

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF VOLUNTEER
EXPERIENCES AT A MIDWESTERN EQUESTRIAN
FACILITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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Research Context → *Helping Hooves*

- situated on 120 acres
- rural Midwestern locale
- therapeutic equestrian center
- Non-Profit Organization
- approx. 40 horses
- heated indoor arena-mounting platform is wheelchair accessible with hydraulic lift
- 2 outdoor arenas
- 20 acres for trail riding
- client conditions include but not limited to: spina bifida, Down Syndrome, mental limitations, autism, cerebral palsy & severe behavioral disabilities



Accredited by *NARHA*

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association

HH averages 18,000 volunteer hours a year

Riding Instructors certified by *NARHA* & *CHA*

Certified Horsemanship Association



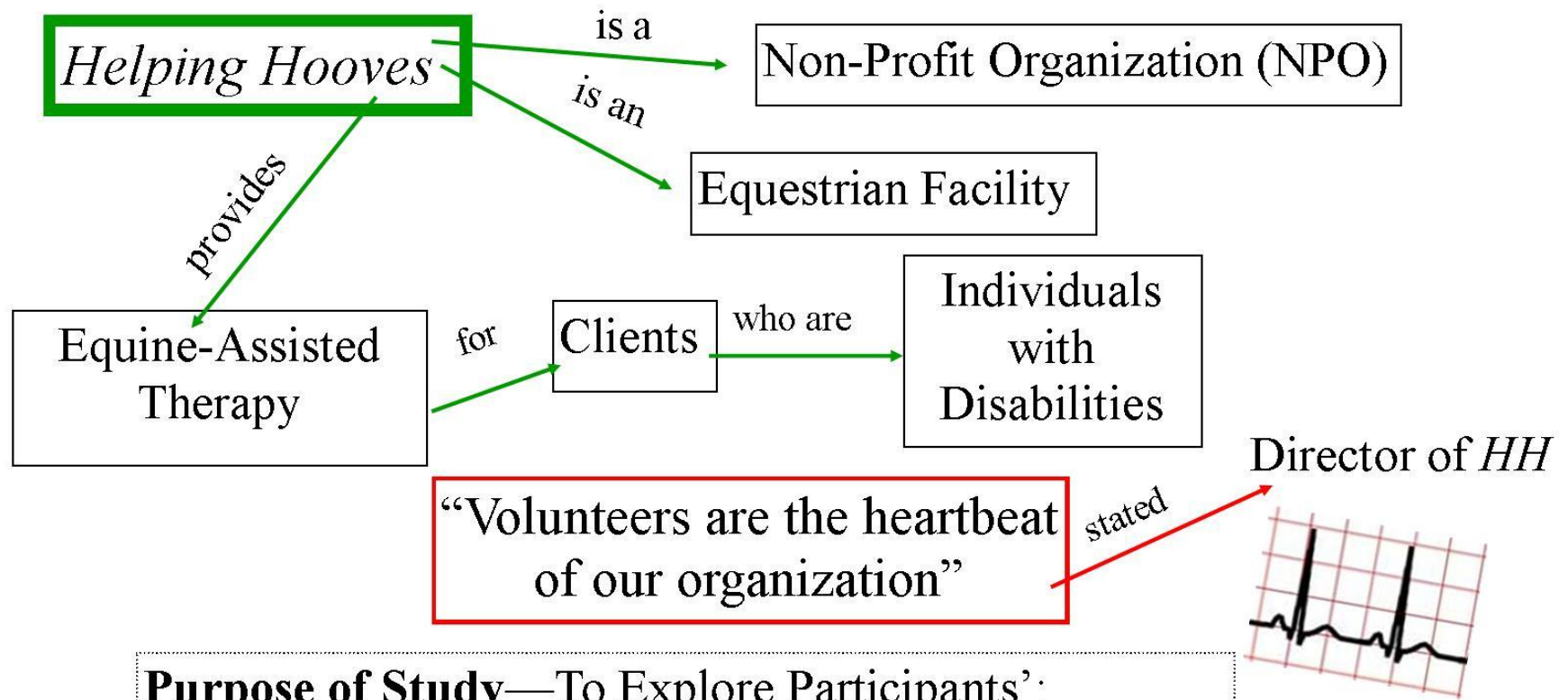
***HH* mission**—to maximize the potential of persons with disabilities to become independent, well-rounded, self-confident individuals by providing;

Horseback riding along with recreational and social support.



