



Children, Horses and Adults in PartnerShip Equine Assisted Therapy

Welcome!

We're CHAPS – Children, Horses and Adults in PartnerShip Equine Assisted Therapy and we're from Sheridan, Wyoming; located at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains. We serve individuals with various limitations. These limitations include developmental disabilities, dementia, Alzheimer's, adolescent oppositional behaviors and veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Our participants range in age from young children through elders. Today's presentation is about serving veterans with PTSD.

History

Sheridan, Wyoming is the home of a Veteran's Administration Medical Center, whose emphasis is mental health, substance abuse treatment and general medical conditions. The facility has both inpatient and outpatient treatment settings. Their offerings include the standards forms of counseling for individual, couples, and family when appropriate. Because of its focus on mental health and substance abuse issues, it offers two specialty programs, both inpatient, that specifically address PTSD. One combines PTSD with co-occurring disorders (PCOD), usually substance abuse; and the second is a cohort for only PTSD using cognitive processing therapy (CPT). The first group, PCOD, enrolls members as they are accepted and onsite, and the course of treatment is eight weeks. CPT is the second group and is a cohort, beginning and ending together for six weeks. Twice a year, the Sheridan VA offers two CPT groups exclusively for women. Many areas of the US are represented in the attendees to these two groups. Equine therapy is listed as one of the offerings for these programs, and as such is a "drawing card" for some veterans. The CHAPS program is a supplemental program to the established programs at the VA. It is based on the established recognition of using animals to help calm down emotional reactivity.

Organization

CHAPS began partnering with the Sheridan VA in 2011, Veteran work is an important part of the CHAPS "face" in the community. The veterans are also offered therapeutic riding, equine assisted learning and therapeutic driving. Our participants in these programs are mostly local veterans, coming from Sheridan and Buffalo, Wyoming. However, we currently have one veteran, having already participated in out of state equine therapy programs, attending our program from Casper, Wyoming, 150 miles from Sheridan.

CHAPS began partnering with the VAMC in 2011, working with the two PTSD groups. Initially, the groups were led by therapists from the VA. However, because of other demands and responsibilities, the outcomes were varying. Four years ago, to improve the outcomes for the veterans, a licensed mental health professional was added to the CHAPS' staff. The mental health professional was selected based on her training and extensive experience in working with at-risk populations. Thus, she had the skills and experience to provide a safe emotional and mental environment for the veteran as they work with the horses. A Peer Support Specialist, a person with a mental health and/or co-occurring condition, accompanies the veterans to the CHAPS site. The Peer Support Specialist is someone who has

been trained and certified to help others with conditions as well as identify and achieve specific life and recovery goals. The issues of the veteran, in addition to PTSD, can include any or all of the following: anxiety, depression, other trauma, affected areas of their lives, and military sexual assault, etc. CHAPS' role is one of being supplemental to provide the environment for human and horse contact.

The Team

Over the course of the last four years, the program structure has become defined and relies on a team approach. There are five positions in the team. The first position: the horses, who have been carefully screened for their willingness to work, character traits, ability to cope with the emotional environment and attitude initiate, guide and “do the work” with the veterans. Second and third are the Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning and the Licensed Professional Counselor. The Peer Support Specialist and our Director complete the team.

The roles of the team:

- Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning – chooses the activities and horses appropriate for the day’s activities based on training in the field as well as intimate knowledge of the horses.
- Licensed Professional Counselor – because of experience and training supports the veterans in the activity. This mental health professional provides the safety and structure to help the veteran learn ways to calm his/her emotional reactivity, generated by their PTSD and life circumstances.
- Peer Support Specialist – transports, answers questions, maintains supervision of the group as the VA representative, covers “the backfield” while the group is working, fills in as needed in the activity, and supports cohesiveness and cooperation with the veterans and CHAPS. This role fills the chinks to help things run smoothly.
- Director – besides doing everything a director does, attends when available, visits with the veterans individually when they’re not in the arena; essentially provides the quiet authority to undergird the program and facilitates it in such a way the veterans knows “the leader” is present and supportive, not absent.

