

Assisted Learning (EAL). EAC is an experience-based program in which a licensed therapist and a professional horseman work with the participant to set treatment goals and manipulate treatments for the participant to best excel. Due to the intense nature of the program, the sessions are highly effective and are considered a “brief approach” treatment, where, much like in hippotherapy, the sessions conclude upon the client’s completion of set goals. This approach allows participants to learn about the relationships between themselves and others by interacting with the horses and then discussing emotion and behavior with the therapist. EAL focuses on learning and education more than emotion and behavior and usually occurs in a group setting, rather than one-on-one.

“An individual may be struggling with anxiety and working with a horse may offer a new perspective into how to become aware and mindful of the internal sensations, as well as relate the anxieties horses experience when they encounter new situations or re-encounter ones that may prompt an unhealthy reaction,” Eller says. “Either way, the participant is able to experience the relationship with an animal that may offer insight into a new way of thinking, resolving old problems, habits, or thinking that is not offered in a traditional office setting.”

Eller believes that HSU is capable of practicing both the EAGALA model and PATH International’s therapeutic riding model, since many HSU students, faculty, and staff already volunteer with

the HERO program which provides hippotherapy to children and adults in the Abilene area.

“The participants who benefit most usually have some mobility difficulties, where riding a horse provides improvements to movement, social, language, and communication, as well as attitude and improvements to overall well-being,” says Eller.

Become a Part of the Legacy!

Building on a rich history of being focused on students, their well-being and serving our community, HSU has a strong vision for the future. You can make a difference in the lives of students who would benefit from equine therapy, and patients in the community who would also utilize these services. You have the opportunity to give back to your community and to Hardin-Simmons University.

To give toward the new HSU Equine Therapy Complex, contact: University Advancement 325.670.1260 or advancement@hsutx.edu



This is an artist’s rendering of what HSU’s Equine Facility could look like. We are still in the process of working with designers to finalize our facility.

OUR PARTNERS IN *Healing*



With a desire to offer more and better counseling programs, Hardin-Simmons University has launched a fund-raising drive for a new equine-assisted therapy center.

In the fall of 2017, HSU began offering equine-assisted therapy to students, faculty and staff, but the lack of an adequate facility is preventing HSU from growing the program.

“There is a big movement toward animal-assisted programs, therapies, activities, and services. These include service animals, emotional support animals, and animal-assisted programs such as the equine-assisted ones. ... It is a good move for HSU, especially considering our western heritage, the Six White Horse Program, and the needs within our student population, amongst our faculty and staff, and within our local and regional community,” says Melissa Milliorn, professor of social work at HSU.

Equine-assisted therapy is a form of physical and psychotherapy that uses horses to promote emotional growth, physical mobility, and behavioral awareness.



HARDIN-SIMMONS
UNIVERSITY

Many HSU programs could benefit from an expanded equine-assisted therapy project. For example, HSU’s counseling department would be able to offer sessions to students who may be uncomfortable in a traditional office-setting, while the physical and occupational therapy programs would have access to another means of therapy that assists patients both mentally and physically. The program also would act alongside the new Houston-Lantrip Center to aid those with learning disabilities in the Abilene community.

An improved program also would provide students with ample opportunities for volunteer hours, as well as equine-based program experience and training, and would act as a resource for students as well as the Abilene and West Texas communities. The university also would be able to provide a certification program for students aiming to enter therapy positions.

“Adding the therapeutic riding/hippotherapy component is possible and

on the horizon for our students, staff, and volunteers,” says HSU counselor Steven B. Eller, MMFT, LPC.

HSU currently offers Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association, or EAGALA, sessions at the Beazley White Horse Center and has been offering demonstrations, as well as group and individual sessions, since 2017. Most of these sessions take place in the outdoor arena, rather than in the barn, as the indoor space is not a suitable location for private sessions.

“If HSU had an enclosed arena, we would be able to partner with other agencies in town, as well as begin to grow our own entity of providing equine therapy services,” says Eller.

He lists multiple other benefits of an expanded program with an enclosed arena.

