



PAALS Patriot Program

Hosted by
Big Red Barn Retreat



The PAALS Patriots Program is an animal-assisted therapy program for active duty service members and veterans with combat related anxiety symptoms and is offered in partnership with The Big Red Barn Retreat, Pathways Growth and Learning Center and the Veterans Administration.



PAALS Patriots teaches coping skills to help participants understand and address their mental health issues, improve communication skills, build trust, and reduce anxiety through experiential therapy. Coping skills are taught by relating training and behavior modification techniques used with service dogs and horses to everyday life applications. PAALS Patriots is facilitated by a multidisciplinary team including mental health specialists, the Executive Director and Head Trainer of PAALS, assistant dog instructors, equine specialists, and volunteers who are military veterans. The non-traditional setting and methods are particularly effective with people who have served in the military because it reduces the stigma associated with treatment and increases the number of veterans seeking care.

Participants in the program will attend ten weekly sessions. All participants are asked to complete a brief survey at the start of the program to assess their emotional state and level of coping. At each session, participants will have the opportunity to process their experience and assess how those skills can be used to help them better cope with their issues and improve their personal relationships. The group will consist of 8-10 participants who will be selected from the VA's Mental Health Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Center (PRRC).





PAALS PATRIOT PROGRAM SESSION SCHEDULE

Session 1: Participants will meet at The Big Red Barn Retreat. Program goals, schedule and assessments will be discussed. Participants will be introduced to both service dogs in-training (SDIT) and horses during this session. Operant conditioning techniques used to train PAALS' dogs will be observed, focusing on reward based behavior modification. Participants will then observe horses and discuss observations of their behavior. Focus will be placed on mindfulness and learning to be present in the moment.

Session 2: Participants will focus on communication, self-awareness, stress management and relationship building with SDIT. Some of the dogs in this program will go to people with physical and intellectual disabilities, so participants are taught relationship building skills to get cooperation from the dog they are handling.

Session 3: This session will be with the horses and will consist of observing how horses communicate with one another and with people. The participants are encouraged to draw upon the relationship building skills they previously learned with the dogs as they engage with the horses. Participants will become aware of the emotions they are experiencing and how the horses are responding to them.

Session 4: Participants will focus on reading body language, building trust and problem solving. By teaching participants about canine body language that occurs in response to each handler, participants will gain increased awareness about the effect that they have on those around them.

Session 5: This session with the horses will focus on communication, reading body language and trust building. Participants are asked to draw parallels to how dogs and horses respond differently as a way of seeing that people respond differently to communication styles. A mid-point assessment will be conducted to evaluate the participant's progress.

Session 6: This session will be with the SDIT and will focus on dealing with distractions. Obstacle course activities with distractions for the dogs-in-training allow participants to use different tools to help their dog succeed. These exercises are related to obstacles they themselves face and how they might find creative solutions.

Session 7: This session focuses on leadership. Dogs are pack animals that need their human partners to be confident leaders. Unlike dog training modalities that utilized physical or forceful leadership, PAALS teaches gentle leadership techniques that can also be applied to human relationships. During this session participants are challenged to lead their dogs into new exposures that have the potential to make dogs insecure. This will be related to the exposures that often challenge participants who are uncomfortable with unfamiliar environments due to combat related stress.

Session 8: This session will be with the horses. Participants will work on dealing with distractions through activities that utilize objects that are distracting to the horses and participants. Participants label the distractions based upon things that challenge them. The participants then utilize coping skills to manage the distractions both for themselves and the horses.

Session 9: In the final session with horses, participants practice assertive and clear communication, set boundaries, and help the horses face challenges that will require trusting the leadership of the handler.

Session 10: Celebration Dinner at the Pond Pavilion. Final assessments and course evaluation performed.





Stephanie Bowman Czeresko, MA, LPC
Pathways Growth and Learning Center
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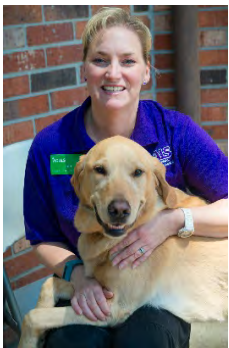
Stephanie is the owner and director of Pathways Growth & Learning Center, LLC, a business providing traditional counseling and equine assisted psychotherapy. She has worked both in private practice and with Palmetto Health in their Behavioral Health Day Treatment Program. Stephanie is a certified Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and as a Mental Health Specialist with EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association.) Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is a form of experiential therapy where the metaphors used during the therapy session with the horses assist clients in applying the skills learned to other areas of their lives.



Christy J. Rew, CCC-SLP, HPCS
Hoofprint Meadow Therapy
 Phone: (803) 714-7092



Christy is the owner and director of Hoofprint Meadows Therapy, LLC, a private practice providing Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT) near Columbia, SC. She holds dual certification as an Equine Specialist (ES) from the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) and EAGALA. Christy partners with Stephanie to provide pertinent observations of equine behavior during each experiential learning session and help clients relate their equine experiences to their challenges in everyday life.



Jennifer Rogers, Executive Director
PAALS
 Phone: (803) 788-7063



Jen has over twenty-three years of combined professional experience with marine mammal, zoo, equine, and assistance dogs training and therapeutic programs. She is the founder and executive director of PAALS, the only Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited based program in the state of South Carolina. She is a graduate of the National Education of Assistance Dog programs, AZA Management of Enrichment and Training programs, and has a B.S. in Biology from Rutgers University. Jen holds certification with EAGALA, as an equine specialist.

PAALS is accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and adheres to their recommended training standards and guidelines.

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Equine Assisted Therapy is based on the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) Model and is led by certified Equine Assisted Therapy staff members.

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Pre & Post Assessments and evaluations will be conducted by the PRRC staff to collect data on the program's effectiveness.

At the end of the ten-week session participants are invited to stay involved with PAALS and The Big Red Barn Retreat by volunteering. Many of the participants will also continue with mental health counseling sessions independent of this program and are encouraged to discuss and use the realizations made during PAALS Patriots Program

For More Information on PAALS Patriots Program
803-788-7063 / www.PAALS.org