



June Hero Profile 2018

Children's Bill of Rights #6: As the children and youth of San Luis Obispo County, may we each visit a doctor, dentist or counselor when needed to help us stay physically and mentally healthy.

JUNE'S HERO
Gina Sears, LMFT

PASSION
Helping kids overcome challenges through Equine Therapy

ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE GINA
Hope

NOMINATED BY
Transitions Mental Health Association



Gina Sears is a champion for children, providing our community with a program as unique as it is impactful on young people trying to grow through personal difficulties.

For nearly 15 years, Gina has been involved with Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP), by way of her own private practice and with Transitions Mental Health Association's Youth Treatment Program (YTP). This experiential treatment includes both groundwork and riding, where the horse acts as a biofeedback messenger, giving valuable information on the nature and fluctuation of the client's moods. Gina uses EFP as a therapeutic tool with about 35 youth each month, ages 5 and up. EFP helps children understand how their non-verbal communication might be impacting or influencing others in their lives. The experience with the horse helps the children to be observant and present in their bodies—to stay focused and attentive. Caring for horses takes dedication, time and effort—which can foster ownership, accountability and a strong work ethic.

Colleagues say Gina's equine program is highly effective in improving each child's personal power, self-esteem and sense of purpose. This is particularly important as many of Gina's

clients have a wide variety of emotional challenges, learning disabilities, and social adjustment issues. Approximately 80% of young clients in YTP have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and more than 60% are from low-income families. YTP receives funding from the State Department of Social Services and the County of San Luis Obispo Behavioral Health Department, but its budget is still limited. Recognizing the benefits of equine therapy for the young people in the program, Gina has significantly reduced her fees so that additional youth can participate. Because of Gina, more children and teens facing challenges in our community-- are growing in profound ways while getting active and assuming unique responsibilities.

**Thank you, Gina.
You are a true Hands-On Hero.**

Look for more on all of our Hands-On Heroes on COE-TV channel 19!



Hands-On Heroes is a special recognition of dedicated individuals who believe in and support the Children's Bill of Rights, an achievable vision that our children grow up with healthy minds, bodies and spirits that enable them to maximize their potential. This program is coordinated by First 5 San Luis Obispo County in collaboration with local organizations that make a difference in the lives of children in our community. To find out more about First 5 and the Children's Bill of Rights, please visit first5slo.org.



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