Characteristics of Naturalistic Inquiry

- * Holistic approach
 - * Multiple realities exist
 - * Time & contextually bound
 - * Research is value bound
 - * Data Interpretation influenced by researcher
 - * Extended time in the 'field'
 - * Thick description
 - * Going back and forth from data to analysis (Reflexivity)
 - * Gaining access (entre) and acceptance
 - * Participant observation
- *** Telling of & listening to **stories*****

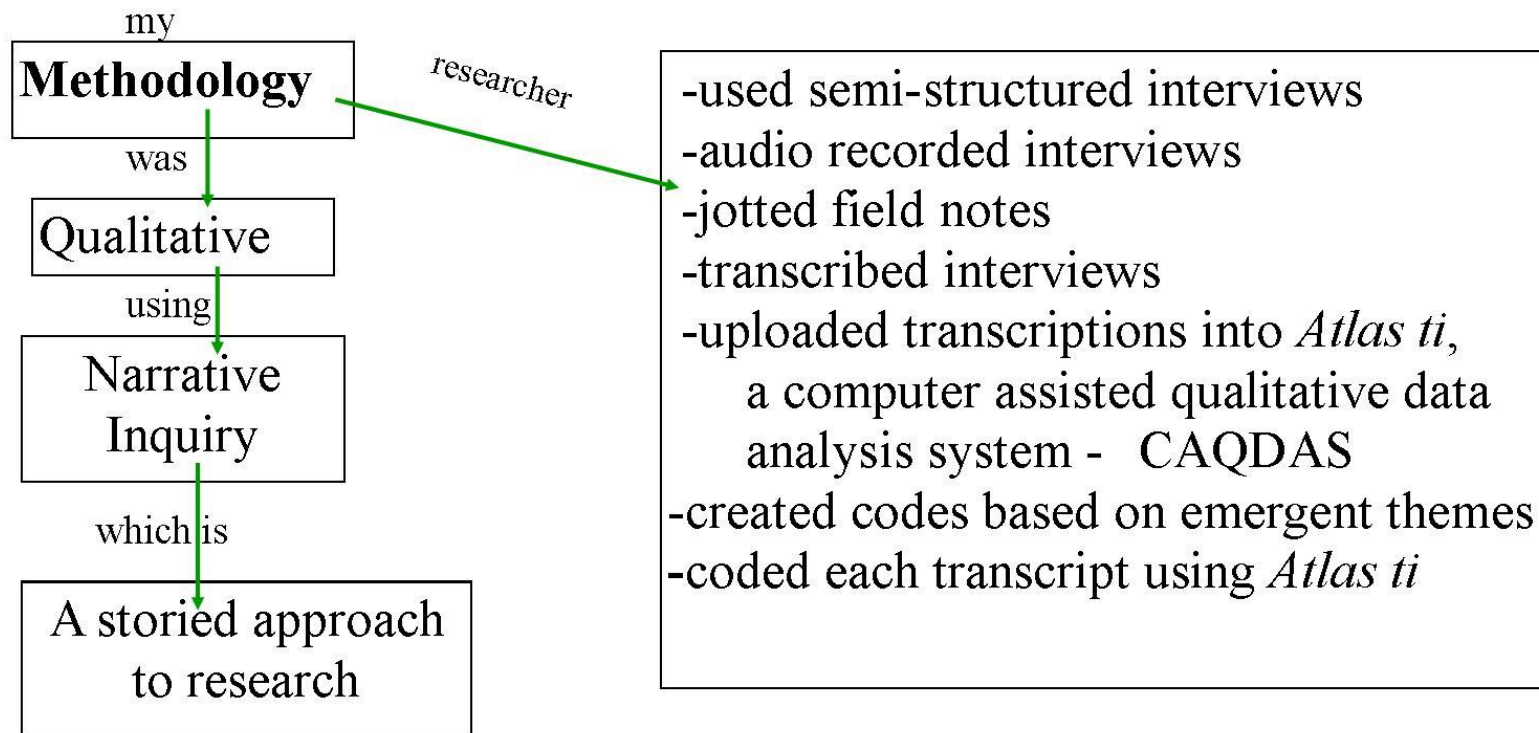


Purpose of Study—To Explore Participants’:

- Perceptions of benefits derived from volunteering
- Personal characteristics
- Motivations to volunteer
- Pathways to *Helping Hooves*
- Impact & Interactions within client/volunteer/staff community

Research Questions

1. What paths did individuals take to arrive at *HH*?
2. What are the personal histories of individuals who volunteer at *HH*?
3. What are the perceived personal benefits of volunteering at *HH*?
4. What interactions exist between volunteers and the *HH* community?
5. What are the contributing factors for sustained volunteering at *HH*?



Helping Hooves Research Participants

Adults			Youth		
Pseudonym	Approx. Age	Role	Pseudonym	Actual Age	Role
Dotty	82	Master Gardener	Anna	17	Rider/Volunteer
Colleen	50's	Facility Director	Billy	17	Rider/Volunteer
Gabby	60's	Volunteer	Cal	19	Volunteer
Gayle	40's	Volunteer	Carmella	17	Volunteer
Janelle	40's	Volunteer	Emmy	16	Volunteer
Joyce	40's	Barn Manager	Kelly	14	Rider/Volunteer
Kate	50's	Volunteer	Lenore	18	Volunteer
Kevin	27	Rider/Volunteer Equine Facility	Monica	16	Rider/Volunteer
Pamela	40's	Director Volunteer	Robin	15	Volunteer
Patrice	30's	Coordinator	Sandra	15	Volunteer
Perry	50's	Volunteer			
Tessa	60's	Riding Instructor			

