

EAP for Veteran Wellness

By Trinity Equestrian Center

For many, figuring out how to manage symptoms of mental illness, such as PTSD, or increased stress/anxiety/depression during the holiday season, is tricky and overwhelming. With a variety of methods to help, from various therapies to pharmaceuticals or holistic medicine, it's difficult to know what works best for you. At Trinity Equestrian Center in Eau Claire, owners Bill and Toni Mattson seek to reach these people and more through Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and veteran wellness, which they offer for free to veterans and their families. Through their various therapies, they're seeking to "share our love of horses and their healing power with everyone who comes to us for support."

For those who serve in the United States Armed Forces, exposure to traumatic experiences such as combat and/or life-threatening situations often results in symptoms or a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This mental health condition can lead people to lose touch with their emotions, behave aggressively, and feel irritable. People who have PTSD live in a state of hypervigilance and can feel threatened by everyday events, and horses exist in a similar state. Study researcher Mänette Monroe points out "by interacting with horses, people with PTSD will often see their own emotional state mirrored in

the reactions of the horse with which they are working."

At Trinity, veteran wellness is non-verbal and relationship-based, which is helpful for veterans who may struggle with talk therapy. The relationship between the veteran and the horse is "a journey of creating connection, relationship, and trust." The ultimate goal of this therapy is "once [the relationship building] is mastered between the veteran and their horse, it spills over to the other important relationships in their life." After her time at Trinity, U.S. Army veteran Nicolle Lillis said, "Week after week my confidence grew, while my demons shrunk." Sessions occur weekly for 12-24 weeks and are offered to veterans and their families at no cost.

The Mayo Clinic points out "when stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup, so try to prevent stress and depression in the first place." One of the ways to combat holiday stress/anxiety/depression is to seek professional help if you need it, especially if you "find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores." EAP, offered at Trinity, is an effective way to address and combat these persistent symptoms. At Trinity, "instead of trying to think your way out of a problem, you use your bodies and hearts to feel and react in the moment." The main objectives equine therapy focuses on are: "communication, triggers and coping, setting boundaries, overcoming fear and creating trust." With these as a foundation, hope and healing follows. Unlike humans, horses "don't judge or criticize," making the path to recognizing strengths and struggles faster, and changes and shifts smoother.

Whether you or a loved one is struggling with PTSD, or you're anticipating the holiday blues, Trinity Equestrian Center is "eager to connect people, horses, and God."

