

## Equine Therapy Helps Veterans Cope with Trauma



*By: Katherine Johnson*

*At Acres for Life in Chisago City, veterans are finding a new way to heal from war trauma.*

"It's scary because they're huge and super powerful animals. I was terrified of them," Marine Corps Veteran Dan Hanson said about interacting with horses for the first time.

But the Sergeant has survived more horror than many of us can imagine.

"We lost 34 marines, we had several hundred injured," he said, while reflecting on his time fighting in Iraq.

After he got out, Hanson turned to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. He tried traditional therapy but told us he just couldn't connect.

"There's a stigma about sharing your feelings," he said. "Whether it's in the military or even after you get out as a veteran. That's just not something you generally do."

Until he found the Acres for Life pasture in Chisago City.

Veterans struggling with communicating are guided through sessions by certified therapists and equine specialists.

"Things that we take for granted are things that can be very very difficult for folks that are working through combat stress," said Scott Engel, a licensed mental health counselor.

For example, during one of Hanson's first sessions, he saw two horses fighting. It made him reflect on his own rocky relationships.

"At the time, I was going through something similar so I identified these issues," Hanson said.

"It doesn't require words to do the healing," Acres for Life founder Lynne Moore said. "It goes to a deeper spot."

"When I was out here I felt comfortable and cared for in a way that I didn't in the other settings. Why

that is, I don't know," Hanson said.

The Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association has programs in 49 countries and serves more than 34,000 clients globally.

Equine therapy is not just for veterans. People struggling with addiction or divorce have also found the therapy helpful.