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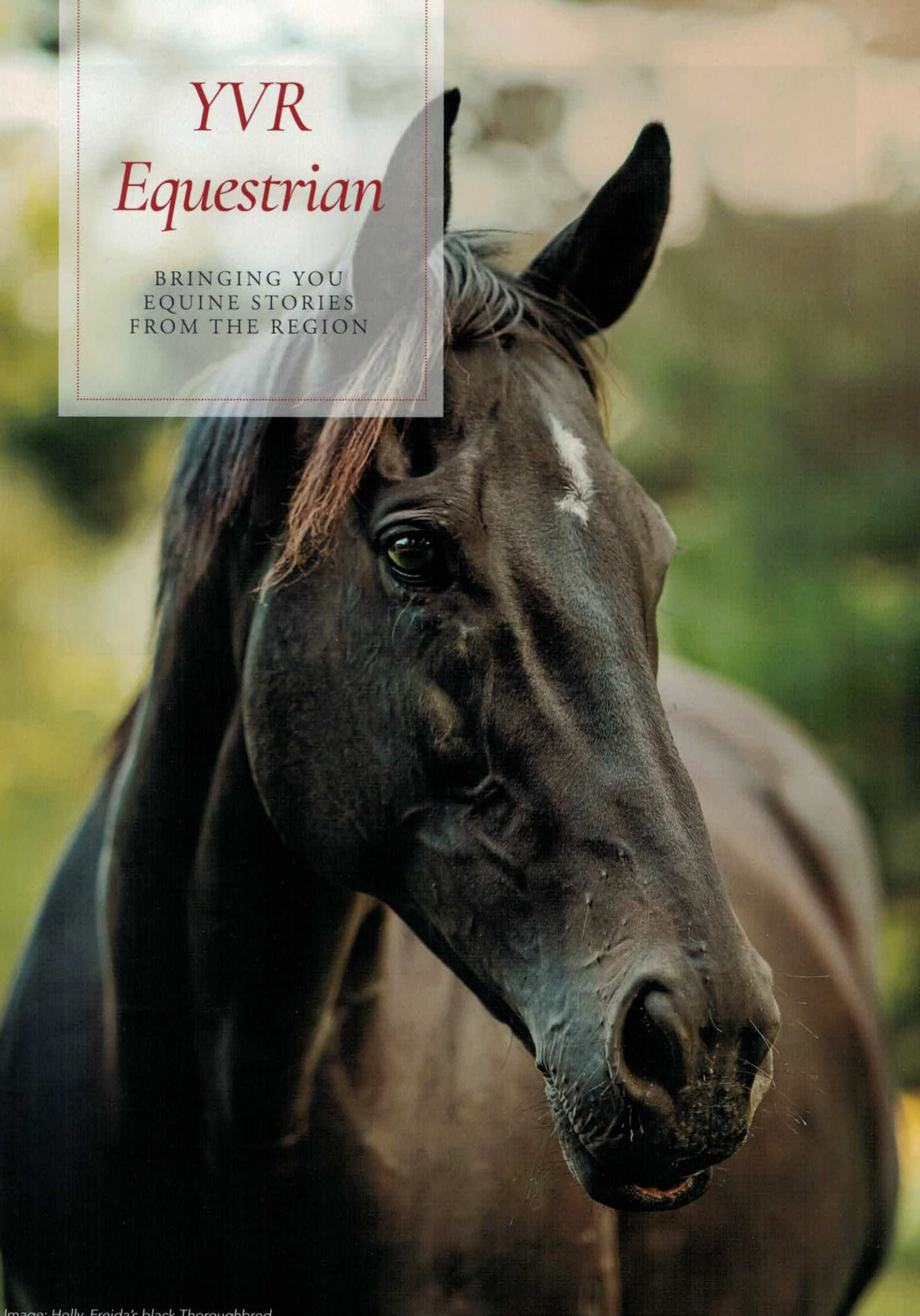


Image: Hannah and Doc



WORDS Lindy Schneider | PHOTOGRAPHY Louise Sedgman

The Sweet Teen Project

WITH LOUISE SEDGMAN

A Drouin photographer has launched a gorgeous coffee table book showcasing teenagers and their deep connections to their horses. Equine Photographer Louise Sedgman did photoshoots with twelve teenagers over the past 18 months, four of which were from the Yarra Valley. The project, a fundraiser for Headspace, seeks to build self-esteem and confidence by supporting young women through a photo experience with their 'best friend'.

