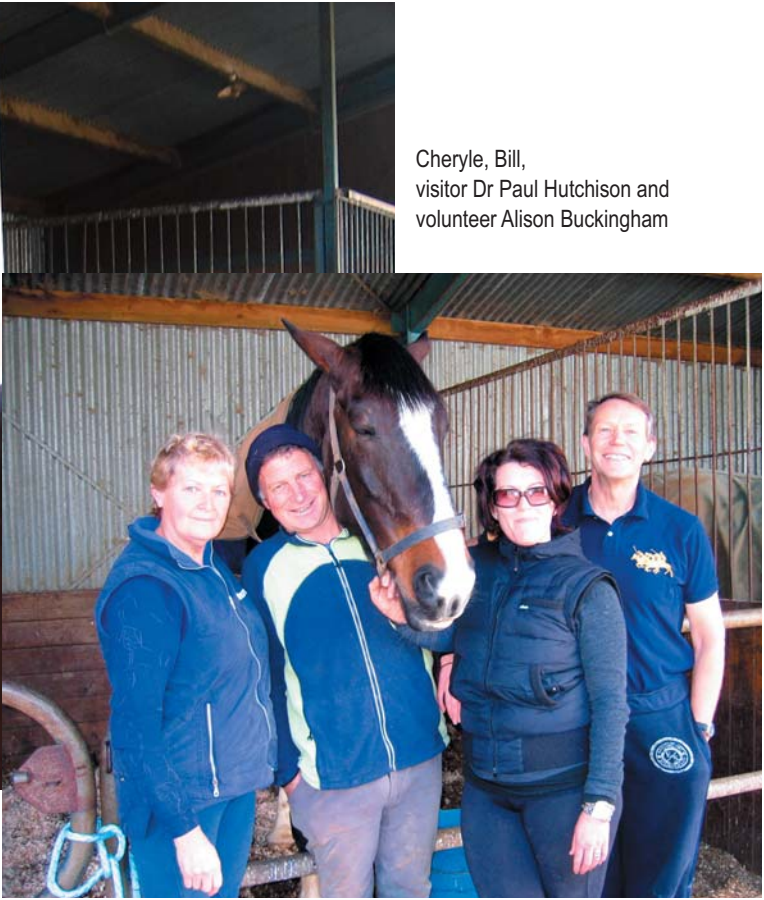




Bill, David and Kahu – lost in a world of their own



Cheryle, Bill, visitor Dr Paul Hutchison and volunteer Alison Buckingham

‘Damaged’ horses make a HEART connection for troubled children

Changing young lives at Kahurangi Farm

David carefully lifts the right front hoof of the dapple grey pony, gently and confidently cleaning under its hoof. “Coming under Kahu” he tells the pony as he moves under its head to attend to the hooves on the other side. David oils Kahu’s hooves and combs his long blond tail. His concentration is a thing of beauty as boy and pony stand in a special world of their own.

Beside them, a taller horse is tethered and another 10 year old works with Cheryle Randall to check a minor scrape on the horse’s leg. Brendon applies the gentian violet while Cheryle explains it will stop infection and help him heal. Bill Millar watches while Nicholas puts a bridle on his horse, knowing when to help and when to let the boy do it by himself. Always, there are words of encouragement and praise – and lots of jokes.

These boys are a credit to their families and their schools, shaking hands when greeting strangers, looking people in the eye and answering questions clearly and confidently. Hold on.... let’s wind that back. All three came here with something in common and it wasn’t good manners – they are ‘at risk’ children, stood down from school where they disrupted classes, bullied and played truant. They are at Kahurangi Farm to receive the type of experiences that can prevent them ending up as crime statistics when they are older.

David’s parents are both drug addicts. When he arrived at Bill Millar’s farm at Puni to take part in the HEART (Human Equine Assisted Reality Therapy) Programme, he wouldn’t speak. Many of the children who come here arrive hungry. All of them

are distrustful. The children are referred by resource teachers in learning and behaviour, counsellors and psychologists at schools all over Franklin and South Auckland. As Bill gently puts it, “they all have indiscretions.”

HEART is a work of harmony and a labour of love for Bill and Cheryle. Bill was a dairy farmer until he was left a solo dad 15 years ago and looked for a way to work at home to be with his children. He took in “damaged” horses, taking time and patience, working with them to build their trust. Most of the horses the children now tend were themselves ‘troubled’ and carry a sense of wisdom about them as they patiently respond to their young charges. Cheryle, a human behaviour practitioner, saw the potential of the farm when she came to learn to ride two years ago. She knows what it’s like to be a kid who drew the short straw and she knew that the magic Bill worked with horses could work for children too.

“Some of the older boys are thugs. They lounge back and think it’s all a laugh. I talk tough to them in their own language, but without anger – just lay it on the line. When I have their attention and respect, then we can start.” Key values at Kahurangi Farm are based on the word HORSE – Honesty, Ownership, Respect others, Self respect, Enjoyment.

Cheryle: “There are seven key abilities human beings need to effectively manage life – to control impulse, to empathize, to hope, to regulate moods, to persist against frustration, the