

Eating Disorders & Rescue Horses



How they
Heal Together



Brook Hill Farm Rescue



Established
Standards of Care

Horses and Anorexia

A horse has no appetite, no interest in food



Horses can tolerate food deprivation for 24 - 72 hours without many systemic effects



60-90 days of feed deprivation for a normal, healthy horse in optimal body condition is time enough to lose an extreme amount of weight and his ability to stand.

Symptoms of Anorexia:

- Not eating
- Weight loss
- Lethargy
- Depression
- Intolerance to exercise
- Ribs and bones apparent
- Lack of fatty tissue
- Loss of muscle mass



Medical Issues affecting Appetite:

- Parasites
- Renal / Liver disease
- Illness and Infections
- Musculoskeletal issues
- Tumors
- Pain and discomfort
- Neurologic disease
- Dental: Cannot chew properly, swallow properly, bad tooth or gums, sharp or broken teeth, oral ulcers, or abscesses.



[Lack, Loss, or Decreased Appetite \(Anorexia\) in Horses - Causes, Treatment and Associated Symptoms - Vetster](#)

Digestion

- Moldy hay, toxic feed stuff
- Medications
- Diarrhea caused by high grain diet, rich legume hay
- Ulcers – fore and hind gut
- Feed causing abrasion/sensitivity of the mucous membranes of the esophagus caused by rough, stalky hay



[Causes of Poor Appetite in Horses - Kentucky Equine Research \(ker.com\)](http://ker.com)

Non-medical reasons

- Travel
- Increased activity
- Temperature changes
- Changes in management
- Feed changes, unpalatable feed



[Lack, Loss, or Decreased Appetite \(Anorexia\) in Horses - Causes, Treatment and Associated Symptoms - Vetster](#)

Environment

- Separation anxiety
- Herd hierarchy
- Socialization
- Depression
- Dirty environment



[Causes of Poor Appetite in Horses - Kentucky Equine Research \(ker.com\)](http://ker.com)



- Moderately starved and thin horses usually regain body weight within 60-90 days.
- Severely starved horses might not recover fully for 6 to 10 months.

Treatment:



- Treat medical issues
- Specific dietary regimen
- Restore the microbiome
- Boost immune system
- Add missing nutrients
- Examine environment and change accordingly

<https://wagwalking.com/horse/condition/anorexia>

Best Diet for Anorexia in Horses

- Vet directed
- Frequent small meals
- Promote cellular/tissue function
- Small amounts alfalfa (1 lb every 4 hours)



Recovery



Brook Hill Farm



Eating Disorders:

- Among the deadliest mental illnesses
- 9% of Americans develop an eating disorder in their lifetime
- Nearly 10 million women and one million men
- Primarily teens and young adults

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/statistics-research-eating-disorders>

97% have a co-existing mental illness!

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Alcohol or substance use disorder



“use food and the control of food to numb or avoid feelings and emotions that are over-whelming”

They are strong enough not to eat, which reinforces their self-worth and empowers them.



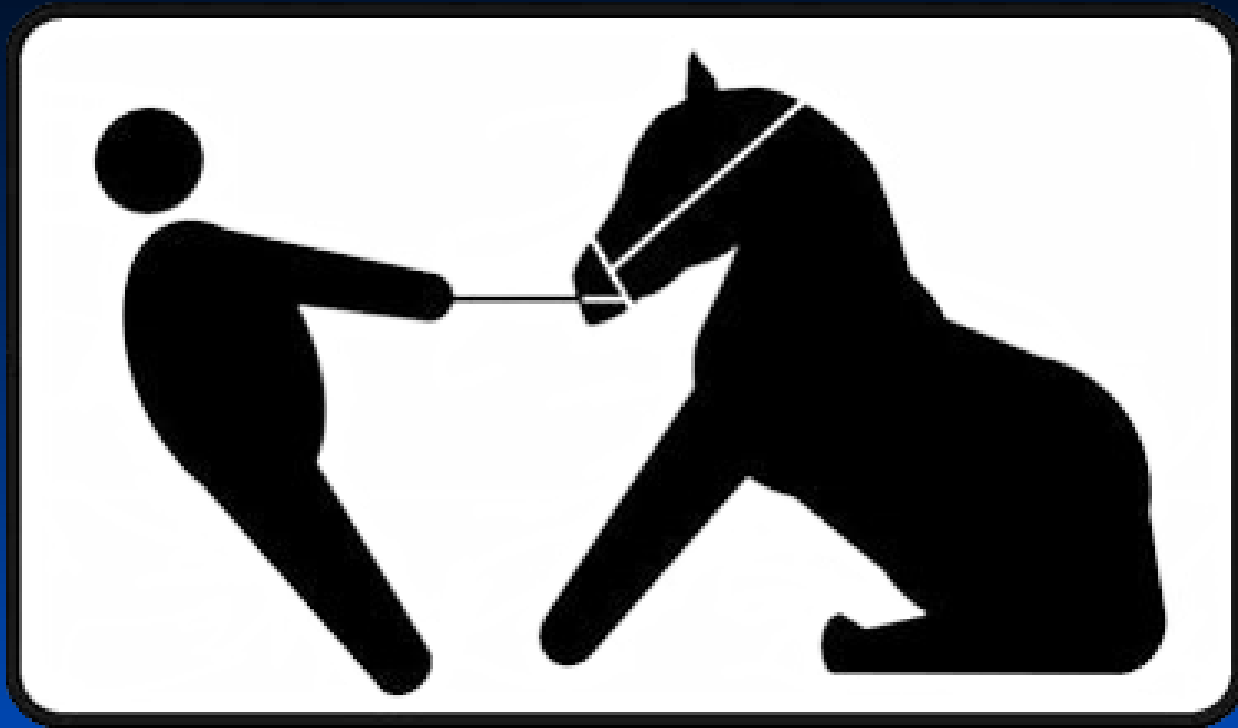
[Why people with eating disorders are often obsessed with food \(theconversation.com\)](http://theconversation.com)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Talk Therapy for Anorexia



