

press release

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EAGALA Military Services Launches Helping Veterans, Active Military, their Families, and Families of the Fallen Combat PTSD, Trauma, and Behavioral Challenges Through Equine Assisted Therapy



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SANTAQUIN, Utah, Sept. 7, 2011 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- MOVE STREAMLINES INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS UNDER ONE UMBRELLA SETTING NATIONAL STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION AND FACILITATING ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE TREATMENT






In a move to streamline hundreds of equine assisted programs across the country and help veterans, active military, their families and families of the fallen gain access to much needed therapy, the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association has formed EAGALA Military Services, it was announced by Lynn Thomas, Founder and Executive Director of the nonprofit. A Military Task Force will focus on five key areas: Research, Community Education, Government Relations, Member Training and Program Development. EAGALA Certified Mental Health and Equine professionals have been working with this population since 1999 treating emotional, mental and behavioral issues ranging from PTSD, TBI, depression and addiction to combat stress, reintegration, grief and family trauma. According to the VA's National Center for PTSD, occurrence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder may be as high as 20% in veterans of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom (New Dawn) and 30% of Vietnam Veterans. According to a recent RAND report (April 2008) only slightly more than half of these have sought treatment. Since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, more than 1,100 soldiers have taken their own lives, with last year alone 301 soldiers committing suicide - a new record, as reported by the Army.

Recently, EAGALA met with key ranking officers from the Behavioral Division of the Army of the Surgeon General, the office of the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army MEDCOM Warrior Transition Command, The Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Human Performance Resource Center to demonstrate the Model of equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP). Unlike therapeutic riding, EAGALA model EAP utilizes ground-based activities where horses serve as metaphors, such as representing relationships with family or unit members, fears, strengths or aspects of self. "According to a growing number of professionals, horse therapy can be significantly more productive than traditional talk therapy and can be used either as a short term approach for those facing re-deployment or as a longer treatment aiding many in reintegration into civilian and family life or in dealing with the potential trigger effects of the 9/11 anniversary," said Thomas.

According to a pilot program conducted by Refuge Services, an EAGALA Military Services Program in Texas, after only six sessions, veterans and their spouses reported up to 60% improvement in severity of marital problems including physical and verbal abuse, financial disputes, parenting choices, forgiveness and time together. Couples also reported up to 50% improvement in conflict resolution, emotional closeness, trust, sex, anger and respect. "For someone in the military like me, it is hard to swallow my pride and ask for help. This was a safe environment to open up in. Sometimes the horses talked for me and helped show me the path to help my marriage," stated an officer in the study.

"The EAGALA Model uses the horse to gain insight into behaviors and perceptions. The horse's reactions provide unbiased and real time feedback, breaking through the barriers that many military members experience in conversations with others who cannot begin to understand what we feel because we made it back. EAP provides a strategy for dealing with

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trauma in a way that makes sense to military service members," stated Jimmy L. Walters, COL, USA (Ret).

"Horses are the best therapists for many veterans, because most vets don't want talk therapy," says Julie Giove Sardonja, MA, LMFT, a therapist in California. "Healing happens in nature, especially for the military. A soldier's relationship with a horse can provide emotional insights and self-understanding," she concluded.

"We have conducted a number of EAGALA EAP sessions with our veterans focusing on coping resources, resilience and anger management. Across the board, veteran participants have said never have they found a group or individual session so useful and life-changing, and that they have found hope. After these workshops, many reflect frequently on the experience and skills learned then take them into their daily lives," said Susan T. Lisi, AFGE Local 3306 Chief Steward, VA Medical Center in Canandaigua, New York.

"I have been to so many therapists and nothing worked. The horses put it right in your face - it's intense, but it works for me," said a female soldier who served 7 years and was diagnosed with PTSD.

The EAGALA Military Services program will generate and monitor research and assessment projects such as those above and continue to educate, recruit and inform professionals on both sides of the spectrum to the efficacy and availability of horse related therapies for our servicemembers and their families.

As a 23 year active duty member of Special Forces reported, "I had my missions and I got them done ... that's why I was needed and what counted. ... I don't know why these horses understand what I am feeling but they do - and they still accept me. It has made it possible for me to not just be a tool in the military, but to get re-connected with my family and myself."

Why EAGALA?

EAGALA is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization developed in 1999 to address the need for resources, education and professionalism in the fields of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning. The association has set the standard for professional excellence in how horses and humans work together to improve the quality of life and mental health of individuals, families and groups worldwide. In partnership with the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF), EAGALA provides an opportunity for a second career for horses retired from racing. EAGALA has more than 3,500 members in 40 countries. For more information on EAGALA Military Services, go to <http://eagala.org/military> . Photos available.

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SOURCE Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA)

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