Communitas and *Friluftsliv*: Equine-facilitated activities for drug users

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Abstract

A green care farm creates a temporal “thrown-togetherness”. Farm-based welfare services provide contact with animals and nature, supportive environments, social acceptance, fellowship with other participants, and meaningful activities. Most green care farms in Norway have horses, and equine-assisted activities are known to add value to green care for people with addiction and/or mental health problems. Farms facilitate connectedness between place and people, create “place-events”, and resemble *friluftsliv* activities. *Friluftsliv* creates a different temporality and rhythm, where nature is cared for and befriended. This article presents and discusses two different approaches to equine-assisted activity for drug-users from an inpatient treatment programme, and for guests from a drop-in centre, respectively. Participation was non-conditional, and following the world view underpinning community work, the participants’ evaluations of benefits are the most significant outcome measure. The equine-assisted communities are both ephemeral and long-lasting, and have given many participants the motivation to stay in therapy and reduce their drug use, or they have gained access to new social arenas, volunteering, or to sheltered employment. Community work at farms offers possibility for *communitas*, i.e. a groups pleasure in sharing common experiences with one’s fellows, learning-in-context, *friluftsliv* and serendipitous benefits – the last adding an important contribution to participants’ health and well-being.

Keywords: friluftsliv, horses, drug users, communitas, low threshold activities

Introduction: "I'd be dead by now, if I didn't have the horses"

The cases presented in this article are based on the author's experience of assisting guests from a low threshold activity centre, and inpatients from an addiction treatment facility, in equine-facilitated activities at green care farms. The author's position is a composite of roles: an organiser of farm visits alongside the farmers, a riding physiotherapist, a researcher, and a witness of both positive life changes and death by overdose. We have reason to believe that a number lives have been transformed during these five years, and several persons have been supported to qualify for a craft certificate, some have successfully combined sheltered employment and disability pension, others have been supported in applying for disability pension or housing, and some work as volunteers at the farms. These people have, on their own initiative, related these critical life changes to the horses, the farmers and the farms, and the sense of community with people, places and animals, as illustrated by the quote in the heading above. Horses become friends, confidants, spiritual advisers, teachers, therapists and coaches. Horses communicate and interact in a non-judgmental way, they receive and give compassion, excitement and joy. As one man said: "I can tell the horse everything, and it stays in the stall". Using farms as an arena for outreach work is uncommon in Norway, even though there used to be several farm-based long-term drug treatment facilities a few decades ago.

Research has shown that participation in equine-assisted activities can contribute to incremental life changes for people with addiction and/or mental health problems (Kendall, Maujean, Pepping, Downes, Lakhani, Byrne and Macfarlane, 2015, Maujean, Pepping and Kendall, 2015, Kern-Godal, Arnevik, Walderhaug and Ravndal, 2015). Within a biomedical paradigm, individualisation of problems and therapy are predominant, and it has been difficult to isolate elements of "what works" when horses are used in therapy. The key message from research on equine assisted therapies and interventions, is that horses and stables represent a non-medicalised arena which increases retention in treatment programmes, and increases motivation to take part in other treatment activities (Carlsson, 2017, Kern-Godal, Brenna, Kogstad, Arnevik and Ravndal, 2016). The human-horse relationship is also believed to add value to the human's life (Davis and Maurstad, 2016). However, the collective and creative dimensions of farm life and contact with nature, and the joy, excitement and risk involved in grooming, riding or being around horses, are less explored. As a riding physiotherapist, my experience is that the therapeutic benefit emerges from this combination of activities, which allows for devised encounters with compassion and daring (Sudmann, 2018). Horse farms offer an arena where people can connect to themselves, to animals and nature, and to other people, which may empower them to make incremental changes in their lives.

Below, two cases of equine-facilitated activities for drug-users on green care farms will be presented against a short backdrop on Norwegian green care farming and drug policies. The cases build on experiences gained at three different green care farms in the outskirts of a Norwegian city, offering equine-facilitated activities or sheltered employment to people with drug-related problems. During the last five years, the author of this article has participated in equine-facilitated activities with participants from drop-in centres from2013 onwards and continuing, and inpatient drug treatment facilities (2014-2016). The research and development projects were funded by Regional Research Fund Western Norway and Innovation Norway (2014-2016), and Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (2013,

continuing). The farms represent rich and complicated environments (Chemero, 2003), and offer a particular healing contact with nature (Ottosson, 2007). The concept 'place-event' (Fors, Bäckström and Pink, 2013, Pink, 2015) will be used to discuss how the 'thrown-togetherness', and the affordances of the environment and 'learning-in-context' add value to the participants' life projects – whether they include changes in drug habits or not. The place-events are further discussed with consideration of friluftsliv and communitas at the farm.