Become aware of the relationship between thoughts and feelings and the behaviors with food that follow, and learn to respond to them in a more effective way.

Therapy Resistant



Equine assisted therapy for eating disorders is another treatment modality.

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/statistics-research-eating-disorders>

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)

Through ground activities with the horses, clients can practice skills learned in treatment in a non-threatening environment



Tartakovsky, M. (2015). Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: Healing Therapy or Just Hype? Psych Central, www.psychcentral.com

EAP is an intense experiential short term approach with talk therapy



Case studies show great benefit using EAP to treat eating disorder clients

Tartakovsky, M. (2015). Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: Healing Therapy or Just Hype? Psych Central, www.psychcentral.com

Recovery



It takes an average of about five to six years after an individual has been diagnosed to fully recover from anorexia

[Why Full Anorexia Recovery Is Crucial for Brain Health \(verywellmind.com\)](https://www.verywellmind.com/why-full-anorexia-recovery-is-crucial-for-brain-health-3746187)

[Recovery & Relapse | National Eating Disorders Association](#)

Equine Assisted Learning Long-term Approach

Mounted



Unmounted



[Why Full Anorexia Recovery Is Crucial for Brain Health \(verywellmind.com\)](https://www.verywellmind.com/why-full-anorexia-recovery-is-crucial-for-brain-health-2786187)

Equine Assisted Learning



Aiding personal growth and development of life skills through horse interactions

EAL in Academics:

- Academic skills
- Character development
- Life skills
- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking skills



EAL Personal Development

- Problem-solving
- Decision-making
- Critical and creative thinking
- Communication.

The Program

Interactional

**Goal
Oriented**

**Future
Oriented**

**Research
Based**



Solution-Focused Learning



Envision the future (positive relationship with food) and teach life skills to achieve that outcome

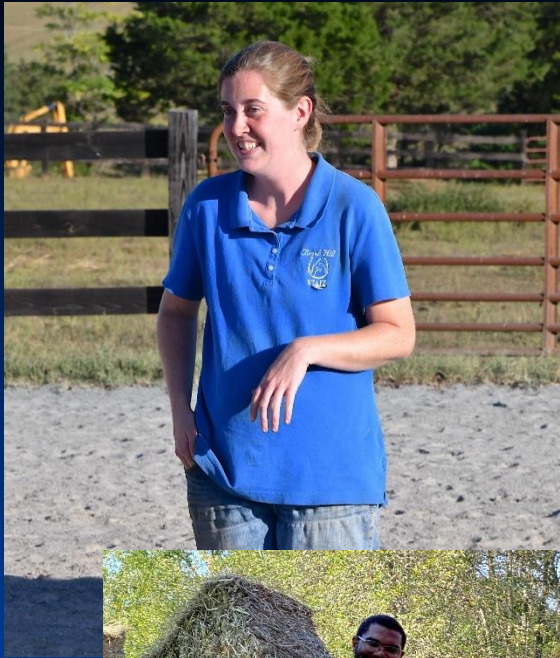
Based on Individual Goals:

