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## HorseSensing combines soft, hard skills

Horses to help vets, addicts and teens through facility set to open next spring

By Tammy Shaw  
 Friday, May 31, 2019 at 3:00 am (Updated: June 4, 10:12 am)

Veterans with PTSD or addiction, former inmates and at-risk youth – Dr. Sally Broder, husband, David Broder, and their friends and colleagues want to help.

Sally Broder, a psychologist, and David Broder, an addiction treatment specialist, formed HorseSensing in California in 2009. Its primary purpose, to help veterans with PTSD and social isolation by using horses as a therapeutic tool.

With the exception of treatment centers and individual client therapy, the Broders tackled this project for a decade free of charge to veterans.

The project, near San Francisco, helped vets find employment in the horse industry.

The couple also own a home in Shelby County and their next project is to bring HorseSensing here.

Sally Broder is from San Diego and David Broder is from San Francisco, but they ended up in Shelby County because of their love of Saddlebred horses.

Vets, addiction, prison

The project here will change slightly from the California model.

Vets, former inmates, recovering addicts/alcoholics, domestic violence survivors, at risk youth and anyone else who needs to change their life's direction, David Broder said, are welcome in the new program.

"The therapeutic model is to be employed in the horse business," Sally Broder said.

Experts in American Saddlebred, thoroughbred and harness horses will teach students how to care for one horse paired with each.

Students can earn a Groom Elite Education certification, which has been in use on racetracks for many years, she said.

The team

Sally Broder had a hard life early. Her brother died young and her mother descended into a deep depression and alcoholism. But she found solace at the horse barn and would skip school to tend to the horses. "They listened," she said. "I could cry with them and they responded with kindness."

Her mentor, Frank "Poncho" Kibbee caught her crying one day. "'Let it out,' he said. The horses can take it," she recalled. "Horses got me through it."

Rena Elswick was on the Kentucky Racing Commission for 16 years, wrote some of the first administrative regulations, is an advocate against horse abuse and instituted drug testing for harness drivers. Her father served in WWII and the Korean Conflict and a family member is a recovering addict. "I wanted to find any way to help veterans," she said.

Billy Bob Taylor will teach students to groom harness horses. Taylor holds expertise in harness and thoroughbred racing and is a recovering alcoholic.

At the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution, Taylor worked ten years training horses and riders on patrol, then trained inmates to care for those horses.

Over the decade, Taylor watched inmates turn their lives around, he said. After they left, they had skills to earn a living and incentive to not return to prison.

Inmates tend to mistrust, but they were able to trust the horse and vice versa.

When Taylor retired, he moved back to Kentucky.

Dr. Laura Howard Strong, a veterinarian for 30 years, loves horses and learned about the high incidence of suicide among veterans. Sally Broder was training veterinarians for compassion fatigue, and Strong brought her in to test Resiliency Compassion Training for her team.

Philip Crittendon will teach students about American Saddlebreds. He also has experience with road crews.

Funding

HorseSensing will sponsor a booth at the Shelbyville Horse Show in June to share information. Funding will come from federal, state and local grants, donations and partnerships. Grant requests are in the writing stage now, but the Broders plan to open HorseSensing in Shelby County April 1, 2020.

The program will take applications for eight-to-ten spots in each session, which can last up to nine months if the student completes the entire course, including a one-month internship at a barn. "We need partners for that," Sally Broder said.

Broder hopes judges may sentence addicts and young offenders to work in their program instead of serving jail time or picking up trash on a road crew.

HorseSensing will host an event at the Old Stone Inn from 6 to 8 p.m. July 30 to inform people in the horse industry about the program and what the Broders hope to accomplish.

A raffle will be held at the event for a makeover with Hollywood makeup artist to the stars Jeffrey Fetzer, worth hundreds. Each ticket is \$20, six for \$100.

Process

The Broders found success with veterans bonding to horses. A manic veteran calmed down when he worked with his horse. "He found a best friend," Sally Broder said.

"With horses, there is no threat, no judgment," she said.

"These vets can tell their horses their silent stories," Strong said.

"I could tell my dogs [her stories] and cry," Rena said. "It's the same with horses."

"They move past low self esteem and teach a sense of responsibility, skills and to regulate emotions," Taylor said. "They [former inmates] can have a whole new life through the horse business."

David Broder is an intervention case manager for substance abuse. He will act as the HorseSense addiction treatment specialist, holding process groups, identifying addiction triggers to help addicts recognize and deal with behavior, which might lead back to addiction.

Broder worked at the San Francisco County jail with prisoners and their belief systems. "Prisoners have different belief systems than people on the outside" and he works with them to how to adapt them to freedom.

The course will teach relaxation methods, such as deep breathing and yoga and soft skills.

Teamwork, honesty, being on time, appearance, getting along with people and communication are all soft skills that vets and former inmates need to learn to work in the horse industry or any job.

Win-win

Sally Broder thinks of HorseSensing as a win for both students and the horse industry. She hopes barns will offer older horses for students to work with. "We can help them get experienced grooms," she said.

One friend in the horse industry told Sally Broder that every one of her temporary work visas had been denied and grooms are in high demand.

Dr. Broder may be reached at (650) 776-4313 or find information online at horsesensing.com.

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