Background

Drug policies in Norway

Norwegian drug policies differ from policies in most western countries, particularly on criminalisation of using and possessing drugs for own use. The penalties for violating the Medical Products Act (LOV-1992-12-04-132)' or The General Civil Penal Code (LOV-2005-05-20-28) are high, up to twenty one years imprisonment for drug trafficking, distribution, or large-scale possession. Users are fined for possession for personal use, and fines are converted to a prison sentence if unpaid. Users are often barred from certain down town areas in the largest cities. In Norway, there are nearly 260 drug-related deaths each year (population 5,300.000). Many of these are related to injection of dirty drugs or miscalculated dosage. Heroin is usually injected, which increases risks of death. Access to alcohol is also strictly regulated. Beverages containing more than 4.7% alcohol are only available in state-controlled monopolies or restaurants and bars. Furthermore, beverages containing 2.5% - 4.65% alcohol are only available from grocery stores between statutory time limits. Buying or selling any amount of alcohol is only legal for persons above the age of eighteen (twenty-one for spirits). Moderate use of alcohol is accepted as part of Norwegian culture and policies (Schiøtz, 2017:5).

Since the I970s drug use has been a contested political issue, with proponents for zero-tolerance, criminalisation and medicalisation on the one hand, and proponents for moderate use, damage control, social and medical approaches on the other hand (Fjær, 2010). Most of the attention has been given to the users, leaving structural conditions out of the discussion, i.e. living conditions, unemployment, or international trafficking. Since 2004, the regional health trusts have been responsible for treatment of alcohol and drug-related problems. Previous acts and care systems for people with drug problems were set aside when Health and Care Services Act (LOV-2011-06-24-30) was enacted. The municipalities are now responsible for general health care, which includes drop-in centres in the cities, and the regional health trusts are responsible for specialised multidisciplinary drug treatment. Additionally, there are drop-in centres run by NGOs.

Street-dwellers and drifters are offered bedsits in shelters in many cities in Norway, often run by NGOs such as the City Mission or the Salvation Army. Some private for-profit, non-religious agencies also offer shelters at relatively high nightly rates. The municipal social services pay for short term stays at these shelters. There are long waiting lists for permanent stay in council houses. Drop-in centres offer various daytime activities, provide food and coffee, clothes, attend to minor health concerns, and offer judicial counselling, aiming at reducing harm and contributing to incremental changes in the lives of their guests (Kaltoft,

Korff, Steen Olsen and Svendsen, 2015). All the participants in the equine-facilitated activities had been guests at drop-in centres, been inpatients for treatment, and/or had served time for drug related offences.

Green care

The use of farm environments as arenas for community work are cognate with therapeutic horticulture, therapeutic communities and with collective treatment methods where social interaction, strength-based approaches and harm reduction are core elements (Hassink, Elings, Zweekhorst, van den Nieuwenhuizen and Smit, 2010, Sempik and Bragg, 2016, Sempik, Hine and Wilcox, 2010). Farms have been part of the Norwegian welfare system for centuries, from historical mandatory relief, production farms at mental health hospitals, to the modern day green care farming. Green care farms currently offer services related to children and adolescent's education, elder care, mental health, correctional services, and sheltered employment. Steigen et al. (2016) identified five interrelated components of green care: (i) contact with animals, (ii) supportive natural environments, (iii) the service leader as significant important other, (iv) social acceptance and fellowship with other participants and (v) meaningful and individually adapted activities in which mastery can be experienced (Steigen, Kogstad and Hummelvoll, 2016). Farmers may have green care as their main income or as an extra income.

Green care farms in Norway have their own trademark, *Inn på tunet* (Into the farmyard). Use of the trademark and logo requires certain HSE standards to be met. The farmers' body *Matmerk* ensures farmers follow around 1800 statutes and regulations for health, safety and environment (HSE) for people, animals, land and produce. Special accreditation for green care must be renewed every second year. The "green" in green care refers to nature and to environmental sustainability.

