

Stable Solutions LLC

Equine Assisted Growth & Learning
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Equine Assisted Therapy: Understanding a Growing Modality

Objectives of Presentation:

- Be introduced to the practice of Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) and leave with a fuller understanding of how it works and treatment applications.

**Denise Demick Case, CTRS M.Ed,
EAGALA Certified Mental Health
Specialist**

Denise is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist with twenty years of clinical experience working with traumatic brain injured, spinal cord injured, stroke survivors, alcohol / substance addicted and co-occurring disordered populations. Denise has expertise in using a wide variety of recreational modalities to assist her clients to improve and expand their recreation skills, thus leading them to experience more meaningful and satisfying lives. She is thrilled to be combining her life-long love of horses with her long career of assisting people to heal and grow. In addition, Denise owns her own horse who gives her some of life's greatest joys.

**Keri B. NearyWood,
LMSW, CASAC,
EAGALA Certified Equine
Specialist**

Keri has over 30 years of experience with horses ranging from competition in equitation, hunters / jumpers, natural horsemanship, providing instruction to all levels and ages, owning her own horses, managing stables and studying with horse experts. Keri attributes many life lessons and invaluable skills such as compassion, teamwork, support, and responsibility to horses. Keri is a social worker and CASAC with many years in the field of addictions, working with depression, trauma, anxiety, addictions, and co-occurring disordered populations. In addition to her work at Stable Solutions LLC, Keri works for Twin County Recovery Services.

What is EAGALA?



- Professional non-profit association, established in 1999, to provide resources, education, standards, and support to professionals providing services in Equine Assisted Psychotherapy
- Committed to setting the standard of professional excellence in how horses and humans work together to improve the quality of life and mental health of individuals, families and groups worldwide
- Largest, most established professional organization for this growing modality with 3,500 members in 33 countries
- Provides a certification training program to ensure a specific model of treatment is being provided along with quality assurance (ethics committee and protocol)

What is Equine Assisted Therapy?

- **Equine-assisted therapy is a therapeutic intervention, accompanied by specific goals and structured activities that utilize horses as a catalyst for therapeutic change in its participants.**



Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT)

An experiential modality:

- Trial and error learning by doing
- Reflect on interaction between clients and horses
- Involves clients questioning, investigating, experimenting, solving problems, being creative, and constructing meaning
- Identify current beliefs and attitudes
- Practice new strategies to achieve goals
- Outcomes not known – each experience and solution is unique to the clients and horses



Equine Assisted therapy and learning activities are not Horsemanship or riding lessons. All interactions are ground-based and do not involve getting onto a horse,

Experiential Learning

- The process of making meaning from direct experience.
- Learning through reflection on doing
- Experiential learning is based on the belief that adults learn best when they “do.”



**“I hear and I forget; I see and I remember;
I do and I understand.” Confucius, 550
BC**

Facilitation

Experiential modality – focus of treatment team is on:

- Creating a space for the clients and horses to tell the clients' life stories and write their own subsequent chapters (client-directed)
- Prompt insight and awareness
- Explore the metaphor created by the horses
- Reflect back the learning – bring to conscious level and universal relevance



- A problem solving model of change utilizing therapeutic metaphor to:
 - Look at expanding perceived limitations
 - Allow behavioral practice
 - Facilitate cognitive restructuring



Benefits

- Confidence
- Self efficacy
- Communication
- Trust
- Anxiety reduction
- Resilience
- Impulse modulation
- Social skills
- Assertiveness
- Boundaries
- Creative freedom
- Problem solving



Purpose of the Horse

- Read and react to non verbal communication
- Confront behavior and attitudes
- Act as a metaphor for relationships



EAGALA Model Standards for EAT

- Team facilitation approach consisting of Licensed Mental Health Professional, qualified Equine Specialist (ES), and the horses
- 100% on the ground (no riding)
- Solution-focused model
- Code of Ethics



Why Horses Instead of Other Animals?

- As prey animals, horse have exceptional ability to read non-verbal communication – people must change their own thoughts, attitudes and behaviors to get different results
- Size and strength – opportunity to overcome fear and develop confidence



Observations are
non-interpretive
And
non-judgemental

so the clients can provide their interpretations!



Strength-based, systemic, and solution-oriented focus.

Non-traditional approach

Horses strip down layers of defenses

Challenges maladaptive coping styles



Horses/Family Structures

- Social Structure – “Herd” (family) groups, “bands” and individuals with the “herd”
- Structure and substructures are based on “rank” and require boundaries
- Understanding and enforcement of boundaries are key to emotional and physical safety
- Develop behaviors to deal with demands of living in the “system” structure
- Use keen observation skills
- Seek leadership

Family System (“Herd”) Dynamics

- Work requires focusing on the “process”
- Changes in “system” can be planned or unplanned
- How does “herd” shift?
- Watch interaction or social exchanges between horses
- Seek “homeostasis”



The 5 R's

- Rules, roles, relationships, responsibilities and “rituals”
- Who holds power?
- Who is in leadership position?
- What happens when there is a shift in the system and/or structure?



Research in Support of EAP



- EAGALA Model EAP is solidly grounded in well-established and researched theories of psychotherapy .
- EAGALA Model EAP is a clinical advance on these established practices where the incorporation of horses in psychotherapy in a deliberate, principled, thoughtful and professional manner catalyzes change.
- Clinical success preceded systematic study. EAGALA model EAP has been effectively employed in the treatment of numerous behavioral and emotional disorders.

Research

Clinical successes led to academic interest where numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of EAP.

Randomized Control Group Designs

- Trotter, K., Chandler, C., Goodwin-Bond, D., & Casey, J. (2008). [A comparative study of the efficacy of group equine assisted counseling with at-risk children and adolescents.](#) *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, Vol. 3(3), 254-284.
- Russell-Martin, L.A. (2006). [Equine facilitated couples therapy and Solution Focused couples therapy: A comparative study.](#) Doctorate of Philosophy, Northcentral University.





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EAGALA serves as a resource for:

- Identification of best practices
- Referrals – Certified professionals
- Standards and Accountability
- Replicable programs
- Training and continuing education
- Research and evaluation
- Partner to provide an adjunct treatment
- Outreach and information

www.eagala.org