth was rooted in the financial demands of the organizations. Finances were reported as both the most significant barrier to organizational growth and the most difficult aspect of operations by the representatives. These findings are consistent with reports from Holcomb et al. (2010) which found funding to be the greatest challenge for 74.8% of their participating organizations and is a common challenge among many nonprofits (Weerawardena et al., 2010). The lack of financial resources contributed to a marketing deficiency as only three of the nine rescues held a specific position for marketing and development. The organizations which did hold a position described their marketing goals in terms of “telling the horse’s story”, “catering to new audiences”, and “enhancing the organization’s mission” while those who did not have a position strictly for marketing described their goals in terms of “seeking donations”, “recruiting volunteers”, and “providing for the horses”. These findings highlight the way funding and marketing in nonprofit organizations are intimately intertwined which aligns with findings from Pope et al. (2009). This exposes a potential cycle in which a nonprofit may be in need of funds, spend money marketing to receive funds, spend those funds as needed, then again be in need of additional funds. Further research is

required to more accurately understand this cyclical problem which was outside the scope of this study. 8

Future directions

To address the continuous problem of the unwanted horse issue, industry professionals need to continue in collaboration to ‘think outside the box’ and continue to improve the welfare of equines. Research into equine rescue and sanctuary organizations is largely uncharted. The findings from this qualitative analysis have discovered that there is a particular need to increase the effectiveness or modify strategies for marketing equine rescue. Funding remains one of the largest hinderances to organizational growth and strategies to mitigate the issue need to be addressed.

Education for potential and current adopters has been shown to be an effective tool in successful adoptions. Future research into effective programs for equine adopter education is needed to further understand this facet.

Conclusion

The unwanted horse issue is a continually pressing problem within the United States. Industry leaders believe that rescue and sanctuary organizations could play a crucial role in mitigating the problem, but little research has been conducted on equine rescue and rehoming operations. Semi-structured phone interviews with representatives from highly accredited rescues from across the United States were conducted to gather a deeper understanding of equine rescue practices which may aid in these successful adoptions. Through discussion about the participating organization’s general management practices, adopter-fit processes, marketing and finance strategies, and unique strategies, common themes were extracted which may help rescues increase the quality or quantity of equine adoptions.

It was found that the rescues act in more roles than just the initial intake and future adoption of the horse. At the core of the rescues lies a drive to engage within the community, educate the public, and act as a continual resource throughout the horse's life. Fostering community was an integral part of every participating organization as seen through their involvement in local events, opening their doors to volunteerism, and engaging the public in multiple aspects of equine education. Programs continuing education for future and present owners was directly reported from eight of the nine participating organizations. Other education programs included catering to youth, law enforcement, veterinary students, volunteers, and international students. Rescues act as a continual resource by providing decision-making support, training and behavior modification advice, and occasional financial support while remaining a 'safe landing' for the adopted horse to protect it from becoming at-risk in the future.

These services come at a cost for the rescues who reported finances as being the largest hindrance to organizational growth. The most common source for funding came from private or individual donations and grants- though the effectiveness of grants was contradictory as some organizations did utilize them and some were unable to. Marketing and finances were found to be intimately intertwined. Those rescues who held a position solely for marketing or organizational growth described their marketing goals in terms of "telling the horse's story", "catering to new audiences", and "enhancing the organization's mission" while those who did not have a position strictly for marketing described their goals in terms of "seeking donations", "recruiting volunteers", and "providing for the horses".

Previously, there was no industry standard definition for the term 'successful adoption'. Through the interviews, it was found that successful equine adoption is a multidimensional concept comprised of three main aspects: (a) The horse has a specific purpose in the adopter's

life and the abilities and limitations of the horse and handler are compatible. (b) The adopter puts the needs of the horse first while simultaneously the horse meets the specific needs of the adopter. (c) The outcome of the pairing leads to a life-long home in which the horse is cared for until death. It was recognized that not all adoptions may last the entire lifetime of the horse and factors outside the control of the adopter or rescue organization could lead to the cessation of the partnership.

