



# HORSE POWER



Serving  
wounded service personnel and veterans



## “HORSES FOR HEROES” PROGRAM NARHA APPLICATION



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## **NARHA's "Horses for Heroes" Program at Horse Power** **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. How did Horse Power's "Horses for Heroes" Program get started and what does Horse Power have to offer for staff, facilities and equipment?**

The Board of Directors, Staff and Donors of Horse Power, a NARHA Premier Accredited Center and a NARHA Approved Training Site, heartily endorse welcoming the veterans and/or wounded service members to our existing programs.

In 2007 and 2008, Horse Power's team set about preparing its string of horses, tack, facility and teaching team of certified instructors and volunteers to successfully and safely meet the needs of veterans of all ages and with differing disabilities.

Numerous training sessions and consultations were undertaken from 2007 to 2009 by Isabella Martin, M.Ed., the Founder of Horse Power, and lead instructor for Horse Power's "Horses for Heroes". Isabella is both a NARHA and CHA Master Instructor, a NARHA Therapeutic Driving Instructor, Level III, and has served on many NARHA committees. She has also been the co-founder of the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association of NARHA. She is also the co-author of "Equine Facilitated Mental Health...the Guidebook for Practice." In these capacities, she has presented at numerous regional and national conferences over the last 20 years. She has been awarded the American Riding Instructors' Association Riding Instructor of the Year. She has received the award for NH Horse Person of the Year. She is the recent recipient of NARHA's James Brady Lifetime Achievement award at the 2009 national conference for her contributions to the field of therapeutic riding and driving.

Horse Power enjoys the use of an extensive equestrian facility with multiple outdoor riding arenas and a large indoor arena. In addition to two large barns, it also has classroom facilities, as well as a lodge on site to accommodate both veterans and their families. Approximately 20 to 25 horses and ponies reside on site. These mounts have been selected for their willingness to work, gentle behavior and ability to provide a safe experience for individuals of all ages. They have been well trained to accommodate both mounted and un-mounted activities.

Horse Power has a staff of NARHA several certified therapeutic riding instructors and one therapeutic driving instructor all of whom have the desire and ability to work with veterans and their families. A community corps of volunteers is also ready, trained and willing to provide services to veterans. These services include not only working in the ring or barns with the veterans and/or their families, but also cooking meals, providing transportation and assisting with work study/vocational opportunities.

In addition, Horse Power has sufficient helmets, saddles, ramps and teaching facilities which will meet the needs of taller or heavier individuals.

The Horse Power Therapeutic Driving Club has worked diligently since 2007 to expand the therapeutic driving program at the farm. This opportunity will be available to veterans with both pleasure driving horses as well as draft horses. Again, NARHA certified driving instructors are ready and eager to serve veterans. At least 10 horses and large ponies with suitable vehicles and harness are trained and ready to accommodate veterans who exceed the weight and height limit established for the horses in our riding program.

Finally, Horse Power has the opportunity to offer expanded services to either veterans and/or their children in our farm animal barn and extensive gardens. Many programming opportunities exist on the farm where Horse Power operates to meet the social, therapeutic and recreational needs of our veterans and their families.

In 2009, the Horse Power team determined that we were ready to open our doors for pilot programs to serve veterans. The first two pilot programs to be offered were in partnership with Monadnock Family Services (MFS) and the Veterans' Homestead. Both of these organizations are well respected not-for-profits serving veterans.

The longest running collaboration has been with the Veterans Center under the direction of AJ Paige, a veteran himself, and a certified psychotherapist and Veterans' Benefits Counselor. This Veterans' Center is part of Monadnock Family Services of Keene, NH. With the Executive Director of MFS, Jaymee Collins, and AJ Paige, Horse Power began a once a month day long program to serve veterans of all wars who were dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. As many as 14 veterans attended each session, beginning in April and culminating in December of 2009. Many of the group members also brought their children, and some times their wives, making it a family day.

