



MSU Veterans Horsemanship Program



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Our Story

- 2 Person Team
- 27 Veterans Served
- Natural Horsemanship Centered
- 6-10 Week Length
- Class size – Average 3 Veterans
- Trial and Error





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What is the MSU Veteran's Horsemanship Program?

- 10 week natural horsemanship based program provided each spring and fall and 6 weeks in the summer
- Open to anyone who has served our country in the armed forces and is not restricted with regard to theatre.
- The goal of the program is to promote wellness and facilitate healing for Veterans





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How We Started

- We volunteered for the Semper Fi Fund's Jinx McCain Horsemanship Program
- One Veteran showed up at the arena and asked for help with his horse
- We added two other Veterans





Beginning Of Sessions

- Complete participation paperwork
- MHP administers self-report assessments such as the PCL-5 for PTSD
- Introductions
- Pick out their horse in the arena



Groundwork



- Creates a bond
- Develops confidence in the Veteran and the horse
- Creates comfort
- Creates trust
- Creates safety
- Amount done depends on what the Veteran needs



Groundwork Leads To A Better Riding Experience



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Riding

- Be Quiet
- Be flexible – ride when ready
- Have the one rein stop in place before they mount
- Turn off your micromanager button
- Trust them to learn at their own pace
- Everything works together in natural horsemanship – from ground to saddle
- Challenge and advance





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Safety Goals

- Safety around horses
- Emotional safety in the arena
- What happens at the arena stays at the arena – they won't hear their business in town
- Ask them what their goals are for horsemanship and for this experience as a whole
- No judgment zone
- Allow people to learn through making mistakes
- We close the arena down - participants only



Quotes



- I have been retired from the military for several years and I still had nightmares; they are completely gone since I started this program.
- Before this I had no joy – now I can experience joy. It's really cool what a horse can do for you.
- These horses have taught me how to trust again...





Benefits

- Know the benefits so you can promote the program to Veterans and supporters
- Hope
- Decreased symptoms for PTSD
- Decreased symptoms for anxiety and depression
- Learn better regulation of emotional responses
- Decreased anger
- Better sleep
- Horses provide metaphors, especially helpful in developing self awareness
- Develop self - confidence





No, Don't, Stop...

- Remove these words from your vocabulary
- They said if it has the word “therapy” in it then they aren't coming
- We don't have volunteers
- We don't have visitors
- Each Veteran has his own horse for the duration of sessions





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- Humor can fix a lot of issues
- Boundaries
- Ethics
- Integrity – do what you say you're gonna do
- Dignity
- When you don't know what else to do - listen





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After Riding



- We debrief ...
- What did you learn from your horse today?
- What was your favorite thing today?





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End Of Sessions

- Administer Program Satisfaction Survey
- MHP can administer self-report assessments such as the PCL-5 for PTSD
- Celebrate with food and prizes



Veterans and Families



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Starting A Veterans Horsemanship Program



- Start small
- Recruit locally – friends, Veterans organizations, University, resource fairs, Church, and invite yourself!
- Build on your strengths
- Use what ya got
- BE FLEXIBLE
- Ouch... Be willing to listen to what they didn't like





What If?

- Have a plan for the what ifs...
- Be trained in mental health first aid
- Be familiar with VA resources online and in your community
- VA Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) press 1 for Veterans





Best Advice We Ever Got

- Really LISTEN and take in what people say to you and about you (your program) that is critical...
- If it is something that you believe is true – then start working on it.
- If it is something that you don't feel is true about you – then let it gooooo.





Do Your Homework

- Volunteer with a Veterans horsemanship program, outdoors program, athletic program, or any Veterans program to help you gain cultural competence
- Interview Veterans that you know
- Take online courses
- Take natural horsemanship clinics
- Build competence in de-escalation
- Veterans are service oriented – emphasize how they will be helping the center by attending





- There's one in every group...
- Approach difficulties with curiosity – What is this about? What can I learn from this?
- The end.

