



Newsletter

Equine Assisted Activities Research News from Horses and Humans Research Foundation

President's Letter

We are very excited to announce the launch of HHRF's Focused Research Initiatives. This is an opportunity to target your investment in research and maximize the impact of the research dollar for all of those who benefit from equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAA/T).

As we look toward the future, we have invested our energies in asking how we can best promote the highest quality research and advance our knowledge of the relationships between horses and humans. While the number of empirical studies continues to grow, they also reflect the enormous breadth of the field, with studies widely scattered across different populations and challenges in living. There is a need to support the development of programs of research for each of these groups.

We are responding to this need through the formation of Focused Research Initiatives (FRI). Each FRI is committed to focusing and supporting research efforts through partnerships with researchers, practitioners, clients, organizations and many others who are passionate about serving people through the best of EAA/T. The ultimate goal is to create and fund rationally conceived programs of research which prioritize our funding efforts in a way to best advance our knowledge base in support of EAA/T. We believe that this is best accomplished by gathering together those who are passionate about EAA/T and research experts in their field.

Our first FRI was launched in early June and targets the needs for research on equine interventions for wounded warriors and military veterans. It is our hope that, through our collaborative efforts, we will help to provide much needed focus and ultimately momentum to the research efforts on EAA/T for veterans with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorders. The success of this initiative will provide a model for future efforts with the many other deserving populations.

You can support these Focus Research Initiatives: help us identify a research focus (send your thoughts to info@horsesandhumans.org); help us identify champions (researchers, donors, strategists, EAA professionals...) who will work to design a focused research initiative; help us identify businesses, donors, groups who will help fund specific research initiatives. We look forward to hearing from you!

With gratitude,
Paul T. Haefner, PhD
President, Board of Directors



\$100,000 Available to Researchers Investigating the Therapeutic Effects of Horses on Humans

Horses and Humans Research Foundation (HHRF) has announced an open call for proposals to investigate the therapeutic effects of horses on humans. Research proposals requesting up to \$100,000 are due on July 15, 2016. Grant application information at www.horsesandhumans.org.

Effects of Equine Assisted Activities on PTSD Symptoms, Coping Self-Efficacy, Emotion Regulation, and Social Engagement in Military Veterans

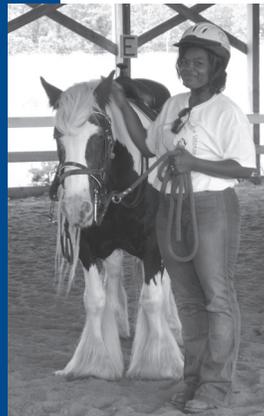


Image courtesy
Rebecca A. Johnson

University of Missouri-Columbia, College of Veterinary Medicine recently reported on findings from their research related to military veterans with symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The study investigated if participation in a structured, six-week therapeutic horseback riding (THR) program decreased PTSD symptoms, as well as improved self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and social engagement among veterans. The project, funded through an HHRF grant was led by principal investigator Rebecca A. Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNAP. Thirty-eight veterans were randomly assigned to participate in the six-week THR program, either without a wait control period or assigned to a six-week wait control *(continued on next page)*

First Science Achievement Award To Nancy McGibbon

The HHRF board awarded their first Science Achievement Award to Nancy McGibbon, MS,PT,HPCS. Nancy helped set up the foundation's original "think tank" meeting more than 12 years ago. She has remained active in the foundation as a scientific advisor and was also a research award recipient in 2010. HHRF gratefully acknowledges her exemplary and significant contribution in the equine assisted activities research field through her time, efforts and dedication. Nancy is a licensed physical therapist with an advanced master's degree in neurologic physical therapy. She has worked in a variety of clinical settings, including acute care, rehabilitation and private practice. Nancy has more than 30 years experience in all aspects of therapeutic horseback riding and has been practicing hippotherapy for 20 years. She is credited with multiple research studies that have been published in scientific journals. Her impact in the field has been far reaching - she is the perfect recipient of this coveted award! Congratulations and thank you for your work and dedication Nancy!

Effects of Equine Assisted Activities on PTSD Symptoms, Coping Self-Efficacy, Emotion Regulation, and Social Engagement in Military Veterans

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period prior to the six weeks of riding. As predicted, no significant changes were found for any outcome measure during the wait control period, indicating that changes in outcome measures were due to the THR rather than other extraneous factors.