Friluftsliv

The idea and practice of *friluftsliv* is an important backdrop for green care. Friluftsliv refers to the Scandinavian outdoor life, which is to care for and befriend nature, to walk and ponder, and rest and talk. The Scandinavian way of being outdoors is connected to public right of access to all land (since 1957), and to an understanding of nature as something to be befriended, cared for and to cooperate with, as opposed to other kinds of outdoor life focusing on nature as something to be exploited, conquered or mastered (Gelter, 2000). Being outdoors is an important part of Norwegian culture, as shown by the establishment of large associations for hiking, skiing, fishing and hunting 150 years ago, which are still active. Additionally, there are many environmental associations.

The report to the Norwegian Government on *Friluftsliv* (Meld. St. 18 (2015-2016)) states that friluftsliv is the most common form of physical activity in Norway: more than 60% of the population enjoy walks outdoors in nature. *Friluftsliv* is cost free, and does not require expensive equipment or props. The right of public access is balanced by a duty to take care of nature, not to disturb or destroy paths or environments. Motorised access is restricted, but horses and bicycles are welcomed with the same duties.

The concept of *Friluftsliv* is to be engrossed in nature, not acquiring or demonstrating skills or straddling between safety and risk. *Friluftsliv* is to be placed in and connected to nature, to see nature as sacred, to walk and find nice places to rest and light a campfire or go fishing (Meld. St. 18 (2015-2016), Gelter, 2010). *Friluftsliv* is to be attentive to the present moment, to sounds, scents, movements, weather, animals or people. Friluftsliv is to experience a different temporality and rhythm, and to be like the Norwegian Ash-Lad (and similar to Jack the Numbskull or Jack the Dullard), who won the prize or princess due to his curiosity, generosity and serendipity (Kvaløy-Sætereng, 2007). Friluftsliv has also been compared to slow adventure (Varley and Semple, 2015), to just being outdoors, enjoyed individually or as a collective experience (Henderson and Vikander, 2007). According to Gelter (2010), the basics of friluftsliv are slow, flow and peak experiences, in combination with a deep appreciation of nature and the outdoors. It's a mode of being in contact with and to preserve nature, which facilitates a deep personal satisfaction.

The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912-2009), a keen climber and environmentalist, has contributed to the appreciation of friluftsliv. Naess was emphatic about the intrinsic values of nature, and of meaningful and necessary engagement with nature. Naess, referring to global environmental challenges, stated that joy in the forms of cheerfulness and pleasurable excitement is the reward for engaging in the world around us. Even in a world of facts, hardship and social inequality, he argues that being active and trying to do something is meaningful, and leads to joy. Whether the aim is to seek peace of mind or address larger environmental questions, there is no size that fits all. Locally adapted activities may contribute to the bettering of one's own life, or one's peers. This is not connected to living conditions or consumption, but meaningfulness and quality of life (Naess, Drengson and Devall, 2008). This idea of how being in action may be rewarding, ties in with the Norwegian idea of friluftsliv, but also to the idea of offering equine facilitated activities to drug-users at farms.

Research Methodology

The cases which are presented below, are built on data produced by participatory methods on three farms (2013-continung); participating in equine-facilitated activities, studying green care from the perspective of buyers, providers and users, and developing guidelines for equine-facilitated activities on farms for drug users (Sudmann and Agdal, 2015, Giskeødegård, Sudmann, Halvorsen, Børsheim, Agdal and Båtevik, 2016). The farms are family-run, all close to different city centres, and close to nature. During opening hours, the farms are teeming with guests, participants, case handlers, employees, suppliers, pupils or students, or passers-by, varying considerably by farm, day of the week, weather and season.

At farm A, the husband works fulltime. The farm has 6 horses of different breeds, production sheep and hens, and domestic animals (cats, dogs, pigs, rabbits), and produces firewood. The farm offers pedagogical services, mental health/substance abuse services, sheltered employment, and riding physiotherapy. The farmer has an agricultural education. Farm A has offered green care for 25 years.