(Participants are referred to us by mental health professionals)

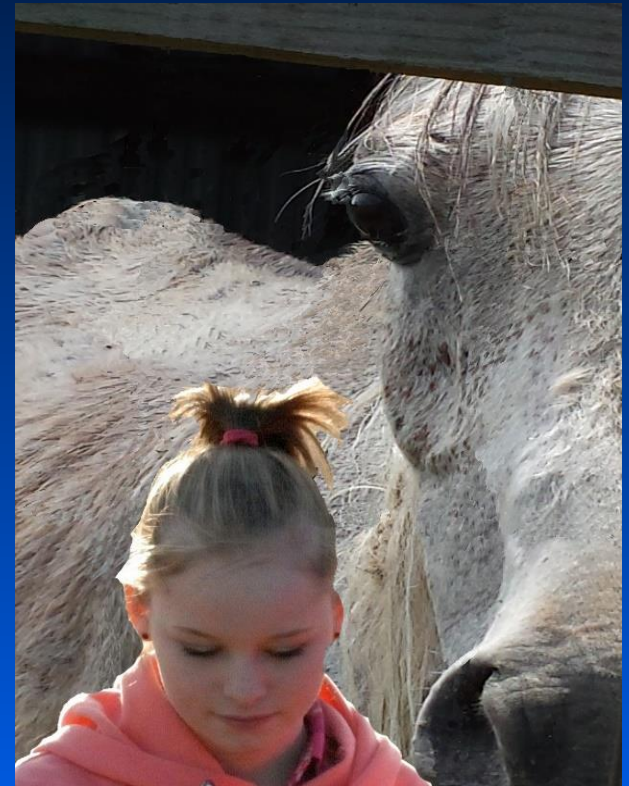
- Diagnosis of mental health disorder(s)
- Identify triggers
- Coping skills
- Socialization
- Develop groundwork skills
- Teach riding skills



The Team



Similarities of Rescue Horses and At-Risk Youth



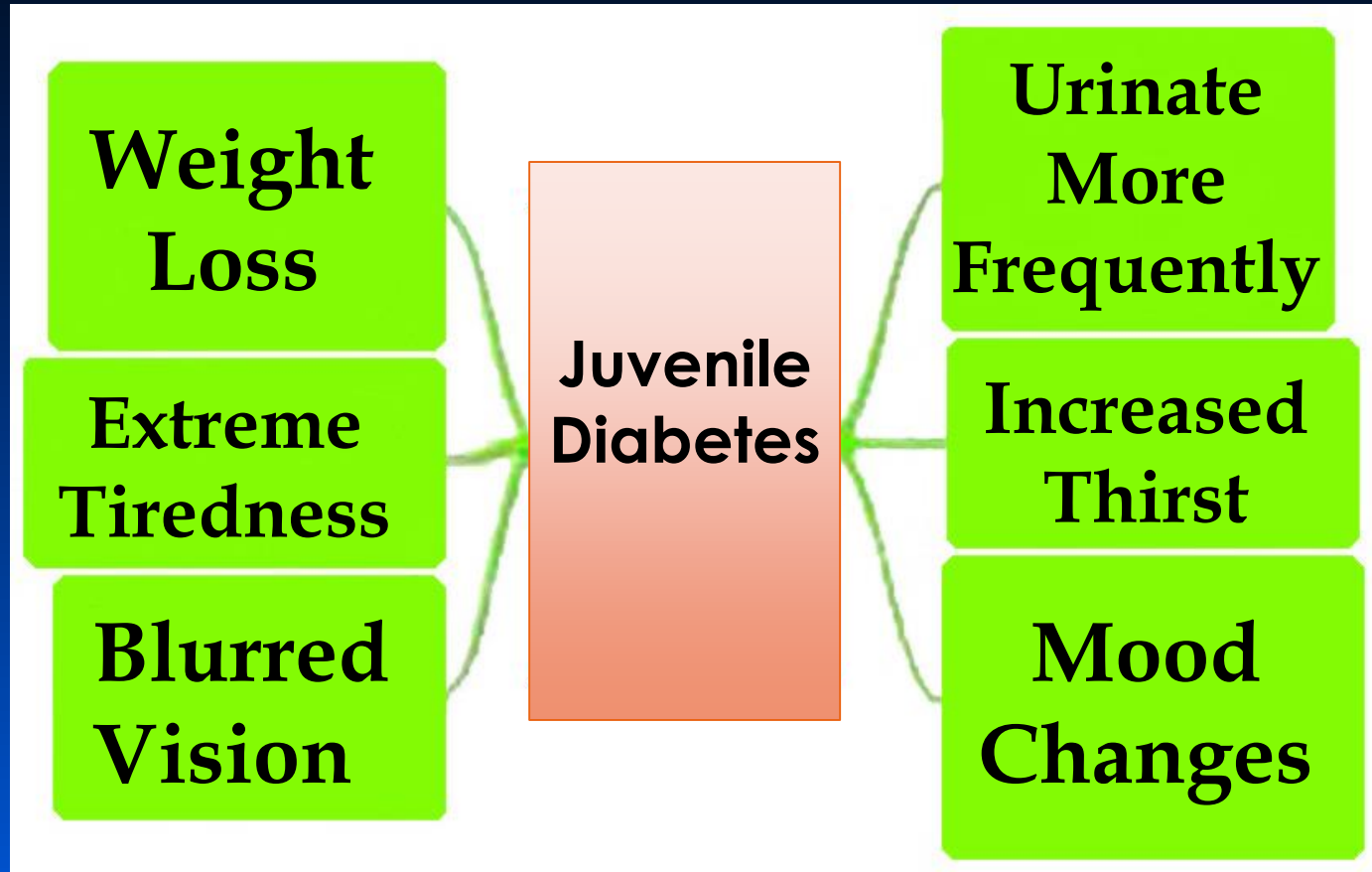
“Meet Katie”