The format of these sessions was as follows:

- The HP teaching team would meet and receive a brief introduction about PTSD. The roles each team member would play were assigned. The arena(s) and the horses prepared.
- Arrive and "Meet and Greet" with introductions of everyone under the direction of AJ Paige and with the entire volunteer team of Horse Power.
- The adult group members (veterans) would then select whether they wanted to ride or drive for the session. They would be paired up with appropriate teachers, volunteers and horses.
- Meanwhile, the children went on a Farm Tour, including interaction with the farm animals. They would learn to groom and lead a horse or pony. They often did arts and crafts activities under the supervision of a therapist who came with the group.

- Following the riding or driving session of approximately one and a half hours, the veterans would un-tack and put their horses away. They would then do a closed therapy session of approximately one hour with AJ Paige. During this time, the volunteers of HP helped the children have their own riding session.
- Upon completion of both of these activities, a complete luncheon was served in the lodge. Veterans and volunteers were free to leave at will. Many of the informal sessions lasted until 4PM or later.
- The entire year culminated in a holiday party with Santa Claus and presents for all the children.

The second collaboration was with the Veterans' Homestead's Veterans' Victory Farm of Fitzwilliam, NH. This farm is one of six facilities which are 'veteran specific'. In Fitzwilliam, the residents are all men who have struggled with alcoholism. The residents are able to live at the farm for up to two years.

A program was designed for three veterans who had served in Vietnam. These three men were at least 90 days sober. The format for their weekly visits was as follows:

- Departure from the Veterans' Victory Farm at approximately 8AM, driven by a Horse Power volunteer.
- Arrival at Horse Power at approximately 9AM.
- Presentations and demonstrations were given on Horsemanship topics until 10:30AM. These hands on sessions in the barn covered feeds & feeding, daily horse care, shoeing, breeds, tack and equipment, and seasonal health care for horses.
- Riding lessons were then given from 10:30 to 12, during which time the students learned to walk and trot in control. The culmination of these sessions was to participate in a trail ride of 5 miles at the walk and trot with all three veterans riding completely independently.
- Lunch was the provided by a Horse Power volunteer.
- From 1 to 4PM, the veterans worked on farm projects, building a work history and references. Projects such as painting, building stalls and creating a new riding arena were accomplished under the supervision of the farm manager.
- Departure back to Veterans' Victory Farm was at approximately 4PM.

This program successfully took place from the beginning of September to the end of November of 2009.

Further collaborations and staff training took place with other veterans' groups in the local areas. The following groups now have a partnership with Horse Power, and are in the planning stages for programs to begin soon in 2010:

- The Veterans' Center in Manchester, NH...a counseling center for veterans and their families with a focus on bereavement and readjustment counseling.
- Harbor Homes in Nashua, NH...a homeless center for veterans and their families.
- Northeast Veteran's Training and Rehabilitation Center in Gardner, Mass. specializing in rehabilitation for men and women and their families with head injuries, spinal cord injuries and amputations.

In summary, as Horse Power begins its 21<sup>st</sup> year of successful operation, it not only has the will but the facility, staffing, liability insurance, resources, equipment and horses to serve veterans and their families with a major new set of programs.

## **2. What kind of services is Horse Power able to offer?**

The Horse Power team and our veterans' group partners have determined that we can serve our veterans and their families by offering programs the following areas:

- Ground lessons involving grooming, tacking, horse care, etc.;
- Sports riding including setting of goals for developing independent riding skills;
- Recreational/Leisure Riding, including trail riding;
- Educational skills, including classroom activities;
- Equine Facilitated Mental Health, including facilities for on site therapy groups;
- Driving;
- Vocational opportunities;
- Farm and gardening opportunities.

## **3. Where does the funding come from to support this program?**

The Horse Power finance committee is collaborating with the Development Director to determine the funding requirements to expand the Horse Power "Horses for Heroes" program in 2010. The initial pilot programs offered us vital information needed to create a sustainable budget for 2010 and beyond. The riding and driving horses, equipment and facility are in place to expand beyond the pilot programs. The insurance is available and affordable. A program budget is being finalized and the funding requirements needed to serve veterans and their families will soon be determined by the board and staff of Horse Power. Veterans should feel free to apply to ride or drive at Horse Power, regardless of their ability to pay, as scholarships are available.

