

Calvin Center Horses for Heroes What has worked for us – so far!

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- Have passion! “It’s gotta happen!” – soldier with PTSD
- Play to your strengths! “Don’t reinvent the wheel” – Instructor Mary Vardi, T.R.O.T. (Therapeutic Riding of Tucson)
- Be persistent! “Take your body there” – Mary Jo Beckman, PATH International Horses for Heroes Committee liaison
- The Veterans Administration is your ally! “We believe in this program!” – Social Worker at the Atlanta VA Medical Center
- Be persistent!

“It’s gotta happen!”

This was the comment from a Ft. Hood soldier, suffering from PTSD, regarding whether a center should consider starting a Horses for Heroes program.

- Unless you have passion for starting a Horses for Heroes program, you probably shouldn’t even consider it.
 - Calvin Center “began” our program November, 2009, and had its first session February, 2011.
 - Be willing to talk to anyone! At anytime - anyplace! With business card in hand!

- Program is unlike other equine-assisted programs, because the participants and volunteers are unlike other clientele.
 - There are different strengths and vulnerabilities between adult vets and non-vets
 - Program leaders and instructors need to familiarize themselves with military/VA terminology and culture
 - PTSD and TBI are major participant group indicators
 - Simply getting to the center can be a challenge for someone suffering from PTSD

“Don’t reinvent the wheel!”

- Work with physically challenged adults before starting a program

- Develop program goals:
 - No “magic goal”
 - You can’t be all things to all people
 - Use what you already have and make it work

 - Be safe

 - Have fun

 - Create a community of veterans

 - Allow participants to set reasonable, but challenging goals – set them up to succeed

- Start small, simple, comfortable – get the “feel” for working with vets
 - Be prepared to be rigid in some things and flexible in others
 - The military mind-set appreciates punctuality and structure (volunteers)

 - With participants, be flexible at all times regarding scheduling and participation, realizing that just getting out of their comfort zone by coming to the barn may be a huge hurdle some days

- Develop a pilot program, based on the strengths of your center
 - Determine cost and seek funding
 - Grant-writing
 - Local church groups
 - Veteran support organizations
 - VA sources (we're still working on this!)
 - Make contact with local VA
 - Participants come from referrals from the VA
 - Recreation Therapy Department
 - Chaplain
 - Physical Therapy Department
 - Mental Health Department
 - Public Affairs Officer
 - Army Wounded Warrior Program Office
 - Nursing/Retirement Homes
 - Local hospitals
 - Work with referring doctor, to assure that paperwork meets both VA and your center standards
 - Volunteers come from local veterans' organizations – American Legion, VFW, National Guard
 - “this is a job for grown-up workers”
 - Be prepared to listen as a friend – do not try to advise or ask questions such as “how does that make you feel?”

- Don't be afraid of developing a friendly relationship with your participants
 - Train volunteers just the same as you do your regular volunteers – they will be the “team” members for the participants, so need to be knowledgeable in grooming, tacking, side-walking, leading, etc
 - Volunteers form teams with participants, with each team working together each week.
 - Volunteers are eager to do whatever they can to make the program work – even mucking out stalls to make the barn presentable!
- Create a welcoming environment
 - Have a gathering area
 - Offer refreshments

“Take your body there!”

- Visit the VA, veterans' groups, church groups, civic organizations at every opportunity
- Don't give up – a soldier/sailor/Marine/airman never gives up. It can easily take 2-3 years to get a program started.
- Make a presentation folder to take any time you give a presentation. Leave it behind.

“We believe in this program!”

- Model the values that inspire confidence – for both VA personnel as well as participants
 - Dedication
 - Patience
 - Confidence
 - Knowledge
 - Discretion
- Once permission is granted, cultivate media relationships
- Invite VA personnel to visit your center anytime they can

The VA sees our program for what it offers these Wounded Warriors. The need is there and the opportunity is ours. We have heard testimony from participants and from medical personnel who all say that it works in ways that traditional therapy doesn't. It brings the patient from the clinical setting into a fun, challenging environment, surrounded by friends. And more and more I am amazed at the VA personnel who tell me of the difference an animal has made in their own lives. For no other reason than this, they believe. And such is the power of the horse!

Articles and Stories About PATH Intl. Horses for Heroes

- February 2011: PATH Intl. Horses for Heroes at Central Kentucky Riding for the Handicapped
- February, 2011: PATH Intl. Horses for Heroes Photo Essay by Martha McNeil at DreamPower
- November 2010. This video was filmed in October 2010 and was shown on KTEH-TV in California the week before Thanksgiving. Jeremiah Ridgeway, a US Army Calvary Scout with the 10th Mountain Division, served 15 months in combat in Afghanistan. He is now a civilian working with the VA and with DreamPower Horsemanship (San Martin, CA) PATH Intl. Horses for Heroes.
- March/April 2010: U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs magazine, Vanguard, highlights the story "High in the Saddle" (pages 16-19)
- Fall 2009: PATH Intl. Strides Magazine story, "Heroes on Horses: Partnering With Veteran's Groups"
- Spring 2009: PATH Intl. Strides Magazine story, "Riding Rehab"
- May 11, 2008: Haverill Gazette story, "Shaking the Horrors of War"
- Spring 2008: PATH Intl. Strides Magazine story, "Serving the Older Veteran"
- July 4, 2007: CBS Evening News Story "The Horses of Arlington"
- April 2007: North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc. Establishes "Horses for Heroes" Program (press release)
- Fall 2006: PATH Intl. Strides Magazine story, "I Will Never Leave a Fallen Comrade"