Anorexia Nervosa



- Extreme will power to avoid eating, leading to faulty eating patterns that have become habitual
- Malnutrition and excessive weight loss

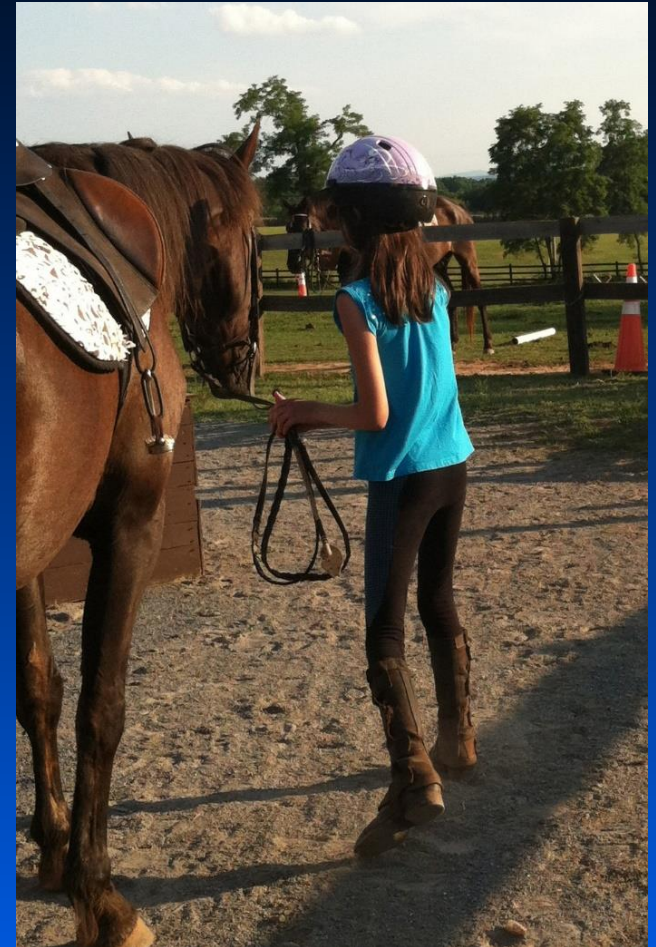
Cause: Change In Life

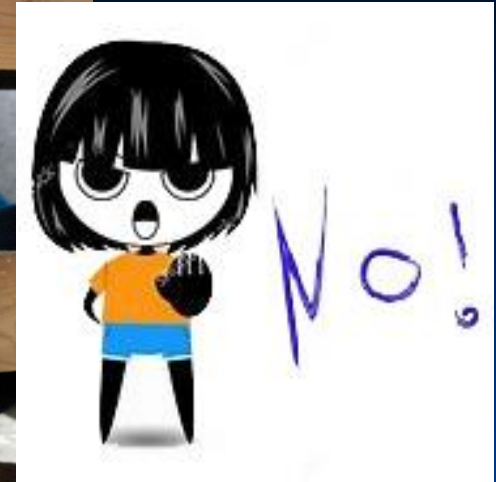


Diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes

Mental Health Diagnosis:

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Rigid
- Anxiety





“People with eating disorders find it difficult to be emotionally close to others.”