At farm B, both husband and wife work fulltime. They have 16 horses of different breeds, production cattle and sheep, and domestic animals (cats, dog, hens). They offer riding for

the disabled, riding physiotherapy, and a riding school. The farm offers pedagogical services, sheltered employment, mental health services and eldercare. Both husband and wife have an agricultural education and continuous education in dementia care. The farm has 2-3 employees who combine disability benefits and farm work. Farm B has offered green care services for 10 years.

At farm C, the farmer works fulltime. The farm has 15 horses of different breeds, and production sheep and domestic animals (cats, dogs, hens). The farm offers pedagogical services, mental health/substance abuse services, sheltered employment, riding for the disabled, and riding physiotherapy. Farm C offers temporal housing to some of the participants. Farm C has offered green care for 25 years.

Case studies and field work

Case studies are well suited to the mapping of unknown terrain, and complex material, (George and Bennett, 2005), both of which apply to green care and equine-facilitated activities for drug users. Case studies are compiled by using a diverse set of methods; informal and formal conversations with participants, walk-along conversations, mini-focus groups during activities, e.g. when weighing hay together, observation, working together, or document analysis. The author of this article has visited at least one of the farms every week since 2013, and has participated in feeding animals, weighing hay, cleaning stables, mucking out, grooming, tacking up, riding out, riding for the disabled, riding physiotherapy, cooking and eating indoors or by a camp fire. Between visits, contact with farmers and participants is done by e-mail, phone or social media. During activities, we became acquainted, and small talk was facilitated. When explicit consent has been given, photographs have been taken of people, horses and farms to be used as illustrations in online articles (Kvam and Sudmann, 2017) or platform speeches. Faces are edited/censored according to the participants' preferences. During the last five years, around one hundred people have participated in the horse-facilitated activities; one person has participated more than thirty times, several are regulars, many just visit a few times, others appreciate the offer but don't manage to turn up at the right time. Staff from a drop-in centre followed the participants, as did staff from treatment clinics. Staff played a low key role, preparing food, coffee or helping out when asked.

Analytical strategies

The empirical material consists of notebooks, photographs, farm webpages, and documents (contracts, health, environment and security documentation, authorizations, rules and regulations). Surnames, addresses, date of birth, age, drug use history, or other personal information is not asked for. Text messages or social media have been used according to participants' initiatives or needs (e.g. transport). In qualitative research, production and analysis of the material are part of the same process. Participants and farmers have served as critical companions in the analytical process. Field research is embodied, and sensuous knowledge production and revisiting the field add value to the process. Walking and talking facilitate creativity in both researchers and participants (Pink, 2015). Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) have inspired the analysis with their comparison of qualitative data analysis with mystery solving. Furthermore, Hansen and Ingemann (2016) suggest that the whole of the

world can be observed in a grain of sand if we pay heed to the *minutiae* of social life. e.g. appropriating Goffman's micro-sociology (Hviid Jacobsen, 2010).

Ethical considerations

People present at the farm (farmers, users, staff, students) have given written or oral consent to participation and for publication of the findings. The study is ethically approved by NSD Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and by Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) and follows the research rules and regulations set by NSD and HVL.

Into the farmyard – equine asisted activities

Below, two different approaches are presented.

Inpatient Addiction Treatment: "Being with horses on Mondays saved the week"

Every Monday at 9am the minibus picked up two staff members and up to eight men at the specialised multidisciplinary treatment facility. The men were enrolled in a twelve weeks treatment program, including ten weekly 6 hour visits to a horse farm. One of the researchers/facilitators (TTS) was picked up along the route. The driver always brought a large thermos, and the men always offered me coffee when I entered the bus. Some Mondays there was a large box of chocolate to go with the coffee. The drive from the hospital to the farm took around 40 minutes. There was a lot of banter and puns, some deprecation, and talk about what people had been up to during the week-end. I initiated conversation about the horses, repeated their names, asked if they wanted the same horse as last time, and asked for ideas for what to do when we arrived. Staff usually kept quiet. When possible, I would place myself on a seat near to the men, rather than near staff, to remind them that I was not part of the treatment team. During the drive to the farm I would text the farmers and tell them how many passengers there where in the bus (participants, staff and me). Additionally, one or two participants were picked up in a private car at the other end of the city by the second researcher.

