Catching dreams out at the ranch

by Kevin Crush

All Melany Wurm ever wanted to do was to pet the horses and comb their hair.

But as a paranoid schizophrenic and prone to seizures, people were afraid of her and horse owners would make up excuses to keep her away.

She wanted to buy a horse of her own, but didn’t know how to do things like put a halter on a horse. Living with a stigmatized illness had literally drained all her self-confidence away and kept her from horses.

“I just love them,” said the 22-year-old.

“They’re not like any other animal. They’re like people.”

Her mother, Janice, had taken her to all the programs she could find, but nothing suited Melany until they came to the Dreamcatcher ranch, a nature-assisted therapy ranch just opened east of Ardrossan.

Noticeable change

Owner Eileen Bona introduced Melany to the ranch’s signature horse Whispering Rain and it didn’t take long for a change to come over Melany. She had an instant rapport with Rain and soon a new esteem began to grow.

“The difference is at home. She’s a person now with self-confidence,” said Janice.

“You can just see this strength growing in her that wasn’t there before.”

Melany is just one of the success stories already coming out of the Dreamcatcher ranch. Opened in June, Bona uses the animals and location to develop therapeutic programs that are

unique to the needs of each client. With a modest start of seven clients, the ranch has been increasingly becoming more popular.

“Ever since the opening we’ve had people calling at least once a day, sometimes 10 or 15 times a day, about what we’re doing here,” said Bona, a therapist. “Some people are just calling because they like the idea and they’re giving us encouragement to keep going. Some people want to be clients here.”

Those who are already clients are raving about Dreamcatchers.

Angela Wilm brought her 13-year-old son, Zach, to the ranch. An epileptic with developmental disabilities and depression problems, he was acting out at home and Angela couldn’t get him to cooperate.

Bona just has a way with Zach, says Wilm. She manages to get him to do chores like collecting wood or looking after the bunnies.

“She (Eileen) just seems to be able to know what to say and what to do at the right moment,” said Wilm.

The idea now is to transfer Zach’s willingness to cooperate at the ranch back to home.

“It’s going to take a little bit of work but I feel good about it and I feel comfortable with Eileen.”

Rural lifestyle

Or there are stories like Nathan Graham, who came to live at the ranch after the city proved too much for him. Constant distractions kept him from his homework, he got kicked out of school, and he ended up in trouble with the law after stealing a water barrel.

Working at odd jobs around the ranch and dedicating himself to homework to get back into school, the ranch has changed his ways.

“I’ve developed a different kind of focus now. I’m more prepared now, I’ve set myself a routine. I wake up earlier; I sleep right; I eat right. I’m not just going out whenever I want to here,” said Graham, who is now planning on finishing Grades 11 and 12 in the next year.

Unique for all

It’s stories like these that has therapists, clinical psychologists, and social workers calling Bona wanting to send clients her way or to see what she’s offering.

Dreamcatchers is a multi-faceted program — it has to be.

Each of the stories here is different from the others, just as all the people are different.

Each person needs a program tailored just to themselves.

“For more information on Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy Association, call 922-1047 or ebona@telusplanet.net.