“... An equine therapy program could also bring in outside interests such as trainings and workshops, research opportunities, partnerships with local

agencies and organizations such as West Texas Rehab, Hendrick Home, HERO (Hendrick Equine Rehabilitation Opportunities), MVPN (Military Veteran Peer Network), and even Dyess Air Force Base. As this program develops, and our ability to provide a consistent service is needed and expected, an indoor arena would be an expectation, not only for climate control and comfort, but for confidentiality, privacy, and professionalism.”

Eller received his EAGALA certification in 2009 and began providing equine-assisted therapy to couples and individuals in the Abilene area soon after. He then started training with Refuge Services in Lubbock, and upon completion of his certification, began providing equine-assisted counseling to students, faculty, and staff at another university. During this time, Eller also taught a course called Introduction to Equine Assisted Counseling and Learning, where students both sat in lecture and experienced equine-based sessions on a farm. Alongside

instructing courses, Eller submitted two chapters that were included in the book, Harnessing the Power of Equine Assisted Counseling.

“I was amazed at the genuine connection a horse provides, and how the components of play therapy are implemented in this work,” says Eller.

In 2012, Eller started offering equine-based services through his private practice to families, children and adolescents, active and retired military personnel, and patients struggling with hardships such as loss, grief and chronic illness.

Equine-assisted therapy has allowed Eller to explore many avenues and help a wide range of individuals. He has volunteered as a side walker with the HERO program and has provided workshops and sessions to military families through the Abilene chapter of MVPN. He has also worked under contracts with ACADIA to assist in-patient clients, and with Hendrick Home for Children to aid single mothers and children.

In 2016, Eller partnered with the Lone Survivor Foundation, which, according to the organization’s website, aids the one in three military veterans who “suffer from signature wounds such as invisible injuries of combat trauma.” Eller works as one of the equine-assisted mental health professionals who participate in three-day retreats offered to active or retired military members struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder or mild traumatic brain injuries and their families.

DIFFERENT EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPIES

Equine-assisted activities and therapies emphasize hippotherapy, or therapeutic riding, which is used to improve neurological functioning, cognition, body movement, organization, and mental focus. Hippotherapy uses horseback riding to improve functions both on and off a horse and is a one-on-one experience between the participant and therapist. The therapist regularly evaluates the client’s progress and works

to assess and modify the treatment based on how the client responds to various activities until the client successfully fulfills previously decided upon discharge criteria.

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (or PATH) International’s focus on hippotherapy and therapeutic riding typically assists anyone seeking increased mobility or improved communication. PATH International offers training and certification to those looking to provide therapy through horseback riding.

In this style of session, three volunteers accompany each rider. Two of these walk alongside the horse and hold the rider steady, while the third acts as a leader, who guides the horse to various stations throughout the arena. Patients eventually become comfortable on the horse and sync its movement to their own, allowing them to improve strength and balance. The rider also may gain an improved sense of trust, as the horse interacts with obstacles or stimuli in the arena.

In 1999, EAGALA emerged as a different form of equine-assisted therapy which focuses solely on ground work and does not involve the participants ever mounting a horse. The horse becomes a partner whose goal is to provide resistance and experiential learning for participants. This model focuses on four points: all sessions take place entirely on the ground; a licensed mental health professional, an equine specialist, and the horse comprise a treatment team; sessions are solution focused and provide experiential learning to participants; a professional environment is maintained based on EAGALA’s ethical standards.

EAGALA sessions are available to anyone who is looking for therapeutic assistance, including individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, traumatic experiences, and some medical traumas. Clients can participate as an individual, as a couple, a group, or a family. Sessions are also commonly used as a team building activity for corporate groups.

The EAGALA model includes two distinct branches: Equine-Assisted Counseling (EAC) and Equine-

Steve Eller has watched as his patients have benefited from equine therapy. He believes this type of therapy could help the community.

Equine-assisted therapy can benefit individuals with:

- Attention deficit disorder or other hyperactivity disorder
- Amputation
- At risk-youth
- Autism
- Cerebral palsy
- Developmental delay
- Down syndrome
- Emotional behavioral difficulties
- Family counseling
- Grief counseling
- Learning disabilities
- Muscular dystrophy
- Multiple sclerosis
- Paralysis
- Reactive attachment disorder
- Spina bifida
- Spinal cord injury
- Substance addiction and abuse
- Terminal illness
- Traumatic brain injuries
- Visual and auditory impairment
- Weight control disorders
- Strokes

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