

EQUINE ASSISTED VETERAN SERVICES (EAVS)

2016 REPORT

A collaborative service of Aleda Lutz VAMC and PEACE Ranch of Traverse City.



"It all started at PEACE. I was so low I couldn't see a way out. Now I can. I'm confident again."
 OEF/OIF Veteran

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

92% of respondents experienced improvement:

- decreased physical tension,
- decreased anxiety,
- improved mental focus

Why is this important? The brain develops from the bottom up.

According to the Neurosequential Model of Trauma, nothing can happen unless the lower areas of the brain are calm. When calm, an individual can access abstract thought, attachment, and emotion regulation.

'Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past. It is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present.'

'Helping victims of trauma find the words to describe what has happened to them is profoundly meaningful but usually it is not enough. The act of telling the story doesn't necessarily alter the automatic physical and hormonal responses of bodies that remain hypervigilant, prepared for assault or violation at any time. For real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present.' ***The Body Keeps The Score, Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD***

TERROR	ALARM	ALERT	CALM
Autopilot, no control over actions – no memory of what has happened, no learning.	Act out or disengage (daydreams), fight or flight mechanism is activated. No clear thinking - learning is impossible	Stress of learning new things can be handled – ability to work with others, share responsibility, interact.	Access to higher parts of the brain & past knowledge, ability to create something new, abstract thought, mental flexibility, imagination, learning, play.

(Bruce Perry, Neurosequential Model of Education, childtrauma.org.)

SAFETY AND TERROR ARE INCOMPATIBLE. HOW IS SAFETY DETERMINED?

The principles of the EAVS program and the natural environment of the ranch assist the veteran in creating safety based on their physical, sensory, and emotional needs. There is no pressure of physical proximity, verbal engagement or identifying a problem. The veteran is not ‘coached’ but experiences safety in their own way.



*‘I’ve tried a lot of different kinds of therapy but this has worked better than anything.’
-OEF/OIF Veteran*

HORSES MAKE THE WOUND AND RECOVERY *VISIBLE*:

Veterans with trauma and horses (prey animals) are ‘wired’ in a similar way. The horse makes visible the source of the veteran’s troubles – hypervigilance, reactivity, caution- and the path to recovery. Through observation, self-regulation and connection, the veteran learns to re-write the story of trauma on a sensory and cognitive level.

ENGAGEMENT:

When veterans in the EAVS program experience immediate symptom relief, something happens: the risk to reach out is positively reinforced and therefore further engagement is likely. Based on anecdotal reports, veterans in the EAVS program demonstrated more engagement with VA services, (mental health services, primary care) and reported improvement/expansion in their personal lives. The saying, ‘You can’t be good in the barn and bad at home’ applies – changes experienced in the EAVS program have a ripple effect on other aspects of life. This may be an area for further study.



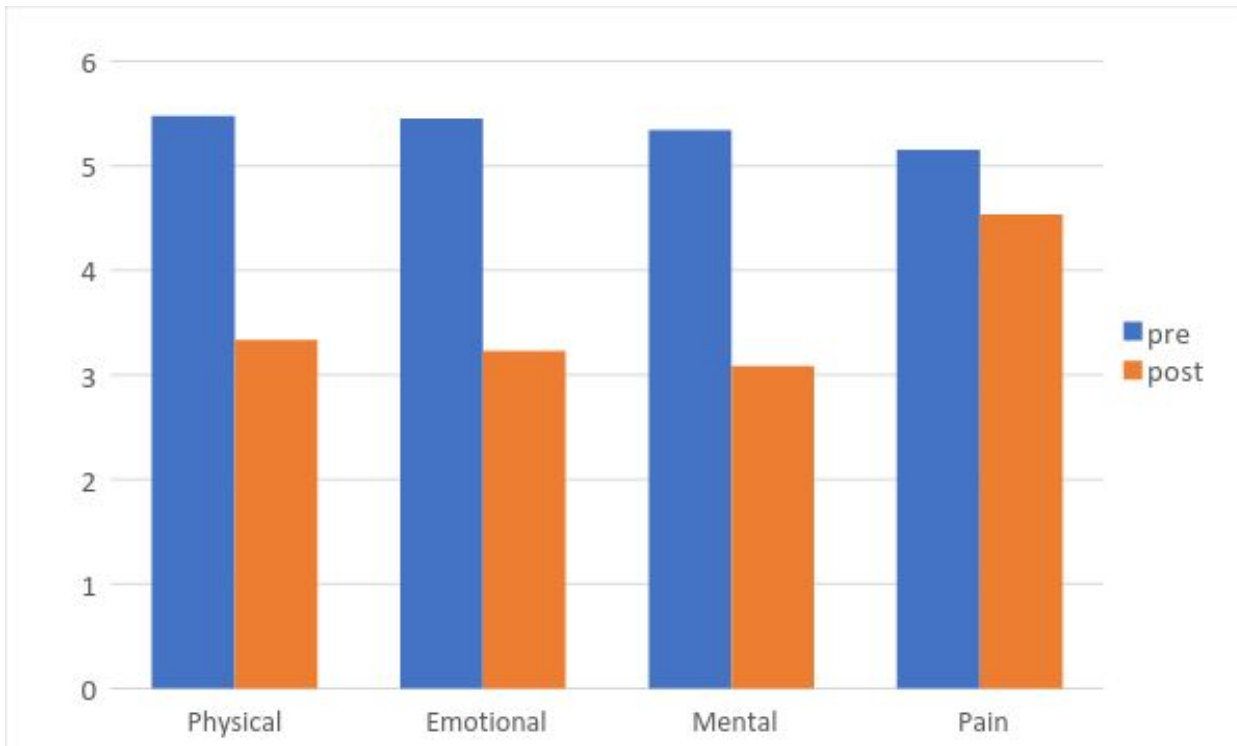
“I don’t talk” OEF/OIF Veteran

VETERAN ACCESS:

EAVS is the only program offering after hours/evening appointments AND a direct phone line. This was the only mental health option for veterans in the program who work or attend school during the day.

