



HOW THINK LIKE A PONY HAS HELPED HARIBO

An Interview with freelance instructor and Think Like a Pony Co-Director, Sophie Hildreth

At Think Like a Pony, we don't just help children and families in need of assistance, all the ponies we take on have past struggles too. We use our core principles to build back the trust needed for them to work with troubled children and families, and we not only do this at our flagship centre in Leeds, but through a network of instructors who have trained with us. Sophie Hildreth is a Director of Think Like a Pony and one of our longest serving instructors. Today, we get to learn about Sophie's experience as a Think Like a Pony instructor and her personal journey training the internet's new favourite pony, Haribo.

Tell us about your journey as a Think Like a Pony instructor and how you came to work with the organisation?

My journey began with Think Like a Pony when I sat in on a lesson with Lynn as a spectator fifteen years ago. Immediately, I felt aligned with the training Think Like a Pony offered, so I moved up to Leeds and I started my training with Lynn. Over the last 15 years, I've developed my skills using the Think Like a Pony method. During that time, I've helped to set up the flagship centre and six months ago, I moved to Wales to bring Think Like a Pony to a wider audience. My role is centered around taking in ponies that have had behavioural problems, rehabilitating them, re-training them and rehoming them with families. I also currently travel across the UK teaching Think Like a Pony Club members.

Haribo has captured our hearts. Can you tell us about your first interaction with Haribo and his story?

I originally found Haribo on a Facebook Group called Project Ponies, which is a popular site for ponies that often have behavioural problems that can't be sold via traditional routes.

After assessing Haribo via video, I went to meet him. On our first meeting, I found him in the stable living with the rope and halter attached. The yard owners had done the best they could with him with the knowledge they had, but Haribo was already so traumatized and terrified that they decided to seek help. Because he was so frightened, he had spent 3 months wearing his halter and rope 24/7 as the owners tried to reduce his stress around being caught. It was clear that his behavioural problems were greater than I first imagined. My initial action when I got him home was to remove the head collar and begin the Think Like a Pony approach to rehabilitation.



"Alongside calm and controlled breathing, I set a positive intention that showed him I wanted to connect with him and, of course, used positive but assertive body language to gain his respect and trust."

[@think_like_a_pony](#)

For more information email
info@thinklikeaponyclub.co.uk

What key TLAP approved techniques are you currently using to train Haribo?

The first technique I used to train Haribo was the same one we use when teaching children; controlling my breath to create a calming energy, so I could gain permission to share his space. This is The Think Like a Pony method to start a two-way conversation.

Alongside calm and controlled breathing, I set a positive intention that showed him that I wanted to connect with him and, of course, used positive but assertive body language to gain his respect and trust.

From here, we built his confidence with touch by approaching gradually and responding to his reaction. His body language would convey his level of comfort with each interaction, and we would advance or retreat accordingly. This relates to one of the main Think Like a Pony principles, which is ensuring that the pony is part of the process and the interaction is happening with him, not happening to him.

Once Haribo was comfortable with touch, we worked with him to introduce equipment and encouraged him to be curious about the halter, rather than be intimidated by it. Lastly, we tried a number of leading exercises and then once that was completed, we could turn him out and he didn't have to be confined to the stable anymore.

What role do specific training techniques like body language, breathwork, trust and respect play in Haribo's training?

Throughout Haribo's training, we have stuck to the Think Like a Pony principles. Everyone that worked with Haribo controlled their breathing and body language and entered his space with a positive intention. This meant adopting a confident body posture that wasn't threatening, to let him know that he could depend on them as his leader and take confidence from them. This made training consistent so Haribo could begin to predict what was going to happen when he was approached. This made him feel safe, which in turn, calmed him down.



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Tell us about your most magical Haribo memory to date

The first one was the first time he really let someone enter his personal space. I remember an incredibly healing moment where he stretched his head forward and snuffled around my head and neck for a prolonged moment, that really felt like he was overcoming his barriers of letting others in. I felt very connected to him. A second magical memory would have to be when we turned him out for the first time. It was very challenging to see him confined at the beginning of his journey with us and seeing him so free and delivering on my promise to him was a moment of pure joy.

What has Haribo taught you?

I always knew how many small steps it took to rehabilitate a pony, but Haribo has taught me that success sometimes means breaking down these small steps into even smaller steps. If one step seems too much, break it down, because no step forward is too small. It's these small steps that make up the bigger picture.

What does the future hold for Haribo?

Usually, ponies stay with us for around three months, and while Haribo won't be leaving us any time soon due to the extent of his behavioural issues, he will be rehomed with a family. While we love Haribo and have contemplated keeping him, his connection with one of the children he has made friends with makes us realise he needs and deserves a person of his own to love and care for him.

Every horse that leaves our rehabilitation programme joins a family that follows the Think Like a Pony approach and is sold with a set of lessons and membership to the Think Like a Pony online Club.

Join the Club to start your horsemanship journey today.

You can follow Haribo's journey on Instagram and see Sophie's most magical Haribo moments here:
@sophie_tlap_horsemanship



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