When we arrived at farm B, some of the men ran into the stables to treat their chosen horse with an apple or carrot, while others walked in the yard to smoke, or entered the yard house to grab a cup of coffee. On average, there were four or five participants (range: three to nine), two staff members, two researchers and the farmers. After greeting horses or smoking, everyone assembled indoors or outdoors (depending on temperature and weather), more coffee was served, and we talked about experiences from the last ride or farm visit and made plans for the day: e.g. go for a hack (trail ride), carriage driving, look after the fireplace, tend to other animals, prepare food. Needs and wishes were accommodated as far as possible with respect to animal welfare and seasonal challenges (temperature, precipitation, ice/snow). During the ten Mondays, everyone took part in mucking out, feeding, grooming, tacking up and riding by lead rope and by themselves. All participated in one or more basic riding lessons in an indoors hall or fenced outdoor arena, and one or more trails with horses walking on lead rope, if necessary. Each Monday, a hot meal, prepared by hospital staff, was served indoors or outdoors by the fire place. Meals were pre-prepared, or made at the farm. At 2.15 pm we left the farm. The drive back was always quiet, most of the men fell asleep, or talked in a low voice. The men themselves, and

the staff, corroborated the words of one of them: “I sleep much better on Monday nights, I look forward to going to bed”.

While in the riding arena, we heard surprised comments, such as: “It was stunning to see the world from above”. Several men believed the horses to be small while they were grooming them, and were surprised to find them big when mounted, and surprised by their experiences: “I could *feel* something in my body”. When the men got their diplomas for their riding lessons, one of them said: “I have actually learned something!”.

Drop-in centre guests: “It’s lovely to get out of the city, there are so many different scents”

Since autumn 2013, and continuing today, guests from a drop-in centre are offered 3 hour visits to farm A or B (the farm changes every second year). Every fourth week, staff at the centre put in extra effort to remind the guests about the farm visit on the Wednesday. Guests often sign up to participate, but forget to turn up, or they join at the last minute. Participants may jump in or out of the minibus before it leaves the city. The maximum number of participants is eight, plus two staff (ten seat van). During the last five years around 100 different men and a handful of women have visited the farms. One man, Hector, has taken part in nearly all the farm visits, and he always rides the largest horse: “I’m always coming, you know, Tobba” he says and hugs me. Many of the guests come back at irregular intervals, depending on their general health condition, treatment periods, serving time, housing situation and so forth. Farmers’ hospitality and generosity is appreciated, poignantly expressed by one man: “It’s taxing to always be singled out, to be assessed and corrected – here we’re welcomed as ordinary people.”

Once at the farm, participants look for the horses and go and greet them: Hector always brings apples. After greeting horses, dogs, cats, roosters and hens, there is coffee by the fire place in the yard, or by the hearth in a 400 year-old building. Staff always bring some food. Due to safety precautions, riders must eat before riding, and be relatively “clean”. While drinking coffee, we make plans for the day; who wants to ride, carriage drive, watch the fireplace, visit the sheep, walk next to the horses, or walk near the horses and so forth. Then participants, volunteers and the author of this article fetch the horses from the fields or paddocks, and bring them to their stalls. Horses are groomed and tacked up. Participants are shown how to use the equipment, e.g. the hoof pick and bridle, and are encouraged to try it out.

Depending on how the participants feel, they ride by lead rope in walk or trot, or they go for a trail ride, or hack, in the woods with a volunteer or the author of this article. Horses behave quite differently on a hack, they become more “horsey”, more alert and eager, and sometimes less obedient. Some of the guests prefer this kind of experience, and when possible, we ride out with them in pairs. One of the guests loved to go in the woods, it nurtured his dream: “I wish I could ride away from everything, just me and the horse, and live in the wilderness”.

During the last five years, some participants have been recruited as volunteers, others have brought their children, or acquired sheltered employment at one of the farms. One man told me how the horse farm had changed his life for the better: “After I got sheltered employment, my life is better, and I can see my children and my ex-wife”.

One of the farmers often prepares traditional thick pancakes made of sour milk, served with coffee, or pizza from his wood fired oven. The weather may be rough on the western coast of Norway, and knowing that there will be pizza or pancakes served indoor by the fire is an extra attraction for coming to the farm. There are occasional puns about horse (heroin) and horse (animal). The pleasure of being with horses was summed up by a young woman: "Horses are better than heroin, benzo and alcohol!". Drug-related talk is seldom heard, apart from when some of our riders are lost to an overdose or other unexpected deaths. Some of our keenest riders have died during the last five years.

