

9. Please describe the nature of your work at the PATH Intl. center or describe your career plan after completing your EAAT coursework.

I am a counseling intern at the Rocky Top Therapy Center in Keller, Texas. I work exclusively with veterans and their family members through the center's Horses for Heroes program. I chose this internship site because of the work we are doing with veterans and the support that equine-assisted psychotherapy has gotten through a Texas Veterans Commission grant that funds our program.

I am a veteran of 21 years that includes two combat deployments to Iraq. When I came home, I recognized the need I had for both myself and my family to seek out reintegration counseling. My children participated in an equine-assisted counseling program in Pilot Point, Texas. After I experienced firsthand the power of this therapy to heal, I was completely hooked. I left my flying job at United Airlines and entered the master's program in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at the University of North Texas. From the beginning, my hope has been to work with other veterans in an EAP program. I studied with Dr. Cynthia Chandler in both her Animal Assisted Therapy course and my Practicum. When I learned of the work that Rocky Top was doing with veterans, I decided to do my internship there.

10. What are your goals in the field of equine assisted activities and therapies?

I graduate from UNT in December and hope to continue to develop the field of EAP in the veteran/military population. I have seen tremendous success already with this often difficult to reach population. I believe that the mental health needs of the veteran community are going to be extensive over the next few years as an additional half million combat veterans attempt to re-enter civilian life. I am not confident in the ability of traditional therapy to meet the needs of this unique group. I do however, believe that EAP offers exactly what this population needs --- a counseling environment that achieves insight and change by coming in beneath their radar and leveraging the amazing therapeutic power of the horse. This emerging therapy is wide-open with endless possibilities for healing a population with which I share a very deep bond.

11. How do you think attending the PATH Intl. National Conference and Annual Meeting will help you in your work and goals in the field of equine assisted activities and therapies?

The literature on this modality and its success with veterans is sparse. Furthermore, my exposure to EAP is limited to what I have learned from the very small staff at Rocky Top and my own clinical experience. I believe that the chance to learn from the leaders in the military/equine-assisted psychotherapy field would be invaluable to my professional development. With this experience base, I could better leverage this incredible animal as a true co-therapist in my work with veterans. I would then be well-positioned to build upon my background as a combat veteran and become a leader in the development of programs that serve other veterans through equine-assisted therapies.