<https://www.elderhaven.org/equine-therapy-for-eating-disorders/>

Therapy Resistant



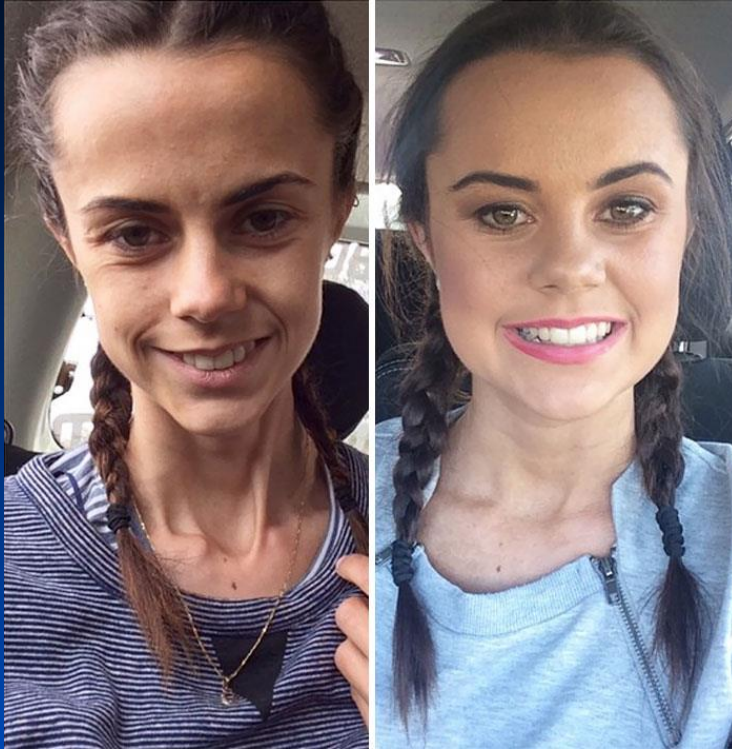


EAL

- Build new relationship patterns.
- Work past toxic feelings that arise in relationships because of food, by forming a bond with a horse first.

Levallius, J., Clinton, D., Bäckström, M., & Norring, C. (2015). Who do you think you are? Personality in eating disordered patients. *Journal of Eating Disorders*, 3, 1-8.

Theory of Resilience:



Ann
Mastin



The ability to have good outcomes, in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>

Pairing the right horse with the right person



Set Small, Achievable Goals

Need energy to work with horses

Adapt diet accordingly to calorie count



Food Contract

Identify triggers: Choice



Allowed to choose from a list of foods that are appropriate for someone diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes

Reinforce positive changes without focusing on her medical condition

Physical Recovery



Restoring weight to an appropriate level
Normalizing electrolyte and hormone levels

Have energy to ride!

Unique experience allowed her to integrate new relationship skills with horses first, then with a friend, and then with food, until they became habitual and comfortable.



Levallius, J., Clinton, D., Bäckström, M., & Norring, C. (2015). Who do you think you are? Personality in eating disordered patients. *Journal of Eating Disorders*, 3, 1-8.

Pairing the right horse with the right person





Make Peace with the New Normal



Accept that she has Juvenile Diabetes

Life is better with healthy eating, appropriate body size, weight range, and newly acquired coping skills.