The Sweet Teen Project was launched in February 2020 when Gippsland and much of the east coast of Victoria and New South Wales were experiencing bushfires, and just as the Covid pandemic was starting. Louise wanted to do something that gave back to her community and raise funds and awareness around teen mental health. With lockdowns and Covid restrictions, her project became a little more challenging to navigate than she had planned for!

Families applied to be part of the Sweet Teen Project, which involved a beautiful photo experience at their home with their horses. "I wanted to bring some joy to these young women, to show them they can be brave and amazing. Having photos of your children around their home can also bring them a sense of belonging and inclusion, helping them to feel safe, wanted and loved," says Louise.



Image: Lousie and her camera



Image: Freida & Bailey

For Louise the real joy in her work is when she sees someone's face light up when they are shown an image on the back of her camera during a shoot. "The relaxation and confidence that shines through after that moment, when they become aware how great they look is wonderful! Hearing their special stories and seeing the bond they have with their horses is magical. Never more evident is the reality that horses are incredible, sentient beings. With the ability to help someone through the darkest and toughest of times, with nothing more than simply being in their presence."

Louise, who was awarded the Australian Institute of Professional Photographers Victorian pet/animal Photographer of the Year in 2018, travelled to Warburton, Yellingbo and Macclesfield as well as Buln Buln, Tynong North, Tooradin, Darnum, Thorpdale, the Mornington Peninsula, Meeniyah and Doreen for photoshoots. "I've had horses in my life since I was five, and photography has been a growing passion for me for more than 20 years. Combining my two loves is absolutely the best job in the world. I was also lucky enough to breed Clydesdales with my husband and two daughters for a number of years."

"Combining my two loves is absolutely the best job in the world."



Image: Alexis's horse Little Joe

MEET THE TEENS

Hannah and her beautiful gelding Doc, along with Freida and her sweet mare Bailey, were such a delight to work with. Both women live in Warburton and are lucky enough to have the stunning Mount Donna Buang in their backyard. Hannah was given Doc for her 13th birthday – a special gift from her family and they have worked to build the beautiful partnership they have today, competing, growing and learning together.

Bailey was a rescue horse and Freida has taken a slow and steady approach to gain her trust and build a strong bond based on love, with confidence building and gentle training methods. (She is also mum to Holly her thoroughbred, and Jedda, who she cares for and is more than 40 years old.) This is absolutely evident when you see the connection between the two of them. Hannah and Freida are friends, and often spend time together with their horses.

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Image: Alexis and Little Joe