<i>Length of Participant Interview & Date</i>					
Adults	Interview Length in min	Date	Youth	Interview Length in min	Date
Dotty	24	10/20/2004	Anna	32	4/5/2005
Colleen	8	10/15/2004	Billy	11	4/1/2005
Gabby	12	10/29/2004	Cal	9	10/20/2004
Gayle	17	4/1/2005	Carmella	41	8/31/2009
Janelle	11	10/29/2004	Emmy	35	8/2/2009
Joyce	27	4/2/2005	Kelly	19	4/2/2005
Kate	17	4/23/2005	Lenore	40	8/31/2009
Kevin	19	10/15/2004	Monica	29	8/19/2009
Pamela	31	4/5/2005	Robin	33	7/27/2009
Patrice	29	4/25/2005	Sandra	17	4/5/2005
Perry	31	4/16/2005			
Tessa	17	10/15/2004			

Interview Codes

Used within Atlas Ti—CAQDAS

Affect on Pegasus (of volunteering)

Affect on Riders (personal)

Best experience

Career (support for)

Characteristics (of a volunteer)

Disability (personal description)

Duties

Feeling Appreciated

Feelings (emotional responses)

Horses (comments about)

Interaction/Rider

Interaction/Volunteers

Parental support (for youth)

Personal Gain

Personal History

Previous Volunteering

Qualities (of a volunteer)

Reason (for volunteering is) horses

Reason (for volunteering is) kids

Reason (for volunteering is) others

Recognize need (for volunteering)

Staying

Time Spent (volunteering)

Type (of volunteer, long term or short)

Typical day

Sharing Stories

Youth Image

Paths taken to *HH* by:

Adults

- retirement
- the need to interact with their child as they ride for therapy
- a move to a new location
- death of a spouse
- an empty nest
- the smile of a child on the back of a horse

How Joyce & Kelly came to *HH*

Searching for equine-assisted therapy was a critical event in the lives of mother and daughter, Joyce and Kelly. Joyce revealed, “I can’t talk about my volunteering without talking about hers [Kelly], because we’re a package.” Joyce told of her daughter Kelly’s learning disabilities and low self-esteem that “could not have been lower.” While Kelly was riding, Pamela began working in the barn or leading her daughter around in the arena during lessons for support.

Youth

- through the girl scouts
- because their friends volunteered
- by way of a family member (legacy volunteering)
- because of the need for the services provided by *HH*
- They were bored and too young to get a job

Anna’s story

Anna began riding when she was four as a result of being born with hydrocephaly. “That’s why I started here [*HH*] in the first place. I still have a balance problem,” she said. Sandra, her younger sister was roughly three years old, when her mother began bringing her to *HH*. “I was practically born in the barn,” said Sandra, and told me that she was eight years old when she actually began to volunteer 12 years previous. Sandra came to *HH* by default; for Anna it was her disability that brought her to *HH*.

Perceived Benefits:

Adults

- respite
- relaxed after a day of work
- enjoyment of interaction with other volunteers, riders, and horses

Youth

- gained self-confidence
- increased self-esteem
- feeling of accomplishment
- opportunity to be around horses
- became less judgmental
- learned to appreciate hard work
- valued service to clients

A story of two mothers

Pamela and Joyce, both mothers, spoke from the point of view of the effect *HH* had on their daughters and their family life. “I feel good about what my girls [Anna and Sandra] are doing,” said Pamela. “We have a family interaction. We have a family bond, we can always talk about this.” Pamela made a hand motion that encompassed the *HH* arena. “I think the most important thing to me is to be able to have that connection with my girls.” Pamela views *HH* a safe place for her daughters; she does not always have to stay with them. Regarding this safety aspect of *HH*, Pamela commented, “It’s really important for Sandra, my daughter with disabilities; because she feels that she can be capable and competent and doesn’t need her mom with her all the time.” Pamela’s eyes mist over and she looks downward as she explains the effects of *HH* on her family; “The more time we spend out here, the more proud I am of my girls. I could just get tears in my eyes driving home some nights.”

Narrative Inquiry as
research incorporates
vignettes



Sidewalker

Leader

Janelle's story

“Tell me a good story, a story that tells me what really affected you as a volunteer, I ask Janelle. “Probably the first child I worked with was a 3-year old Down’s [syndrome] girl.” Janelle begins to paint a portrait of the first rider she worked with at *Helping Hooves*. “I watched her grow and change, and become more focused on what was being done, to the point that it was only her and I.” Janelle reports that the little girl is riding independently now with a bridle and does not need her horse led around the arena by a volunteer. “She’s seven or eight [now], she’s a tiny, beautiful little girl, and that transformation . . . you see this transformation.” Janelle looks upward and her eyes water ever so slightly as she remembers and tells her story of a child’s physical and mental change that occurred as a result of equine assisted therapy.

Volunteers stay at Helping Hooves because they:

experience a sense of

community

helping others less fortunate than themselves

satisfaction of a job well done in regard to barn chores—a clean stall or a horse well groomed.



a Friday
afternoon
autumn
ride

Note: the riders are wearing “Scream” masks as their ride was taken shortly before Halloween

I believe that volunteers come to *HH* for reasons other than adding to their resumes. During my time at *HH*, I observed volunteers to be engaged, cheerful, and committed.

I discovered a great deal of laughter alongside hustle and bustle.