Results of this study provide clear evidence that the THR program contributed to a decrease in PTSD symptoms. Veterans participating in THR had statistically significant decreases in their PTSD symptoms throughout the study period; and the benefit increased the longer an individual was in the riding program. Veterans also expressed great enjoyment when interacting with the horses as well as the camaraderie with other veterans and the research and riding center staff. These positive interactions were an enormous advantage in engaging the veterans - especially as compared to frequent resistance found with clinical counseling sessions. It is also worth noting that several of the participants from this study have continued on with THR and others are now doing volunteer work as side walkers or leaders at the center where the study was conducted.

Dr Johnson said that "Further investigation is needed to learn more

about the changes we saw in self-efficacy and emotional regulation. We continue to analyze the extensive and very rich array of qualitative data from the participants' weekly riding diaries, which we think may help shed light on the trends we found in these outcome variables." Her report is available at the HHRF website - we are anxiously awaiting the final assessment and publication of her findings.

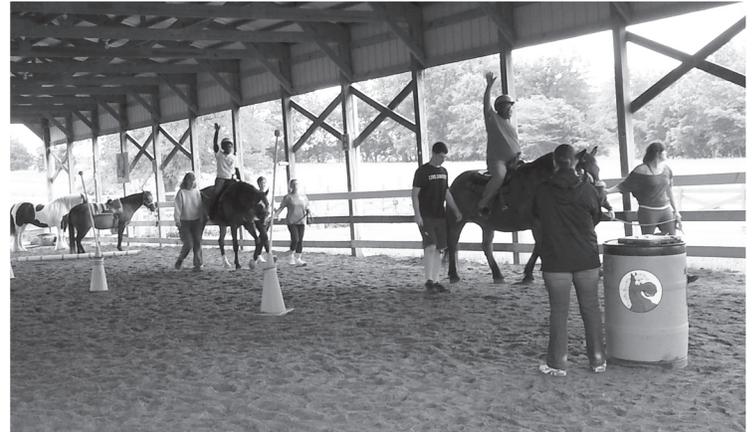


Image courtesy Rebecca A. Johnson

Published/experienced research scientists with an interest in serving on the HHRF Scientific Advisory Council can contact the office for an application.

New Board Members

HHRF recently welcomed Pam Cusick and Michael Richardson to the Board of Directors.

Pam Cusick, MA is an experienced public health research professional with experience in the areas of education, communications, and research as well as strategic planning, community outreach, and public relations. Pam earned a BA in Psychology from Sweet Briar College, and a MA in Psychology from the New School for Social Research. Pam has been involved with horses for much of her life and is interested in increasing public awareness of the therapeutic benefits of working with horses.

Michael Richardson, Hico, TX has credentials and experience that can best be summarized by the example he has set with his own life after a jeep accident left him a paraplegic in his early 20's. For the past 30 years, Michael has committed his life to teaching small group clinics and individual lessons.

Drawing from a broad base of experience in Fox Hunting, Eventing, Dressage and Jumping and then learning to ride again after his injury. His unique approach to working with horses and people allows achievement of more with less force and stress and provides the perfect focal point for students to take their horse and life skills to the next level.

Three board members recently completed their terms on the HHRF board: **Judy Lightfoot** was a founding board member and has served as an integral leader for multiple terms. Thank you Judy, we are so grateful for all you have done and we miss your smiles, optimism and friendship in a huge way! **Cindy Ruiz** and **Joanne Hart** also have served with skill and enthusiasm and have led a variety of important projects and efforts. Thank goodness none of these talented ladies have stepped too far away!



Michael Richardson and Pam Cusick

What Are YOUR Thoughts?: Megan Kiely Mueller

We'd love to know your thoughts! If you would like to answer interview questions from HHRF, please send a request for an interview form to info@horsesandhumans.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

Interview with Megan Kiely Mueller, HHRF Scientific Advisory Council Member, May 11, 2016

Megan Kiely Mueller, Ph.D. is a research assistant professor in the Center for Animals and Public Policy at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. Megan holds a Ph.D. in Applied Child Development from Tufts University. Megan's research focuses on the role of human-animal interaction as a context for promoting positive youth development and health outcomes. She is interested in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration in the study of human-animal relationships to increase the visibility and accessibility of high quality animal-related therapy and programming. Dr. Mueller is a member of HHRF's Scientific Advisory Council and is principal investigator for the HHRF-funded project 'Effects of Equine Facilitated

Psychotherapy on Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms in Youth'.