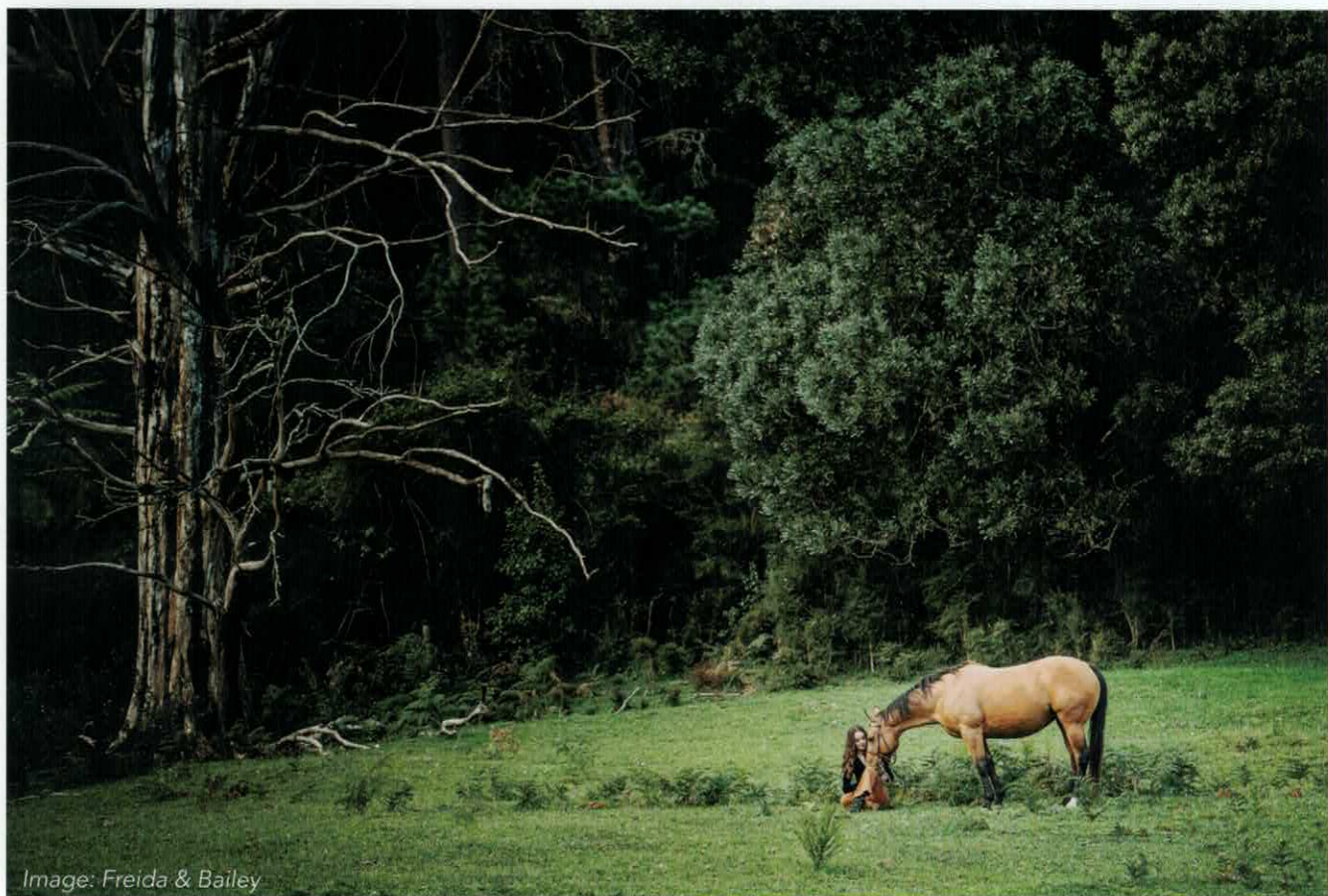


Image: Freida & Bailey



Image: Hanna and one of her beloved horses

Image: Hanna with horses Doug and Eric





Image: Hannah and Doc

Like all journeys, it hasn't always been easy, but that's often how the strongest partnerships are made.

Alexis and her lovely chestnut gelding Little Joe also share a special bond. Little Joe came into her life when she needed him most. He became her therapy and a source of escape from the daily challenges of secondary school and life. The pair love to ride, relax and enjoy the scenery in Macclesfield. Their image is featured on the Sweet Teen cover as chosen by public vote.

Hanna and her handsome Quarter Horse, Doug have come so far on their special journey of Western riding together. From Yellingbo, the pair have a wonderful connection and hit it off the first time they met. Like all journeys, it hasn't always been easy, but that's often how the strongest partnerships are made. Hanna also gets to ride her mum Emma's big grey Quarter Horse gelding Eric and between the three of them are smashing the Trail, Ranch, Showmanship, Dressage and Hunter competitions that they attend regularly. ■



To support this wonderful initiative, **The Sweet Teen Project**, Louise's beautiful hardcover book is available for purchase from www.giddyupfoto.com

Donations can be made at www.headspace.org.au/get-involved/donations/

For more information:

Louise is available to capture the special connection you or your children have with your horses and can be contacted on 0412 942897 with dates currently available from January 2022.