The Horse Power Board of Directors and Development Director have found the funding necessary to offer these programs through the following avenues:

- Fees for service from the sending organization or agency;
- Veterans' Administration funding is being explored;
- Grant writing partnerships to the Disabled American Veterans and Horses & Humans Foundation, as well as other grant opportunities known by the veterans' organizations themselves;
- Several key Horse Power donors have stepped up to fund the pilot programs, pledging continued funding in the future;
- Local churches and civic groups to be asked in the near future;
- Fundraisers that are specifically for the veterans are being considered;
- Perhaps most significant, the new Social Innovation Fund created by the Obama Administration is offering extensive funding for programs that are innovative which serve both veterans and their families. This significant potential source of income is being seriously and currently explored.

#### **4. Are trained and licensed health care professionals involved in formulating programs at Horse Power?**

Horse Power strongly believes in the collaboration between licensed, credentialed health professionals and the nationally certified riding and driving instructors. Horse Power has several licensed and credentialed health professionals who serve both as advisors to the program and volunteers for the program. However, as of yet, none of these professionals are paid directly by Horse Power.

For the last 20 years, Horse Power has relied on the partnership of these specific licensed, credentialed health professionals who are hired by the sending institution/agency. These professionals work in collaboration with the Horse Power certified instructors to ensure the success and safety of all participants and equines. This format will be followed as the Horse Power "Horses for Heroes" program grows.

It is hoped that the program will be sufficiently successful to one day allow Horse Power to hire a mental health professional to work with the veterans. Until such time, it will be the policy to continue to work in collaboration with the professionals of the sending agencies and organizations. Horse Power will rely on the adequate screening of individuals for any necessary cognitive, physical or mental health issues to ensure their safety and success while at Horse Power.

#### **5. What types of individuals may participate at Horse Power in the "Horses for Heroes" Program?**

Horse Power is prepared to serve adults with a variety of disabilities. After 20 years of serving civilian adults, Horse Power has the necessary horses, equipment (including helmets and saddles), ramps, wheelchair mounting areas, arenas, carriages and volunteer team to support a large veterans' program of adults.

Horse Power is also prepared to serve adults who are older. Currently, Horse Power serves a number of riders and drivers in our existing program who need significant help mounting and dismounting. In our pilot programs, we successfully and safely handled the older veterans who attended.

Horse Power is prepared to accommodate older populations, adapting our facility and programs to meet the requirement of conditions and equipment which might be necessary to safely serve older individuals. We will rely on the knowledge and expertise of the sending organizations. Additionally, Horse Power has an excellent community hospital with whom we have a good relationship. We would seek their expertise and acquire the necessary equipment to not only keep our veterans safe, but do so in a respectful manner to preserve their dignity.

Horse Power is more than willing and able to offer programs for the spouses, children, or other family members to ride, drive or participate in farm related activities concurrent to the program offered to the veterans themselves. In fact, the pilot program with the MFS Veterans' Center in Keene, NH was so popular with the families of the veterans that we ran a week of Barn Yard Buddies, Horse Power's summer day camp, during the summer of 2009.

The Horse Power team feels that, in fact, this is perhaps the greatest opportunity we have to offer. With the sky rocketing divorce rate for current veterans returning from the Mid East, it is our sincerest hope that the Horse Power experience will help provide the necessary space, time and support for families to have the ability to stay together and keep their family intact.

## **6. What kind of screening and preparation is undertaken to accept veterans or family members into the program?**

The veterans who attend sessions at Horse Power will undergo a stringent screening process. Horse Power will provide the sending health professionals with the NARHA Physician's Statement which must be signed as the first step in the screening process. (These forms are included at the end of this document.) The lead certified instructor must then use the NARHA Precautions and Contraindications which relate to the physical and cognitive challenges this type of clientele may be experiencing to determine the suitability for any individual to ride or drive. Additionally, the staff of Horse Power will interface with the appropriate staff of the sending facility to further determine individual suitability of each participant.

The Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy Guidelines provided by the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association for best practice standards will also be distributed to set the criteria for who is able to participate in the “Horses for Heroes” program at Horse Power. These documents, as well as staff training for both the Horse Power team and the sending health professions, will be in place prior to accepting any veterans at the farm. Working in collaboration with the sending organization, the Horse Power team will help those professionals to know what is safe and what kind of skull defects, paralysis, cognitive challenges, spinal cord injuries and mental health issues that Horse Power is unable to safely accommodate.

Using the experience with the many people who have ridden or driven at Horse Power over the last 20 years, our team has sufficient experience to determine when a presenting condition is contraindicated for riding. In addition, the Horse Power team is in place to offer therapeutic driving to some of those individuals for whom riding would not be beneficial. This excellent alternative has its own host of benefits, not the least of which is sheer fun and relaxation, qualities which are often lacking in the lives of these men and women.

Furthermore, Horse Power has the opportunity to work with the farm animals and the extensive gardens for those who are simply not able to ride or drive. Easy access, gentle, well trained smaller animals can offer fabulous benefits to those who are injured in mind and body. With benches, walk ways, a play ground, and blooming gardens, the farm environment offers ample opportunities for people with limitations.

## **7. Will participants be treated with respect while at Horse Power?**

It is the strong and enduring belief that there is ‘dignity in risk’ for those with challenges. Men and women who have seen active combat, jumped out of airplanes, and risked their lives on a daily basis do not wish to be patronized or ‘wrapped in cotton’ on a horse. The team of instructors at Horse Power sincerely believes that the horse can be a safe alternative to other risky behaviors such as alcoholism or drug abuse. The farm is also fertile ground upon which veterans can experience the thrill of motion and the power of the horse. With well trained horses, safe riding enclosures and well groomed trails, Horse Power can and will offer riding and driving experiences where individuals can strive toward independence, freedom and a strong sense of personal accomplishment!

## **8. Who, other than the certified instructors, work with the veterans and their families?**

For the last 20 years, Horse Power has enjoyed a full cadre of volunteers for everything from side walking or leading horses with students, training horses, serving as Able Bodied Whips in carriages, to cooking meals, offering transportation, to fundraising and creating safe riding rings and appropriate teaching equipment.

The veterans programs which were piloted in 2009 were the most popular sessions in all of Horse Power. In fact, we had more help than needed for many of the sessions due to the overwhelming desire of Americans to want to help veterans today.

The Horse Power team is highly invested in training of volunteers. We realize that we not only have the responsibility of training the volunteers with the horses and for the students, but we must add an additional layer of training as to how to deal with this type of individuals and families. They have experienced a great deal more than the typical student who attends Horse Power. The volunteers will receive information at Volunteer Training about the presenting disability, whether it be physical, cognitive or psychological. Information about PTSD must also be included in the training.

They will also have to be coached to allow for more independence for the veterans. The balance for our veterans between risk and safety, independence and support, will be one that we strive to achieve with our volunteers. We will get the assistance of some of the veterans themselves who already have a relationship here at the farm. Our sincere goal is to have the riding and driving continue to be as challenging as is safe and appropriate.

One of the goals of the pilot program with both MFS and Veterans' Victory Farm was to instruct the men and women who attended to be sufficiently independent and safe with the horses to be able to serve as volunteers and assistant instructors for incoming veterans. The team is well aware that veterans helping veterans is most powerful. As we begin the 2010 program season, we will have veterans who are eager and willing to work with the teaching team to be of assistance to fellow veterans.

## **9. With whom is Horse Power collaborating to expand and improve the existing programs held for "Horses for Heroes"?**

Horse Power has already contacted and been in collaboration with local veterans groups. The regional Red Cross has taken up the cause of connecting all those who are providing services to veterans in our area. The Founder and lead Horse Power instructor, Isabella Martin, has attended monthly meetings at the Red Cross to further strengthen the collaboration with existing local agencies and individuals. Isabella will present the "Horses for Heroes" program that is being conducted at Horse Power to this group in February of 2010. Armed with information and photos of the men, women and children that we served in our pilot programs, this speaking opportunity will extend the reach of Horse Power as the largest therapeutic riding and driving program in New Hampshire.