What areas of research needs are most urgently surfacing in the EAA (equine-assisted activities) fields?

I believe one of the key research challenges in the field of EAA (and animal-assisted activities more broadly) is understanding the processes that underlie effective EAA programs. We have an increasing number of pilot-sized studies that demonstrate effectiveness in certain populations. However, we still have a relatively underdeveloped research-based understanding of why equine-assisted interventions work, for who, and under what circumstances. If we can begin to understand these core processes, it will allow us to generalize research findings more broadly.

What are the reasons we need to continue to invest in research?

Now is a critical time in the field of EAA (and animal-assisted interventions more broadly). We are at the point where we are ready to move from many small pilot studies to more robust research designs

that answer fundamental questions about equine-assisted interventions. Moving successfully through this critical period in the development of the field will help facilitate EAA/T as mainstream activities. Providing directed funding for EAA/T work is especially important in this successful transition.

How did the concept for your HHRF funded research project come to be?

I think most good research comes out of strong collaborations with experienced practitioners and researchers. I was lucky enough to be able to work with a wonderful set of collaborators and sit around a table to say: what is an urgent need in the field, and how can our project help move the field forward. By starting with this big question, we were then able to use our diverse experiences to design a research study we thought would be innovative and address some key needs in the EAA field.

See full interview at horsesandhumans.org/interviews.html



Megan Kiely Mueller

Research Update

HHRF has funded 10 equine-assisted activity (EAA) projects in as many years. Nine have been \$50,000 awards, our innovation grant was for \$10,000 and is assessing our understanding of horse-human interactions by researching if horses can distinguish between neurotypical and mentally traumatized humans. Our present open call for proposals is for \$100,000, due on July 15, 2016 (see website for details and application paperwork).

To date, eight grants have been completed - three of these completed projects report-

ed findings on Cerebral Palsy, two on post-traumatic stress disorder, two on autism, and one regarding children with bonding issues. Two of these projects have been published in peer reviewed journals ("Changes in Dynamic Trunk/Head Stability and Functional Reach after Hippotherapy" was published in the Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 2009 Jul;90(7):1185-95 and "A Comparison of Equine-Assisted Intervention and Conventional Play-Based Early Intervention for Mother-Child Dyads with Insecure Attach-

ment" can be found in Volume 8, Issue 1, 2015 of the Journal of Occupational Therapy, Schools and Early Intervention.) Four projects are actively submitting for publication, three have had their pilot studies published. The two remaining projects are still active.

Details for all of our research projects can be found at the HHRF website, including original applications, progress reports and findings. Join us on Facebook for additional reports that we become aware of, on EAA research.

Your Input Sought for Focused Research Initiative. The HHRF Board has established a special task force to develop a Focused Research Initiative (see President's letter, page 1) that targets the research most needed to best serve veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or post-traumatic stress (PTS) through equine-assisted activities. The end result will be an established, designated research fund and a focused call for proposals directing the EAA/PTS/TBI research goals. HHRF board member Larry Pence is chairing the task force and has assembled a stellar team. If you would like to give some input or be added to the list for a survey they are conducting, email info@horsesandhumans.org.



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Mission: Through investment in rigorous research, Horses and Humans Research Foundation will serve as a catalyst to advance knowledge of horses and their potential to impact on the health and wellness of people.

“Science, my boy, is composed of errors, but errors that it is right to make, for they lead step by step to the truth.” -Jules Verne

HHRF can only fund research equal to the amount that its visionary donors contribute. Have you done your share to help reveal tomorrow’s knowledge? Donations of every size are needed, please mail a check or pay online at our website. Thank you!



Image courtesy Rebecca A. Johnson

MORE on EAA Research! Did you know you can receive more HHRF news more often by signing up for our electronic mailing list? And be sure to join us on Facebook where we share research news, funding opportunities, events and more.

Visit www.horsesandhumans.org and look for “Join our mailing list” or “Join us on Facebook”.