

When I made my recent visit, I never heard an argument. Not one child was rude. No one said, "This is MINE!"

There are six pairs of boots, shared with the girls in the morning and the boys in the afternoon. There are four horses, and so everyone shares in grooming and riding. None of that seems to matter. All they want is to be there ... to be with the horses. This program also feeds the children who, without school lunches, may otherwise go without eating.

Shonga Ska isn't an after school horseback riding lesson. It's not a summer camp. It is a life-saving strategy taken on by three men and one woman who are trying to change a generation, the face of Omaha tribal youth. To create laughter by wiping away tears is impossible, but to create laughter by forgetting the tears, is possible. To have the knowledge that whatever happens right now doesn't matter because in a few hours I will be with my horse and everything will be all right, matters.

Most therapeutic riding programs and students have insurance policies, grants and other means of finance to keep programs alive. Shonga Ska has yet to see much of that.

The Omaha Nation Community Response Team (ONCRT) was established in May of 2000 in order to promote better utilization of community resources, create a unified approach to resolving community issues, and to improve communication and working relationships between tribal and state agencies, schools, and community members. The ONCRT has since grown in overall membership of representatives, each committing to the development and implementation of prevention services and activities for Omaha children and youth.

"Supporting our youth through traditional teachings and models"

We need other horsemen with ideas, time, or donations. Others that have worked with grant programs that may also benefit the Shonga Ska program? This article is also a cry for help. A request in brainstorming to keep this program not only alive but help it grow and serve more children who need the love of a horse, kind human contact, and a

hot meal. If two horses can keep 12 kids off drugs, and build life strategies, just think about what a well-rounded, well-funded program could do!

For more information, or to make a donation (which you can specify—campouts, horse care, etc.), please visit this website: www.oneskyranch.com/Shonga.Ska.htm Or call Arnie Harlan 402-837-4191, at the ONCRT building.

These kids also need cards and letters of support. Any love and support that they can feel is most likely more than they will get at home. Their names are Hope (10yrs), Britney (10), Tory (10), Danika (13), Rainelle (11), and Brianna (10). The boys are Dillon (10) who has been making remarkable progress with human relations due to his bond with a special horse. He is autistic. Brian (13), Simon (12), Adrian (10), Jase (9), and Joseph (12). None of these kids had ever been around horses before.

The instructors are Eagala certified. (Using horses in mental health)

Staff is Arnie Harlan, Cal Harlan, Scott Harlan, Mike Wolf (Advisory board), and Cora Freeman.

Winds Reach Mini-Event - Iowa City, Iowa

July, 2006

photos by Michele Kalsem, Don Flatt, and Deb Ockenfels

