



Sidelines Honor

# The Brooke: Working Hard to Help Working Equines

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***Work Horses Working Hard.***  
*Working equids at a highland market place.*  
All photos courtesy of The Brooke



By Ashleigh Brown, welfare assessment advisor for the Brooke, an international equine welfare charity

*It's hot, dusty and crowded. It feels like a hundred pairs of eyes are on me as I examine the desperately thin and despondent horse in front of me. People stare in curiosity at the never-before-seen presence of a farangi (white foreigner) in a remote market town and, in surprise, that this farangi girl should be so interested in a simple cart horse. My eyes fill with tears as I note the lesions, the skeletal body, the hoof deformities, the eye problems, the lameness, the whip lashes, the fear, the pain, the suffering. My body is exhausted after many days of examining hundreds of horses, donkeys and mules, and my heart is heavy from the sights I have seen. But witnessing the suffering of horses like this one only makes me more determined to do everything I can to stop this.*

*This is Ethiopia; this is another day in my role as welfare assessment advisor for the Brooke, a=an international equine welfare organization.*

**F**ounded by Dorothy Brooke in 1934 in response to the plight of war horses left behind in Egypt after World War I, the Brooke has grown since that time and currently operates to alleviate the suffering of working horses, donkeys and mules in 11 countries throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Last year, we reached nearly 1.2 million working equine animals.

Despite several years of working in the field of animal welfare, I still find it horribly distressing to see animals suffering. It's so difficult to hold back tears or anger at some of the things I see when working in the field, and the terrible images stay in my mind even after the reality is no longer in front of me. This is definitely the greatest challenge for me, and never gets any easier to cope with. However, what keeps me motivated is the knowledge that the Brooke's work really does make a difference.

Although today I was conducting welfare assessments in a new area of Ethiopia, in other parts of Ethiopia, my Brooke colleagues have already established programs to improve equine welfare. They've been training local farriers to improve hoof shape and condition; constructing water troughs and shade shelters in conjunction with local communities at markets and watering points to alleviate the heat stress, dehydration and exhaustion that the animals endure after travelling for hours in intense heat carrying heavy loads. They've been supporting and training local animal owners to provide basic first aid and other welfare services and advice to others within their own communities. They've also been advocating for increased focus on equine animals among the Ethiopian government veterinary service providers.



**Ashleigh teaching proper hoof care, which is vital for working animals.**

It's exciting to consider where the Brooke may be in five or ten years' time, and how many animals we could be helping in different countries around the world. Our goal is to measurably improve the lives of 2 million equines each year by 2016.

I find it inspiring to realize that we can create change that will benefit animals for the future as well as the present, through changing owners' behaviors and practices toward their animals for the better, which can be transferred to new generations of horse owners. This sustainable change is very much at the heart of the Brooke's work. Many of the welfare problems I see have their roots in poverty and lack of education. In many cases, poverty forces owners to work their animals for long, hard days as this is their only means of generating income. Poverty also makes it difficult to provide sufficient feed or veterinary care. In other cases, owners don't have an adequate understanding of their animals' needs, even when they have the means to do so.

It's not enough just to patch up the same wounds again and again. In order to achieve real welfare benefit for these animals, we must work with the owners to prevent the welfare problems from occurring and recurring, so we strive to empower and encourage owners to take responsibility for addressing the problems in their own animals themselves, without creating a dependency on the Brooke. This is why the Brooke's work in community education is so essential if equine welfare is to be improved.

An essential component of our work is to ensure that project

activities are based on evidence of the equine animals' welfare needs, and that the impact of these activities on the animals is monitored so that we can continually learn and improve our work on their behalf. An important element of my job is to ensure that the Brooke has methods and tools to scientifically assess and monitor equine welfare directly from the animal.

The Brooke doesn't rely only on assumptions, information about available resources or from the animals' owners. We believe that the animals themselves are the best source of information about their welfare state, hence our efforts to collect reliable animal-based data. The quest to obtain this information

has led me and our local welfare assessment staff to a wide variety of contexts. We have assessed horses, donkeys and mules in many situations: inside people's homes in India, grazing on rubbish sites in

Nicaragua, working at tourist attractions in Egypt and Jordan, gathered at remote watering points in Senegal, in the mountains of Nepal, at market days in Ethiopia, by the roadside in Pakistan...the list goes on. We will go wherever the animals are.

The data resulting from these welfare assessments can be used in many ways, such as to identify the animals in greatest need, the key welfare problems affecting different groups of equine animals, the causes of these problems, the ways in which the problems can be addressed through the Brooke's project activities, and, subsequently, the effectiveness of these activities in reducing the problems they seek to address.

Although the Brooke is based in London, England, and has

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***Ashleigh taking time to reassure a foal while conducting a welfare assessment of the mare at a market.***

recently opened its first North American office in Lexington, Kentucky, all of the charity's work occurs overseas where around 1,000 staff (some employed directly by the Brooke, some by local partner organizations) all work to find sustainable solutions to improve the lives of working equine animals. The UK-based technical advisory staff works closely with the field teams abroad, most of whom are nationals. Much of my time is spent in some of the world's poorest countries, training others to conduct welfare assessments using the methods developed within the Brooke, or working side by side with local staff to collect data from the animals in their project areas.

I cried over the suffering of horses when reading *Black Beauty* as a child, as did many fellow horse lovers. Now I do so as an adult, but with the hope that I am in some way making a contribution to the wonderful work of the Brooke, and that we really can make a difference to millions of horses, donkeys and mules around the world. The need is great, the challenges are many, and our work may never be completely finished, but I'm hopeful that we can give these hard-working, selfless and astonishingly willing and forgiving animals a life worth living, and achieve our vision of a world in which working horses, donkeys and mules are free from suffering.

*About the Brooke: Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall, wife of Prince Charles, is currently serving her second term as President of the Brooke. During her tenure, a vision was cast for the Brooke to double the number of animals being reached each year by 2016. Knowing that Americans share the British people's generous spirit, love of horses and concern for the world's poor contributed to the decision to seek partnership with key American donors, whose support is essential to reaching the goal. A 501(c)(3) was established and in 2013 an office was opened at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, Kentucky, for the sole purpose of supporting the overseas work of the Brooke. American donors can send tax-deductible gifts to American Friends of the Brooke, 4089 Iron Works Pkwy, Lexington, KY 40511. Also, please visit [www.TheBrooke.org](http://www.TheBrooke.org) or [www.TheBrookeUSA.org](http://www.TheBrookeUSA.org), or contact [Cindy.Rullman@TheBrookeUSA.org](mailto:Cindy.Rullman@TheBrookeUSA.org) or call Cindy at 859-296-0037.*



***Ashleigh conducting welfare assessments at a highland market, assisted by Brooke Ethiopia staff and observed by local community members.***

*About the writer: Ashleigh Brown has worked for the Brooke for five years. Her educational background is in animal behavior and animal welfare science, while her hands-on experience includes working with, riding, or training horses in her home country of Scotland in addition to Canada, Argentina and Australia. She travels extensively, having visited 40 countries across 6 continents, in spite of her fear of flying. In her spare time, she trains in boxing, and enjoys glamorous nights out in London (in high contrast to her work in remote and rural locations), and is a self-admitted shoe junkie!*