

- ▶ This informal bereavement group work is well attended with positive oral feedback. Formal evaluation underway—results pending.

#### Discussion

**Benefits** Children feel more at ease when handling a pet or when being “carried” by a pony. They can use the animal as distraction from uncomfortable conversations to disclose intimacies/memories that may otherwise be difficult.

**Challenges** Gaining insurance for the pony component proved challenging but possible. Health and safety issues require stringency.

**Conclusion** Intrinsic to palliative care and bereavement support is focusing upon the little things that make a person feel respected and loved. We have launched a project that is simple in its theory, but complex and diverse in its positive outcomes.

**Recommendations** We appeal to all Hospices to explore whether they could use pets in similar ways to support children requiring essential but difficult pre and post bereavement care. Oral presentation will include photos (consented) and interviews from users.

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### INNOVATIVE PRE AND POST BEREAVEMENT WORK WITH CHILDREN: UNIQUE WAYS WITH ANIMALS

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**Aims** Through the catalyst of ‘pony experience’ bereaved children and parents are facilitated into meaningful conversations with each other and supportive relationships with other families.

**Method** Once a month bereaved children and families are invited to meet in the Hospice Woodland Walk for Pony Experience, including grooming and riding.

#### Results

- ▶ Commonality of experience: participants meet other bereaved families, enabling them to share “their stories” should they wish and develop co-supportive relationships.
- ▶ Children gain confidence – “Life will go on even without their loved one”
- ▶ Observing other children confirms they are not alone, seeing others having fun gives permission for them to do likewise.
- ▶ Walking side by side feels less intense, enabling easy conversation and ability to explore and chat at differing levels.