Discussion: "I've been thinking of horses every day since my last visit"

The aim of the equine-facilitated activities are to give the participants new bodily and social experiences in an everyday arena, with no hidden agenda of control, assessment or treatment. The farm visits are offered as a possibility for personal growth and learning, and for contemplating another future. Our experiences, as illustrated in the quotes, are in line with what is found in other studies. Horse-farms provide a non-judgmental environment where participants' positive characteristics, personal strengths and abilities can be highlighted and encouraged while they interact with the horses (Maujean, Kendall, Lillan, Sharp and Pringle, 2013). Our "thrown-togetherness" facilitates interaction with a range of people; e.g. farmers, volunteers, suppliers, farriers or passers-by.

The purpose of community work is to facilitate change, and to make a positive difference in people's lives. Following Minkler et al. (2008) the hallmark of community work is to facilitate empowerment and critical consciousness, community capacity and social capital, issue selection, participation and make our work relevant (Minkler, Wallerstein and Wilson, 2008:294). Interestingly, the Prochaska step-wise model for changing health habits resembles the process of collective action and community work. There is an upward learning spiral with steps of pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse. The model pre-supposes relapse, and stresses that change is the result of learning, which in turn reduces the harm of relapse, or the period or severity of relapse (Prochaska and Prochaska, 2016). Relapse is part of the game for drug-users, and being welcomed back to the farm after relapse is of vital importance.

Community work or outreach work with drug users necessitates social interaction and dialogues to facilitate learning and critical consciousness, and it necessitates bodily and cognitive activity to create utopias of a different future. Horses force people to pay attention to animals' and humans' whereabouts and needs, and to co-operate and communicate with patience and generosity. Communication with horses demands communicative and embodied presence to avoid scaring the horse and so to prevent dangerous situations, which may be rewarded with sense of community across species. Accordingly, horse-farms offer opportunities for connecting with the horse from the ground, through a lead-rope, or when mounted. Farms also offer opportunities for connecting to people, nature and place, and for *communitas*. This amalgam is fascinating.

Friluftsliv and nature: "It's like friends riding out on a hike"

Changing one's life-style, picking up new and healthier routines, or getting new friends is not easy. Keeping up good intentions involves a struggle to overcome old routines (Prochaska and Prochaska, 2016, Fleig, McAllister, Chen, Iverson, Milne, McKay, Clemson and Ashe, 2015). Anecdotal and scholarly evidence alike, show that even incremental changes must build on the needs and wants of the person in question, preferably within supportive environments (Kaltoft, Korff, Steen Olsen and Svendsen, 2015). Farm-based activities for people who lead rough lives creates a break in daily routines. When new possibilities for leisure and voluntary or sheltered employment are introduced, this underscores the reality that incremental changes are always possible, and that relapses are not detrimental. In Norway, "Go for a stroll" or "Take a walk in the woods" is advice given to people who are uneasy or distressed. The back drop of this advice is related to the healing potential of activity in nature, i.e. *friluftsliv*.

The link between nature, health and wellbeing has been theoretically outlined by several scholars (Ottosson, 2007, Kaplan, 1995, Barton, 2016, Ulrich, 1993). The characteristics of Kaplan's attention restoration theory is cognate with the philosophy of *friluftsliv*; being away, fascination, extent and compatibility. The pleasure of being away from the city is articulated by someone at every occasion, often followed by comments on sights, smells, tastes, the animals or the people at the farm (including the author of this article). Even though the city is nearby, people remark on a feeling of being far away. As illustrated above, participants are fascinated by farm life, by their own feelings, and by weather and temperature or the fireplaces. The feeling of extent relates to the sense of being in a place with sufficient scope to dwell for a while; farms and *friluftsliv* obviously stimulate this feeling. The last characteristic, compatibility, relates to how the setting supports the participants' needs, inclinations or purposes in the moment. *Friluftsliv* is sharing experiences and gadgets or helping out in a seamless manner. Farms offer rich environments or affordances (Chemero, 2003), where the amalgam of nature, animals and people can be understood as *friluftsliv* and attention restoration, or combined as green exercise (Barton, 2016). The notion of "free space" in utopian action research or collective action has a ring of *friluftsliv* as well (Bladt and Nielsen, 2013, Polletta, 1999). Free space stimulates creativity and may be empowering – and health promoting.