PAIN REDUCTION:

Pain was added to the check-in/check-out sheet about mid-way through the 2016 season: 41% of respondents reported a reduction in pain, 45% reported no change and 14% reported an increase.



Results are significant – (p value of less than 0.05 so the decrease in each symptom is real, not random). The decrease in pain is lower than the reduction of the other 3 symptoms, but is still happening. Data is collected by self-report on the following scale at check in and check out.

My Body is: Calm _____ Tense
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Mind is: Focused _____ Scattered
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I Am: Relaxed _____ Anxious
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Pain is: No Pain _____ Worst Pain
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

‘WIN/WIN’ - COMMUNITY COLLABORATION PROVIDES ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO VETERANS:

- collaboration with PEACE Ranch brings many benefits to veterans and the VA.
- annual in-kind donation of \$49,100
- staff and volunteer resources
- promotes strong community relationships with the VA
- provides additional community for veterans
- highly positive press related to veteran’s services, (see below):



Jack's Journal: PEACE Ranch Cabin
 Posted: Dec 19, 2016 12:18 PM EST Updated: Dec 19, 2016 4:37 PM EST By Jack O'Malley

It's an essential part of the Christmas wish -- peace on earth. But for some veterans, that can be

hard to find, even during the holidays.

Jack O'Malley introduces us to two Vietnam veterans creating a haven so those who served can heal in this week's Jack's Journal. Our story is about a cabin but begins with Vietnam vets coming to a place called [PEACE Ranch](#) to find healing. "It's the type of therapy that is really helpful with people who've had traumatic experiences that they really can't talk about," says Jackie Kaschel.

The term is moral injury, things done in war that the soul has to reconcile with when back in civilian life. A group of Vietnam vets came to Peace Ranch to work it through. One day they took a walk around the grounds, looking for a place to start on a project. "We walked around the property and they chose this place, and they were talking together and they formulated a plan for a place for veterans to come and just be at peace," explains Jackie. "We had several ideas and we finally decided to build a cabin that can be passed on to the future, other veterans that might need it," says veteran Larry Lelito. Veterans that might need to find a quiet place to meet, to think, to heal. They named it LZPR, Landing Zone PEACE Ranch.

The boys will have it finished soon. The spot Jackie tells me was chosen specifically by the vets for its military standpoint. It's back against a hill, you can see all the way around. It's a safe location. Visiting vets have commented noticing the location. War is war, no matter the conflict, and when returning home these Vietnam vets knew what it was like to have no welcome, no support. They promised to help the young guys. "We kind of made a pact that we aren't going to let this happen to any other veterans. We are going to reach out and help them," says Larry.



Traverse City Veterans Therapy Program with Horses Expands

Posted: Apr 25, 2016 6:34 PM EDT Updated: May 02, 2016 6:34 PM EDT, By Megan Woods, Reporter

Veterans with PTSD can now get more help in Northern Michigan at a very peaceful place.

The Veterans Health Administration expanded their partnership with PEACE Ranch in Traverse City. The two partner for a therapy program that uses rescue horses on the ranch to help veterans with PTSD. For the past three years a licensed mental health professional has worked with veterans at the ranch for eight hours a week. The program's success has led the VHA to double those hours.

Executive Director of PEACE Ranch, Jackie Kaschel, says, "More time at PEACE Ranch means that more veterans will successfully be able to deal with the PTSD that is confining them in their lives and basically coming out here gives them new life." The program helps more than 170 veterans a year. PEACE Ranch hopes the expansion will double that number.

'WELCOME HOME' VIDEO PROJECT:

In 2015, Vietnam Veterans from the VA/PEACE program harnessed their ideas about being "thanked for their service" to make an educational video. Their project was taken on by Luke Broyles, a video prodigy and student at Interlochen High School. Each Veteran was interviewed at PEACE Ranch and the compilation of these interviews were synthesized into a documentary video the Veterans titled 'Welcome Home'. The first preview of the film occurred at the 2016 VA Conference in Traverse City, MI



Welcome Home has received the National Young Arts Foundation Medal Award.

Welcome Home has been invited to the following film festivals thus far:

GI Film Festival Washington DC

Scout Film Festival Vermont

Envision Film Festival

Pine River Student Film Festival

Arizona International Film Festival





Fear Becomes Safety.

Safety Becomes Presence.

Presence Becomes Trust.

Trust becomes Risk.

Risk Becomes Engagement.

Engagement Becomes Confidence.

Confidence Becomes Leadership.

Leadership Becomes Hope.

HOPE IS LIFE.

2017 Recommendations

1. Continue provision of equine assisted psychotherapy for Veterans in individual and group sessions expanding as necessary to meet the need.
2. Continue to assess and improve program.
3. Collaboratively consider program expansion within VSON 10 and statewide in response to need.
4. Explore new funding sources.