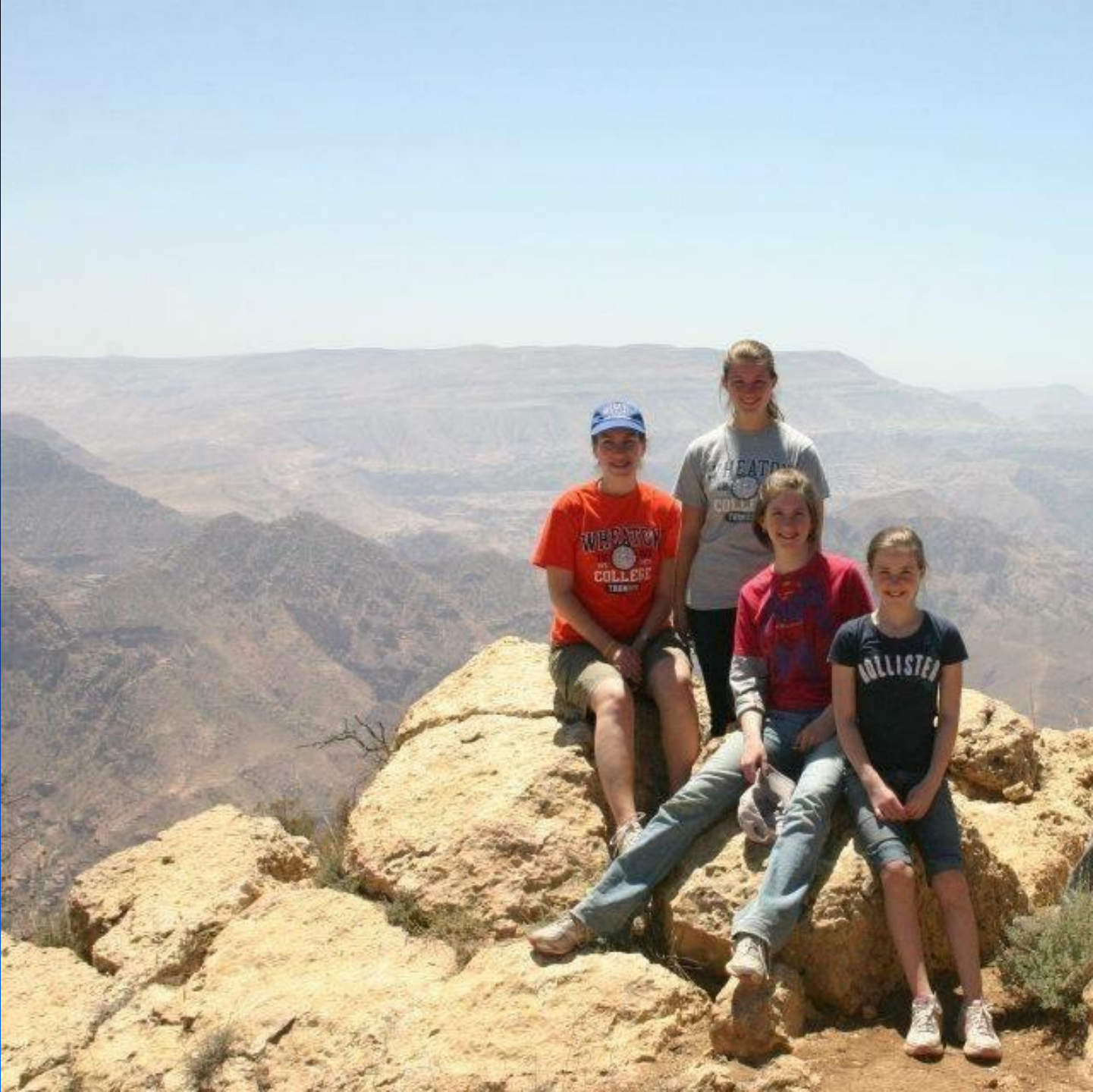
Now can focus on other things!

