Guidelines for assessing suitability of horses for Medicine Horse Way workshops and private sessions

If you are offered the opportunity to run a Medicine Horse Way workshop at another venue these are some notes to help you interact with the owner, assess the suitability of the premises and evaluate the horses.

1. Have a discussion with the owner about the Medicine Horse Way approach and offer him/her a trial session and/or invite him/her to attend a workshop.

2. Decide how many horses you require for the workshop.

3. After your talk with the owner ask him/her to select some horses for you eg if you require 4 perhaps ask for between 4 and 8 to choose from (if there are lots of horses this shortens the time of the selection process).

4. Agree a time for you to trial the horses and ask the yard owner to be there.

5. When you arrive complete your own Meet the Herd exercise with the horses that the owner has selected. Make some notes of your findings and ask for a brief description and record.

6. From this information make a draft schedule of suitability of horses/ponies for each part of your workshop, based on your intuition!! This can be fun!

7. If possible use the whole arena to trial each horse.
   a. Trial in the space you will use for your workshops.
   b. Use the whips that will be used by your participants, when demonstrating.

8. Assessment – Body Scan before walking in.
   a) Walk into arena with horse and observe, greet horse incorporating the energy/boundary rule.
   b) Notice the tendency of the horse eg. Is it shy, is it sensitive to your approach, does it walk into your space boldly.
   c) Notice how you feel in its presence eg. Do you feel warm and happy, confident, scared, frustrated.
   d) Practise the energy/boundary rule and notice the horse's responses to the rock, back and sigh and/or to you setting the boundary with a boundary device.
   e) Remember to keep checking in with your body and finish the session at any time that you do not feel this horse/pony would be suitable for your workshop.
   f) Continue with the energy/boundary exploration and notice the horse/pony's desire to 'connect' with you, walk around in circles, figures of 8 and/or what you feel drawn to do.
   g) Thank the horse
   h) Next take a longer device (rope/lunge whip/carrot stick) and move the horse/pony around the school in one direction firstly in walk, then trot, change the rein and repeat. What do you notice? Does the horse move

freely forward, does he seem lazy, does he explode at a slight movement of the energy, how easily does he turn? How does the horse look? Does he look happy, calm, relaxed, confused, worried, disconnected? How do you feel? Happy, calm, terrified?

i) Remember that the centre of the arena is the safest place and if the horse moves faster than you intended breathe down into your feet, stay calm and encourage the horse to slow down as soon as you can. Be able to ask for help from the owner, if required.
j) Next, have a short play time – incorporating the connecting up and the active work to assess the horse's attitude towards connection through movement.
k) Thank the horse.
l) Have a discussion with the owner and ask for their perspective.

9. Repeat with the other horses and then make a final draft of the horses suitable for each of the required elements of your workshop.

10. Check that the owner is happy with your choice.

11. You owe it to your clients to take the time to do this evaluation of the horses they will be working with. It will also make your job easier and safer. Don't make the mistake of just relying on what the owner tells you. Quite possibly the owner doesn't understand the exercises we do or the dynamics that can unfold with people who are not experienced working with their horses.