Communitas and micro-rituals: "I've got a completely new life, I'm a new person"

Several authors have identified common denominators at green care farms: (i) contact with animals and nature, (ii) supportive environments, (iii) hospitable farmers and leaders, (iv) social acceptance and (v) meaningful activities (Sempik and Bragg, 2016, Steigen, Kogstad and Hummelvoll, 2016, Sudmann and Børsheim, 2017). Social interaction is communication, where micro-rituals and micro-signs determine whether interaction is destructive or empowering for the persons involved. Greeting participants and staff alike by name, exchanging glances or jests, giving and receiving hugs - all contribute to a sense of community. While making plans for the day, we talk about being missed and longing to come back, we help each other with coffee and we share food. We ask questions, tell stories about the horses, the weather, the farm, the people. We do this to catch up on events since the last ride – and to create and sustain a situational definition and sense of community. Drugs or drug cravings are never an issue, unless used to compare the flow or peak

experiences of being on horseback with being high on drugs. When we sit on sheepskins by a hearth in a dimly lit old farm house, this attunes everyone to slow experiences. The difference between sharing cups in a stable and the sanitized cups-for-staff and cups-for-guests in the drop-in centre/hospital is striking. If we accidentally pick up the wrong cup and take a sip, the cups in the stable will still be used by either of the two staff whereas in the centre/hospital a new cup would be provided for staff at once.

Goffman (1983) saw the interaction order as sacred, as a set of rituals which preserved the social standing of everyone present. Micro-signs and actions, such as glances, smiles, touch, micro movements, grins, winks, utterances or sounds, are necessary to uphold a situational definition, and to agree upon who we are or may become in this communal setting. Sharing of food and coffee, gloves, hats or deer skins necessitates attention towards others' needs in relation to one's own needs, and illustrates the "thrown-togetherness" and the sacred and ritual character of social interaction. Victor and Edith Turner's concept *communitas* (Turner, 2008, Turner, 2012) is well suited to capture the temporal and ephemeral facets of our 'thrown-togetherness'. When aligned in the activities, we may experience collective joy of a particular kind. All present join efforts to create a break in the everyday routines of living with addiction problems. When emerged in place and activities, joy and cheerfulness creates a particular community of shared experiences, as *communita*s. *Communitas* is created and sustained through micro-interaction and communication in which human and non-human animals and place are involved.

Concluding comments

Equine facilitated activities on green care farms are multifaceted events, holding the potential for life-changing encounters with self, others, nature or animals. In the present projects, the horses are the key motivation for joining in. The horses at the three farms live in herds, some of them in loose housing with run-in sheds. These horses are more like wild horses than regular horses at a riding school, and are kept separately around the clock. The farm horses' enactment of belonging to their flock and pasture plays into the human interaction in several ways. The horses are usually reluctant to leave the pasture, and are always very eager to go home. Even the horse at the bottom of the pecking order will rather be harassed by peers than leave their herd. Their demonstration of the importance of belonging to peers and place, is a reminder of the significance of *communitas* and place, and about the importance of being and belonging. For the participants in the projects, observing the horses' behaviour opens up conversations about family, homes or friends. The imaginative power of the present, as a lever to change the future, emerges in these equine-facilitated encounters. When participants claim that being on horseback gives a greater kick than injecting heroin, they skip a fix of amphetamine to go riding, or when street dwellers tell how they have been dreaming of horses every night since their last ride, the sense of community between human and non-human participants emerges as a potentially life-changing encounter. The equine-assisted communities are both ephemeral and long-lasting, and have given many of the participants motivation to stay in therapy, to reduce their drug use, or to gain access to new social arenas or to sheltered employment.

Maujean et al. (2013) are not pleased to detect that many equine-assisted programs continue to rely on serendipitous therapeutic benefit rather than planned therapeutic

interventions. Building on the knowledge and insights gained by offering equine facilitated activities at green care farms for drug users, I believe that the possibility for *communitas*, *friluftsliv* and serendipitous benefits like the Norwegian Ash-lad, are valuable to the participants' health and well-being. Drug users have lots of experiences with bad luck, serendipity is always welcome, and deserved.

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