

# It's all about communicating

## *Hinchinbrook Farm leads the way in Horse Boy program*

By ROBERT HIRTLE  
rhirtle@southshorenw.ca

**BLOCKHOUSE** — Hinchinbrook Farm has continued to grow by leaps and bounds since its founding seven years ago.

Now, the Blockhouse facility, operated by a non-profit society to offer therapeutic services to special needs children, has earned another laurel.

"We are now the prima donna Horse Boy centre for Canada," says the farm's founder and driving force, Patricia McGill. "We're the only one with [this] amount of people trained and certified in the various areas of Horse Boy."

Horse Boy is the brainchild of Rupert Isaacson, who developed the six-stage process after seeing how his autistic son Rowan responded positively after working with a Texas Quarter Horse named Betsy.

He also wrote a book and produced a documentary, both entitled "Horse Boy," that chronicled that experience.

The six stages of the program include areas of environment, sensory work, backriding, perspective, academics and self-advocacy, all of which are integral parts of the Hinchinbrook story.

The idea is not to teach the children to ride but to get them to communicate, and the horse is a colleague in the process.

"In the area of environment, according to Rupert Isaacson, he goes around the world telling everybody that if you want to see the best environment for autistic kids go to Hinchinbrook Farm," Ms McGill says. "The thing that got me with him so quickly is I was trained in the invitational approach by the founder of the Hippotherapy Association of America, Barbara Glasow, back in the early 1990s, and ever since then, I guess my reception to kids is to try and see what interests them and then go with the flow, rather than, 'We're going to do this today.'"

Ms McGill says that the key to Horse Boy is not to try teaching the kids, but rather to just communicate with them.

"More and more and more we're finding out that the common consensus that these kids are locked into their own world and are therefore not reachable is turning out not to be true as more and more autistic kids start to write through computers or iPads or whatever what's exactly going on," she explains. "What we're finding out now too is that all these kids have an incredible gift that they can offer, but how do you discover the gift. If you let the child lead you to what interests them, then you start discovering the gifts."

Currently there are 41 individuals volunteering at the farm who range from 14 to 20 years of age and are trained to shadow and communicate with participants in the program.

"We create an environment that the children absolutely are well in. It's a yes environment, it's a safe environment, it's autistic friendly. There's nothing that's going to upset them," she explains. "It's a physical kinetic learning environment."

Ms McGill believes that if people knew exactly what children on the autism spectrum are living inside their bodies, they would be far more allowing when dealing with them or merely being in their presence.

"If the general public just understood that when a kid on the spectrum is having a meltdown, it's just the same as the judge letting somebody off for temporary insanity," she says. "It's exactly the same thing but people don't see it."

Recently, President's Choice Children's Charity made a donation of \$6,500 to help fund programs at Hinchinbrook Farm.

Helping attain that target were the staff at Mahone Bay Save Easy, who raised money by selling paper icons in the store, direct employee donations and other store fundraisers.

"It's wonderful to be able to help organizations that work with children to get the best they can and change their life for the better," said franchisee owner Terry DeBaie. "The team have done a fabulous job raising and donating money so we can help children in our community, but there is so much more we need to do and so many more children we can help."

Lunenburg County Progress Bulletin, Wednesday, August 7, 2013 **B15**



At Hinchinbrook Farm with horse Dandy are, from left, Terry DeBaie, franchisee owner of Mahone Bay Save Easy; Hinchinbrook founder Patricia McGill; and volunteers Ema-lea MacInnes, Kirk Demond, Chelsea Crawford and Sarah Myers.

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