Factors That Affect the Veteran’s Outcomes

- Their interest in being at the program. Attendance is required by the programs in which they are enrolled. While the numbers are very low, there are some veterans who would rather not be at CHAPS.
- How the trauma or issues may be lingering for them
- Their experience, both good and bad, with horses
- Where they are in their treatment program
- The severity of their condition
- Any physical limitations, i.e., bad back, allergies, traumatic brain injuries.
- How they view their condition (mired in their condition, working at going forward and/or wanting to be well).

Staff Presentation and Interaction

- Professional
 - Refrain from being an “everything is peachy keen, sunlight and roses provider.” As one veteran said, “don’t be a softy.”

- Many of the veterans have had experiences that we as lay people can't ever understand unless we've gone through it. Thus, we can't be patronizing, condescending or judgmental.
- Ethical
- No pity
- Non-intrusive
- Follow their lead, i.e., don't want to participate? They're invited each time to participate, but are not pressured to do so.
- However, when they're not participating, they are asked to be close to the working area of the arena, in a designated section. Kibitzing to socialize with others is discouraged. The Peer Support Specialist is very helpful with this.
- If they don't participate in the activity, they're still considered members of the group, and as such-
 - Veterans that are participating may carry non-participating veteran's contributions into the arena for the activity
 - Will be asked to participate in the summary activity
- Make no assumptions about their rank, education, authority, deployment, etc.
- **FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY!**
- Photos are taken with verbal and written permission of the session and with written permission are posted on Facebook and used in our brochures. Copies are also given to the veterans, which they look forward to each week.

The Horses – how are they selected

- Horses are individually selected based on each type of activity that we do at CHAPS
- We have pushy and/or dominant personalities as well as laid-back or low-key personalities
- Our horses range from Haflinger ponies to Percheron draft horses
- Each of these qualities contribute to a particular activity (or activities) for the day
 - Depending on the activity, certain horses facilitate – for example, for a trigger activity, gentle, laid-back horses are used and for outside forces activities, the pushy or dominant horses are brought in.

The Group – Each Week

- Welcome
- The horses are metaphors, symbols of the issues and the facilitators of change.
- Cowboy Code of Ethics – We're a program in the West, and traditional cowboy values support the program - <http://cowboyethics.org/cowboy-ethics/> We ask them to refrain from swearing. We, as the staff, "ride for the brand." This code is reflected in our staff cohesiveness and united presentation to the groups.
- Encourage drinking water – the activities work in the three sections of the brain – the brain stem (runs the body), the limbic system (feeling and memory) and the frontal lobes (processes and makes decisions) and takes energy, often unseen or recognized. Water keeps the brain hydrated for better functioning and processing.
- Structure (see box below) – positive, creates pictures in the mind – presented and discussed with rationales given



Welcome to CHAPS

~

Children, Horses & Adults in Partnership

CHAPS' programs serve children through elders. The horses are trained to be available for all patrons at all times. For the horses to be of service:

- ❖ Keep hands out of the stalls
- ❖ Keep from giving them treats of any kind, which include grass, grain, apples, carrots, etc.
- The ranch that hosts CHAPS is smoke-free. This includes **ALL** tobacco products, **anywhere** on the site and across the road.
- **ONLY** use the porta potty. ~~ANTIQUE ONE~~
- Wearing a helmet, chinstrap buckled, is optional.
- Cell phones and other electronic devices are gathered and placed in a box until the session is over.
- If there is an exceptional circumstance that you must be available to receive a phone call while at CHAPS please make arrangements with the Peer Support Specialist and CHAPS staff.
- Wear shoes that are sturdy and cover and protect the foot and heel. **SANDALS**
- Because some fences are movable, keep from sitting on **ANY** fence.
- The water is not drinkable. Bottled H₂O will be provided.
- If you need snacks, please bring them. They may be stored in the refrigerator in the office.