Meet Carrie

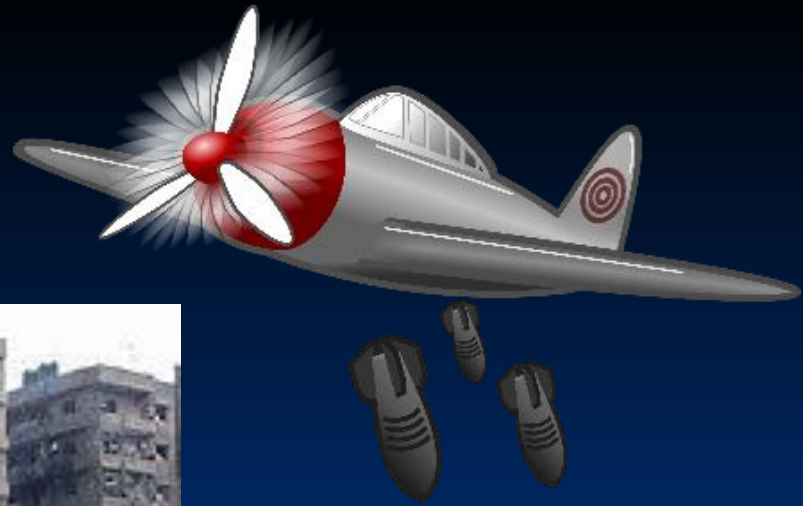


Diagnosis: Anorexia Nervosa







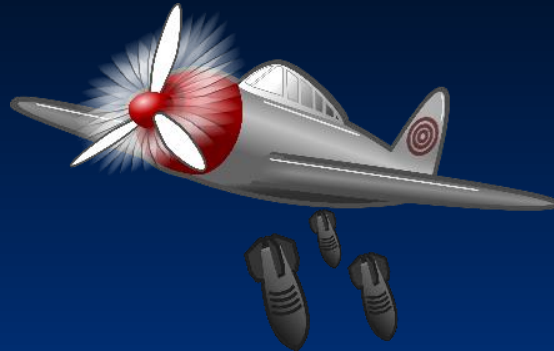


Eating Disorder

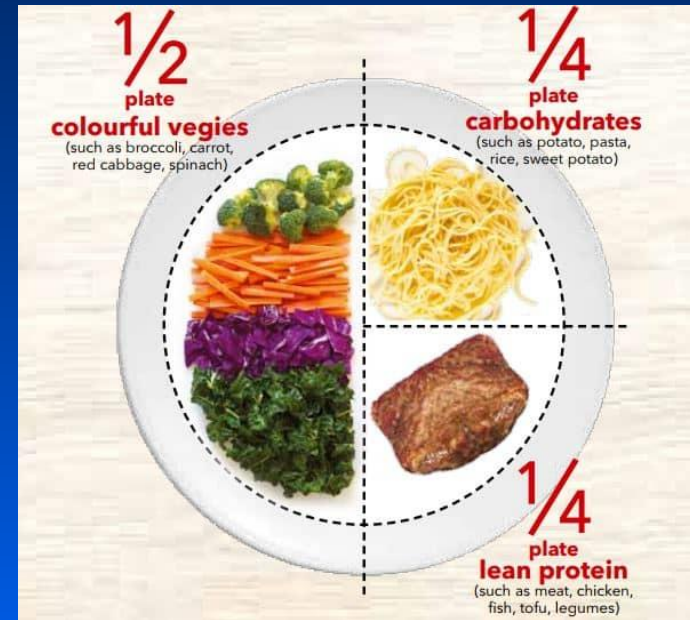


- Physical coping behavior
- Subconscious impulse to cope with trauma
- Processing trauma is the key element of fostering her recovery from the eating disorder

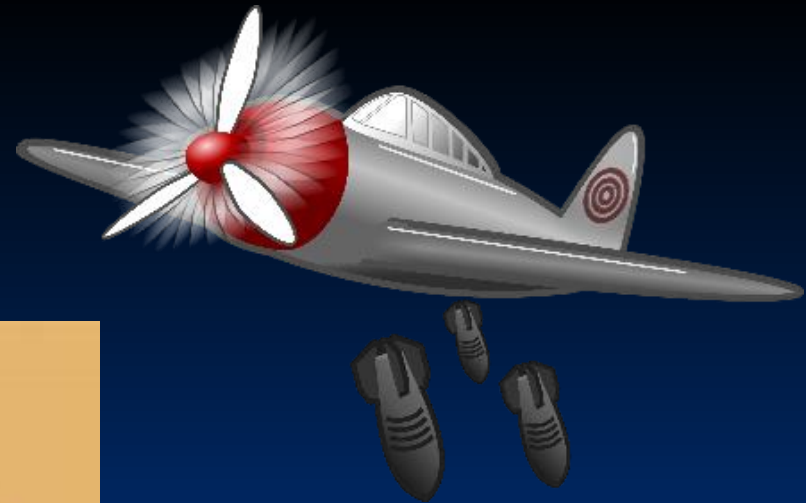
Why not eating?



Can't control airplanes



Can control what she eats



- Learn to acknowledge triggers
- Regulate her reaction
- Learn to normalize her responses

<https://www.elderhaven.org/equine-therapy-for-eating-disorders/>

Therapy Resistant



19 Counselors
Residential: Veritas



Develop life skills to allow growth in the face of adversity.

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>

Equine Assisted Learning



“Horses bring in what is really truly there. ...
learn from them and learn about ourselves.”

<https://www.elderhaven.org/equine-therapy-for-eating-disorders/>

Set Small, Achievable Goals



Try new ideas and behaviors in order for change to occur.

Reinforce positive changes without focusing on food, weight, shape, or appearance.

Foster Trust:



Equine becomes the bridge to reduce the reaction;
Carrie learned to trust in her horse's responses
and learned to process her fears.



Sense of mastery

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in **Children** and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>



Bulimia Nervosa

Cycle of bingeing and compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting, taking laxatives, or extreme exercise designed to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating



Meet Spencer



Youth are often sensitive to criticism or even comments on their weight and body shape, especially during puberty

Environmental

Personal values equated with her body shape



Thin = Success and happiness

Heavy = Socially sensitive
Poor self-perception

https://www.carolinaeatingdisorders.com/anorexia-nervosa/signs-symptoms/?utm_source=bing-o&utm_mediu

Body Dysmorphic Disorder

- Mental health condition
- Can't stop thinking about flaws in your appearance
- Avoid many social situations.