Horse Power also is eager to form strong connections with the NH National Guard. With the Blue and Gold Star Mothers, and the many "Family Readiness Groups"

that have been formed by the state wide national guard, Horse Power is poised to be even more in the center of veterans and their families in the state of NH.

## **10. Is Horse Power prepared to handle the needs of those who wish to ride and who have limited ability physically?**

The Horse Power certified instructors are prepared to be able to respectfully and safely mount individuals who have been wounded, and thus may be challenging to both mount and dismount a horse. The farm offers several different mounting blocks and ramps, each designed to offer maximum assistance while promoting independence. Portable mounting blocks of two and three steps are available. A mounting ramp with steps with a platform is also available. We have two mounting ramps designed for wheelchair mounts. Finally, for those needing the maximum assistance, we have a “Handi Lift” which is a motorized lift for those unable to stand up out of their wheelchair. This lift actually gets a person into a sling like mechanism which then mechanically lifts the person up and over, allowing them to mount the horse.

At Horse Power, specific horses are desensitized to the “Handi Lift”. These horses will be the only ones who will be used if the lift is needed. The lead instructor will be the only one who does any mount using the lift.

As in the other types of programs offered at Horse Power, specific people will be identified by the lead certified instructor as having the skills necessary to correctly and safely mount any rider. These people will have demonstrated their ability to conduct the team of horse handlers, identify correct body mechanics for everyone, and appropriate use of the ramp. These individuals will also be able to identify the appropriate methods of dismounting after the session is over, and in an emergency.

The other program opportunity that the Horse Power team will offer for those who might find it challenging to mount a horse is to drive a horse. The farm has a good variety of horse and larger ponies which are quiet, well trained and experienced driving animals. The Horse Power Driving Team has worked for the last two years to secure a variety of carriages, including one that accommodates individuals in wheelchairs, to meet the needs of those with multiple or debilitating injuries which prevent them from riding. The driving experience with our team may be as rewarding as riding while being more adaptable to those who would find the mounting and dismounting process too difficult.

## **11. What kinds of certification do the Horse Power Instructors hold and are they always on site while programs for veterans are being conducted?**

Horse Power has a strong team of certified NARHA instructors. At present, the lead instructor is Isabella Martin who is one of about 25 NARHA Master Instructors in the US. She is joined by Terri Devlin and Lorna Young, both of whom are Advanced NARHA Instructors. Kevin Sheperd, Chelsea Sharpe and Jessy Savage are all Registered Instructors with NARHA.

Yes, a NARHA instructor will be directly supervising each equine assisted activity at the activity site. This instructor will be aware of and fully responsible for the program conducted at Horse Power for the veterans. At Horse Power, it is the policy to have anyone who is not certified as a NARHA instructor who may be working with a rider stay in visual and auditory proximity to a certified instructor. No session will be held unless at least one certified instructor is able to attend.

## **12. Is independence for riders and drivers fostered at Horse Power?**

The Founder and lead instructor, Isabella Martin, is completely and fully committed to being willing to advance riders' skills to their fullest potential. The goal of Horse Power for the last 20 years is to allow for riders and drivers to "be in charge" of their mount and to learn to really ride and drive. Solid skills and competence on a horse leads to confidence off a horse. It is believed that each individual rider or driver must be allowed to become as independent as is possible while staying safe.

## **13. Are the lessons done in a professional manner and up to industry standards for therapeutic riding and driving? Will skills be developed?**

Lesson planning, including goal setting and tracking outcomes, will be solidly in place for our "Horses for Heroes" participants. This solid lesson planning is one of the cornerstones of Horse Power's teaching team.

Horse Power, in addition to being a NARHA Premier Accredited Center, is also a NARHA Approved Instructor Training Site. In that capacity, Horse Power staff actually teach other teachers and prepare them for national certification. One of the strongest elements of this instruction is in lesson planning. This encompasses Goals, Objectives, Review, Body of Lesson for introduction of new skills, an Activity that allows the riders/drivers to practice the new skill(s) in a fun, creative and productive manner, followed by the Wrap Up and Conclusion of the lesson. Notes are then taken at the conclusion of the lesson in order to accurately and fully prepare for the next lesson.