Motivations for participation in equine rescue from the Interviewees centered around the emotional rewards of improving the lives of people and equines together. The ideas and beliefs gathered is novel information which may have been widely intrinsically known or believed within equine rescue but has not been officially reported upon. Equine rescue and sanctuary organizations may play a significant role in mitigating the unwanted horse issue in the United States. Recognizing the qualities surrounding successful adoption will give guidance to rescues and will decrease the rate of return. Understanding the best practices utilized by outstanding rescue organizations in their equine management, financial strategy, marketing, and adopter-fit processes may strengthen other organization's operations leading to faster adoptions and a higher number of adoptions per year.

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APPENDIX A



Knowledge to Go Places

eProtocol
Office of the Vice President for Research
321 General Services Building - Campus Delivery 2011 eprotocol
TEL: (970) 491-1553

DATE: November 16, 2020
TO: Enns, Kellie, 1172 Agric & Resource Econ
Belk, Keith, 1171 Animal Sciences, McGarity, Kylie, 1171 Animal Sciences
FROM: Chromiak, Angie, Compliance Review Assistant Administrator, CSU IRB Exempt
PROTOCOL TITLE: Key Practices for Success: A Qualitative Study on Equine Rescue Practices
FUNDING SOURCE: None
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 20-10233H
APPROVAL or DETERMINATION PERIOD: October 19, 2020

NOTICE OF IRB REVIEW FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Colorado State University IRB (CSU) (FWA0000647). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above-entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects, specifically .

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the OHRP Website www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Exempt determinations are active for five (5) years. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may change this determination for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and may require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, we wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

IRB Office - (970) 491-1553; RICRO_IRB@mail.Colostate.edu
Claire Chance, Senior IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1381; Claire.Chance@Colostate.edu
Tammy Felton-Noyle, Senior IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1655; Tammy.Felton-Noyle@Colostate.edu

Chromiak, Angie

Initial exempt determination has been granted October 19, 2020 to recruit with the approved recruitment and consent procedures. The above-referenced research activity has been reviewed and determined to meet exempt review by the Institutional Review Board under exempt category 2(ii) of the 2018 Requirements. This study has no funding. Approved documents include: Purpose, Topics, and Interview Questions (1), Verbal Consent before study, Initial Recruitment Email, 20-10233H Enns INTAKE.

APPENDIX B

Topics, and Interview Questions:

Through phone or web-audio based interviews with a representative from the organization, the researcher will gather information about their definition of a successful adoption, their equine management practices, marketing and media, and adoption strategies.

Questions and Interview Flow:

| |
|--|
| <p>Introduction: Opening Remarks and Verbal Consent to Audiotape</p> <p>How many years have you been in operation? How many horses does your facility typically serve? What is your maximum capacity? How many horses do you typically adopt out per year? How many employees do you have? How many volunteers do you have?</p> |
| <p>Introductory Question: How would your organization define a 'successful adoption'?</p> |
| <p>General Management Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How does the organization develop horses to progress through their programs?2. On average, how much veterinary work goes into each horse (both monetary and time)? (i.e. treating injury or disease, gathering health history, and preventative care) (Typically, pending no other extenuating circumstances)3. Does the organization utilize non-traditional health practices? (i.e. acupuncture, body work, spine manipulation, etc.) (why or why not)4. How does the organization manage equine overflow or excess?5. If applicable, how many trainers are hired by the organization and how many hours do they contribute to provide training and handling services to horses? Do you utilize any volunteer trainers? If yes, how many hours? |
| <p>Adopter Fit Process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Is there a specific population of adopters the organization targets?2. What is the adoption screening process like?3. What are some critical stages during the adopter-fit process?4. Do you have a protocol for follow-up after adoption and/or provide any medical support post-adoption?5. How does the organization address behavioral or medical problems post-adoption? |

Media and Marketing Presence:

1. What is your primary mode for marketing your organization?
2. Does the organization hold a volunteer or paid position for strictly media and marketing? Describe the position.
3. What are the main marketing goals and target audience?
4. What platforms are used as resources for marketing? (social media or business advertisement)
5. Without being too intrusive, how is your organization funded? What are your main strategies?

Closing Question:

Do you have any practices which make you unique and enhance the mission of your organization? (i.e. What sets you apart from other rescues? What do you do differently?)

What is the best thing about your organization? What is the most challenging thing?

Conclusion:

Closing remarks and thanking the organization. Let them know you may reach out to them for clarifying questions.

Do you have any closing remarks or electronic documents you could send me if I were a potential adopter interested in your horses?

APPENDIX C

Available Upon Request