

Farmer Clunes: horses can be best therapy for children

Sian Griffiths

EDUCATION EDITOR

THE actor Martin Clunes has urged every school in England to be matched up with a horse to boost children's happiness and wellbeing.

Clunes was speaking as the country's biggest equine charity, the British Horse Society, launches a campaign to help children regain confidence and interest in learning through riding and interacting with horses.

"Every school in this country should have links to horses," Clunes said. "I think even the Household Cavalry would welcome a visit from schoolchildren."

The Doc Martin star said that working with horses could inspire and motivate

youngsters. It could help children with mental health problems and conditions such as autism and dyslexia as well as disaffected youngsters who had lost interest in education.

"I know how much difference horses can make to children's lives," Clunes said.

"I have seen kids who just do not connect with anything and watched as the rhythm of riding releases endorphins in them. You can see their faces light up."

Clunes said he had seen disabled children regain some movement after riding.

"Teenagers who are struggling in school and have lost interest . . . through caring for the horses, they learn to care for themselves," he added.

"Getting kids to relate to

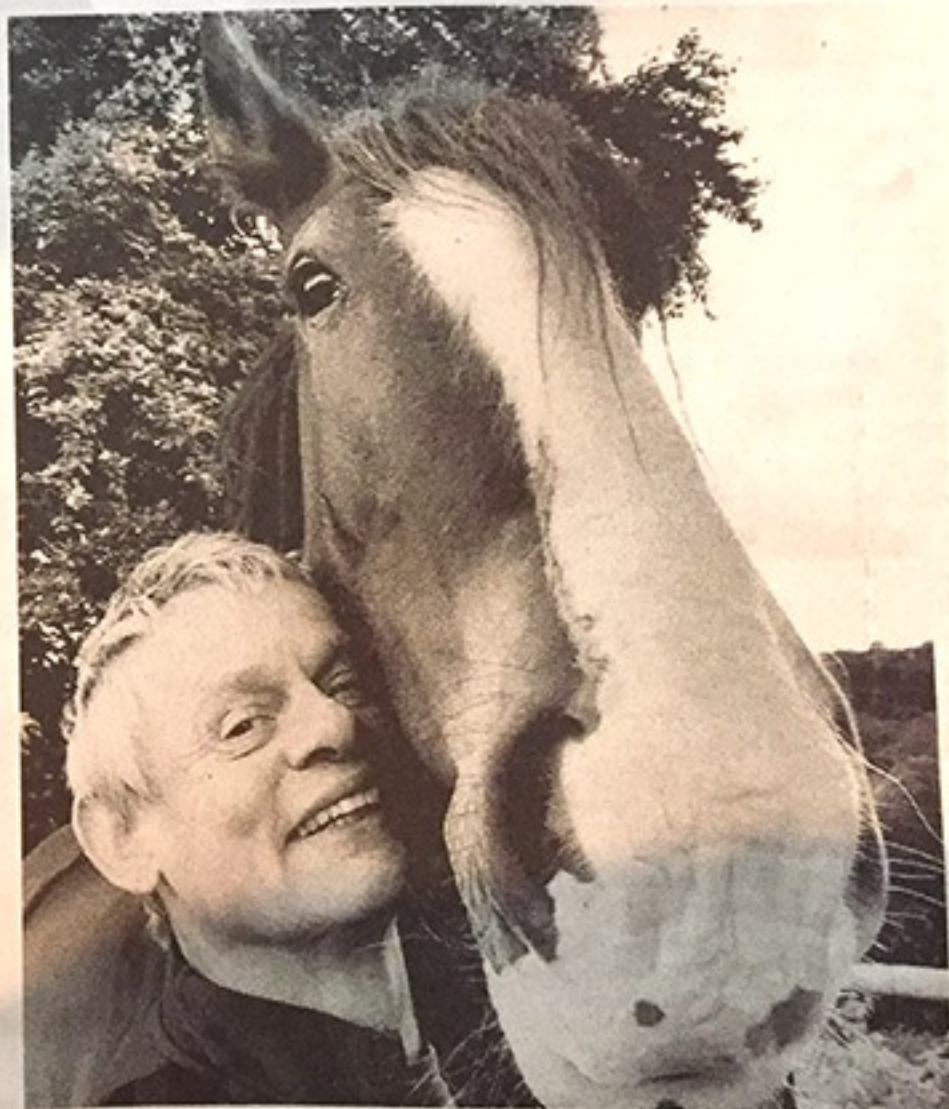
horses unlocks all kinds of things in them."

Clunes and his wife Philippa have a dozen horses on their farm, including rescued and retired animals. His daughter Emily, who learnt to ride when she was two years old, is now 17 and wants to be a horse physiotherapist, he said.

All three ride together and Clunes said that living in the country had enabled Emily to "stay younger longer". Riding horses was a lot healthier than constantly scrolling through "antisocial media" sites.

"Because of [horses'] honesty and big hearts [they can be used for therapy] to help junkies," he said. "There are so many examples of lives being changed by horses."

@siangriffiths6



Martin Clunes with Bruce, one of the dozen horses he and his wife keep