Horse Power's teaching team is also well versed in skill progression for both riding and driving. They are committed to solid, correct and successful introduction of the skills needed to safely and independently ride or drive as quickly as is safe and enjoyable.

#### **14. Is there appropriate Equipment, Facilities and Horses to meet the needs of Veterans' for both riding and driving?**

Yes, Horse Power has worked to secure the correct equipment, including helmets and saddles which are big enough for adults. Five rings and one large indoor arena are available for the riding or driving portion of the sessions. The ramps and lift are in place, as well as easy entry vehicles for the driving program.

One of the most serious challenges that has come up for this program is that many of the riders are over the height and/or weight limit set by NARHA as the industry standard. A 200 pound weight limit and 6 foot height limit is the identified standard. To address this, the staff has worked to get several larger horses, including several draft or draft-cross horses which are able to carry additional weight. The instructional team has also worked with some of the larger program horses to ensure that they will behave well with this type of beginner rider.

The formula of 20% of the horse's body weight will be used to determine the weight limit able to be carried by each individual horse. The horse's age and soundness will also be considered in the final determination of the weight. The veterinarian who cares for the Horse Power horses will also be consulted in setting of weight limits. These limitations will be shared in advance with the sending facility so that no one is ever embarrassed by arriving at the farm and not being allowed to ride.

Most specifically, the Horse Power Driving Club has worked diligently over the last year to prepare a number of horses and ponies to be able to drive with these bigger individuals. With a strong driving program, we will not have to turn people away or place them in harm's way.

The team is highly committed to safeguarding our horses' backs. We realize the stress that heavy people place on the horses. To reduce that stress, riders often do not ride for extended periods. The horses also receive extra conditioning to be able to meet the challenge of bigger weight loads.

The Horse Power string of horses are well trained and acclimated to wheelchairs, scooters, canes, walkers, metal prosthetics and related therapeutic riding equipment. They have each undergone an extensive de-sensitization process and rigorous screening prior to being put into the program.

Horse Power has one of the largest NARHA therapeutic driving programs in the country. Isabella Martin is fully certified as a therapeutic driving instructor. She is also an Evaluator for NARHA. Horse Power is the host for the only NARHA driving instructor workshop and certification in the US for 2010 at the time of this writing.

The Horse Power Driving team works diligently and attends many local and regional driving clinics and events to continually improve their own knowledge and driving skill. The club has also presented at the region conference and at one national NARHA conference. Many individuals interested in being able to achieve their driving certification come to Horse Power to receive the training and preparation for successful completion of their certification in driving.

Extensive vehicles are available for this program. All of them have been selected with both safety and easy entry, both during the mounting and dismounting process of driving, and in the event of an emergency. Horse Power is currently accredited to run a driving program, receiving a 100% in 2005. It is schedule to be re-accredited in the spring of 2010. Full documentation is available for review upon request.

### **15. When are lessons/programs able to happen at Horse Power for veterans or their families?**

Lessons are available both during the week, evening hours and on Saturdays. We have the ability to expand our program for veterans in the following areas:

During the regular weekly lesson program, we would have the horses, teachers and rings, with private meeting space for the therapists to work with their clients, for up to five groups of adults with a maximum of six participants in each group. Private lessons would be offered especially if driving was the activity chosen.

Additionally, we would like to have two work/ride/drive groups a week. These groups of up to 4 men would ride for the morning and work for the afternoon. This 'bartering' would be a 'win win' for the facility as well as the men.

It is Horse Power's sincere hope that we have demonstrated a deep and abiding desire to serve a range of veterans in our "Horses for Heroes" program. We welcome any input or expertise to improve our program as we rise to meet the special challenges and joys of serving this diverse and important group of people who have given so much for us. As one of our fellow veterans' programs says, "Keeping the Promise"...We want to keep that promise and welcome our heroes to our farm while sharing our passion for horses....Together, we can "Harness the healing power of the Horse" at Horse Power.