- Pocket Machine – HeartMath.org – pass it around
- Set intent for the day – intent (achievable in the present) is the desired outcome, refrain from using “intention” (it’s generally either “past” or “future”) or “intending” (it’s a future action, not a present action)
- Autonomic Nervous System discussion/inclusions
 - Parasympathetic – calming mechanism
 - Sympathetic – “fight or flight” mechanism
 - Progressive Relaxation
 - “Fighter’s pump”
 - Hormones for calming activated by making cheeks “smile”
 - Other techniques to calm
 - Tongue to the roof of the mouth – activates the parasympathetic or calming mechanism of the brain
 - Hand position – right thumb touches the pad of the right fore finger and right middle finger, the left thumb touches the pad of the left ring finger and left little finger
- The activity or activities of the day
- Process the activity after its completion
 - Equine Specialist in Mental Health & Learning
 - Personal and interpersonal aspects
- The concluding activity
 - “Did you get your intent, your outcome?”

- “What’s your most significant learning for the day?”
- If it’s the veteran’s last day, a concluding question is “What was your significant learning from the experience?”
- Wrist bands are given the last day to the veteran. They’re from Twin M Design Co (twinmdesign.com or Twin M Design Co on Facebook)

Activities

- Initially, and about every four weeks, working with horses is delivered or reviewed. It includes such as things as:
 - Horses are prey animals – what does that mean
 - How to approach a horse
 - Their scope of vision ahead of them and behind them
 - Herd behavior
 - How to move the horse
- A variety of experiential activities are used. All the activities are ground-only, no riding.
- Content -Activities are chosen based on the group participating and will be modified and/or revised as each group is served.
- Activity works on learning to trust, communicating effectively, coping with triggers, emotional regulation, self-care, asking for help, health boundaries and relationships
 - An example of learning to trust and communicate
 - Activity is Trust Walk
 - Done in pairs – one veteran is blindfolded and leads the horse while the partner is charged with communicating a path through an obstacle course to the blindfolded partner.
 - Another example of this is the Self Care/ Compassion
 - Activity is Egg and Spoon
 - Label the egg with something you want to protect as well as label the horse as outside forces hindering the safety of the thing being protected - lead the horse through an obstacle course

What We’ve Learned

- Many of the veterans that are hesitant at the beginning often come around to participating fully in the experience
- Lots of things can change
- One has to be flexible, ready to “turn on a dime”
- Veterans leave with a different understanding and appreciation for the horse and the program
- Not every veteran wants to be healed
- Capitalize on the “accidents,” those things that just happen and making them positive outcomes.
- Be sensitive to your terrain and understand it may resemble a place or time that is painful to the veteran

Our Future

- CHAPS received a grant to allow expansion from two VA residential mental health groups to six for 2018
- Will be traveling with a pony to the Veteran’s Home of WY and Mountain View Living Center, veteran nursing homes to serve veterans in a familiar environment
- Continue working with the community to serve local veterans through therapeutic riding or driving

Please know, it’s our intention to be as prompt in answering email and phone calls, yet will be doing so around other chores and other program related activities. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

To contact CHAPS:

Email: info@chapswyo.org

Phone: 307-763-6161

Mail address: PMB 201 Sugarland Dr. Suite B, Sheridan WY 82801

Web address: www.chapswyo.org

Facebook: Children Horses and Adults in PartnerShip Equine Assisted Therapies

Our goal was to explain what we do, let you observe a group in process and grow in your understanding of the type of veteran’s work we do using horses. While we know haven’t covered every base, we hope we’ve introduced you to a very rewarding way of how horses can help people heal.

Thank you for being here.

Christina Pescatore, Equine Specialist in Mental Health & Learning
Lynn Gordon, Licensed Professional Counselor

Questions

- ✓ -
- ✓ -
- ✓ -