Feel:

- Embarrassed
- Ashamed
- Anxious



Lost Weight
Positive comments



Gained Weight
Negative comments



Starvation and weight loss changes the way brain works. As she intensified her diet, she was unable to return to normal eating habits.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/eating-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20353603#:~:text=There%20is%20strong%20evid>

Risk Factors

Co-occurring condition of depression and anxiety



Brandt, C. (2013). Equine-assisted psychotherapy as a complementary treatment intervention. *The Practitioner Scholar: Journal of Counseling and Professional Psychology*, 2, 23-42.

Genetic



Experts do not yet know which genes are involved in eating disorders, however there is substantial genetic influences that make some people more susceptible.

[\(PDF\) The Genetics of Eating Disorders \(researchgate.net\)](#)

Warning Signs

1. Obsessed about appearance
2. Exercised obsessively
3. Obsessed about foods to eat
4. Obsessively counted calories
5. She experienced a rapid downward spiral



Therapy Resistant



Hospitalized
In and out of traditional therapy

EAL

Effective in interrupting existing habits and assisting her in developing new ones.

Goals:

- Build self-confidence
- Improve interpersonal skills
- Create healthy relationships with peers
- Enhance self-esteem and self-acceptance



Create a Healthy Relationship

- Horses are not concerned about her appearance or weight
- Connecting with another being without the risk of judgment or rejection let her feel less concerned about how she looks and concentrate more on her relationship with the horse



Tartakovsky, M. (2015). Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: Healing Therapy or Just Hype? Psych Central, www.psychcentral.com

Set Small, Achievable Goals

- Need 200 – 500 calories to ride
- Eat on horseback!



- Eat with staff
- Eat with family
- Eat with friends

"Rider energy expenditure during high intensity horse activity"
by Colleen L. O'Reilly, Dennis H. Sigler et al. (wku.edu)

Guided Self-Assessment

- What did I do today that was positive?
- Was I able to eat what I needed today?
- What small goal can I set for tomorrow?



Recovery

6th in the nation!



Group of peers



Reasons to eat

Binge-eating Disorder



- Large amount of food is consumed in a secretive, out of control, and compulsive manner.
- Over eat but do not try to purge themselves
- Usually leads to being overweight or obese

Meet Haley

Warning Signs

- Hiding actual weight
- Not social with peers
- Making efforts to eat alone
- Struggles with her emotions
- Concealing information from loved ones
- Overwhelming feelings of shame & guilt after eating



Emptiness she feels is because she feels detached from her emotional self and others.



Horses in their honesty and compassion allow us to reconnect to ourselves.

[Beyond Words:the Healing Power of Horses: Bridging the Worlds of Equine Assisted Therapy and Psychotherapy by Alita Buzel | BookLife](#)

Therapy Resistant



Low income family

Tried one therapist, only one that medicaid covered

EAL

Horses stay in the present and respond to non-verbal emotional cues.



Working with horses allowed her to realize and understand her how her emotional state impacted her horse.

Brandt, C. (2013). Equine-assisted psychotherapy as a complementary treatment intervention. *The Practitioner Scholar: Journal of Counseling and Professional Psychology*, 2, 23-42.

Horse mirror?

How your demeanor influences them

React
Respond
Reflect



Need to develop skills to identify what message we are giving the horse, so we can understand the horses and ourselves.



As the horse responds to her emotions, she has the opportunity to not only identify her feelings but to learn how to regulate them.

Fox, J.R.E. (2009). Eating disorders and emotions. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 16, 237-239

Set Small, Achievable Goals



Ground work to help with weight loss

Building confidence, and improve sense of self-worth

Develop empathy for self and others

Observation and Growth

See her interactions with her horse in order to gain an understanding of how this translates into her reactions with people.

These insights help her to gain awareness and put her skills into action.



Tartakovsky, M. (2015). Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: Healing Therapy or Just Hype? Psych Central, www.psychcentral.com

Positive Opportunities

Empathy for
self and others



Masten, A. S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>

Self Confidence



Determine boundaries and guidelines.

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>

Self Efficacy



Ability to Succeed

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>



Jon



**The Story of A
Rescue Horse,
who touched
the lives of so
many.**



“The truth is it's much easier to walk the road of recovery with someone walking alongside you than making the trip on your own.”



SPECIAL THANKS TO:



Jo Anne Miller

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Eating Disorders & Rescue Horses



How they
Heal Together

