

A Horse Can Change A Life



Mind Full or Mindful? A Cohort Study of Equine-Facilitated Therapy for Women Veterans

Aviva Vincent, PhD, LSW

Kathleen Farkas, PhD, LISW-S

Introductions

Kathleen Farkas
Case Western Reserve University

Aviva Vincent
Fieldstone Farm TRC
Syracuse University
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Healing Paws, LLC



Overview

- Explorative study
- Partnering with equines
- Female Veterans seeking to increase aspects of mindfulness
- Veterans demonstrated a significant increase in self-identified Mindfulness throughout the duration of the equine intervention.





Equine Facilitated Therapy

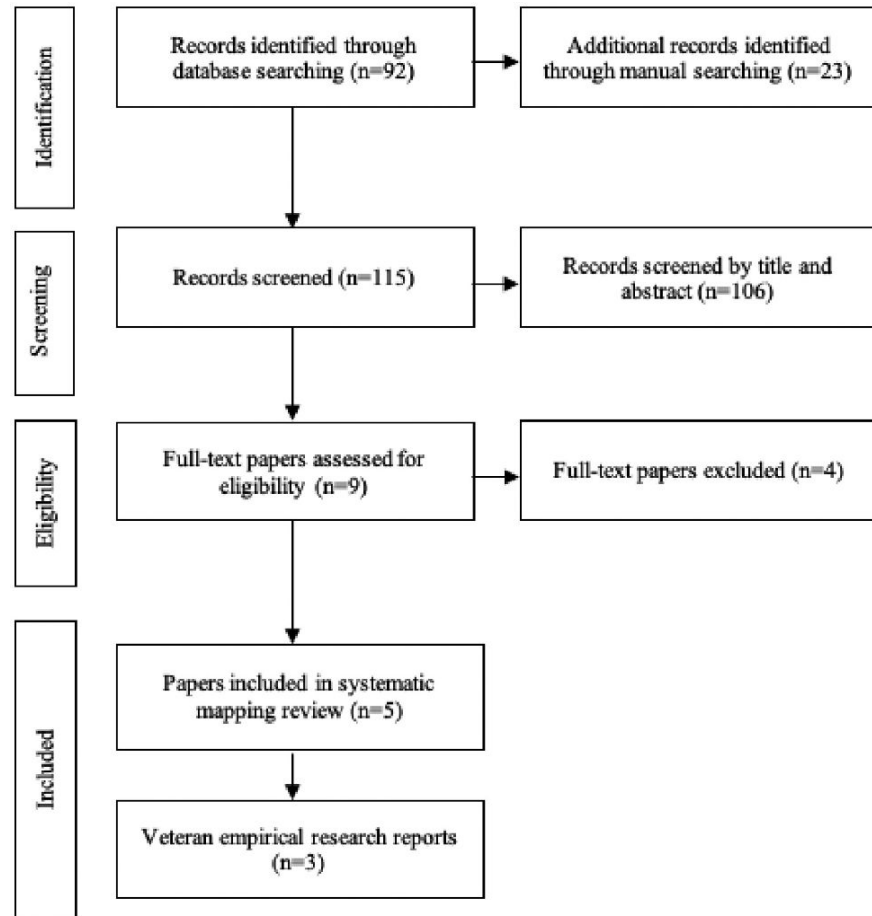
- EFT is a strategic therapeutic intervention provided or directed by a licensed mental health professional, and a trained equine specialist that deliberately include equines into a treatment plan to reach specific goals (Chandler, 2012).
- The inclusion of an animal is designed to accomplish outcomes that are believed to be difficult to achieve without the animal as collaborator (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007).
- Responsibility, unconditional love, self-efficacy, required helpfulness, self-esteem, confidence, empathy, resilience, emotional intelligence...

Sessions



- **Sessions 1**
 - Introduction to the Farm and horses
 - Names
 - Helmets
 - Tour
 - Herd observation
 - Grooming
- **Session 2**
 - Grooming
 - *Breathe With.*
- **Session 3**
 - Grooming
 - Carry your burdens
- **Session 4**
 - Grooming
 - Trail Walk

Literature Review



Measures

- Measures
 - Toronto Mindfulness Scale
 - Mindfulness Survey
 - Program Evaluation

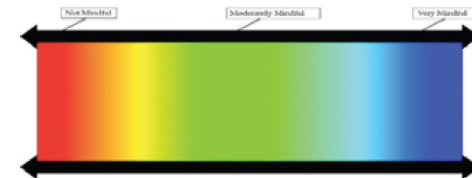


Today's date: _____

Pre- equine session:

Post-equine session:

Please draw a line through the color below that best reflects your current state of Mindfulness:



Program Evaluation

- Post-intervention
- Survey
- Evaluation responses



Partnership



- The Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center
- Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA).
- Women are eligible if they were honorably discharged or honorable under general conditions.
- The Northeast Ohio Healthcare System for Women VA's provide a range of services including Well-Being Programs, General health, Gynecology Health Services, Mental Health, and Specialty Care (VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System, n.d.)
- each session utilizes a team approach including the client, equine activity facilitator, and a licensed mental health practitioner
- focus is on mindfulness, communication, and developing self-confidence and self-esteem.
- ground programming with the horses, completing team building exercises and horsemanship activities

Study Overview



- Mixed-method study
- Pre and posttest design
- Explore perceptions of mindfulness
- Female veterans
- Participated in a structured EFT curriculum
- Delivered by credentialed professionals at a premiere PATH Intl accredited center



Results

- 2019: 114 Veterans served. 59% (N=29) participated.
- Toronto Mindfulness Scale
 - All participants scored greater than 1, and less than a 2.5
 - construct of curiosity had a mean of 2.14
 - construct of decentering had a mean of 1.88
- The Mindfulness Survey: averaged for pre-intervention, then for post-intervention.
 - pre- intervention survey responses ranged from 2.3 to 6.5 with a range of 0 to 10 (M = 4.59, SD = 1.29)
 - post- intervention survey responses ranged from 6.7 to 9.2 with a range of 0 to 10 (M = 8.2, SD = 0.69)
- paired samples t-test: impact of the equine intervention and the mindfulness
 - **significant** difference in the scores from pre- intervention (M = 4.59, SD = 1.29). to post- intervention (M = 8.21, SD = 0.69) conditions ($t = -9.43$, $df = 13$, $p < .001$).



Results

- The Mindfulness Survey responses pre-intervention ranged from 2.3 to 6.5 with a response range of 0 to 10 ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.29$).
- The post-intervention Survey responses ranged from 6.7 to 9.2 ($M = 8.2$, $SD = 0.69$).
- A paired sample t-test found a significant difference in the scores from pre-intervention to post-intervention conditions ($t = -9.43$, $df = 13$, $p < .001$).

“The horses have taught me a lot about myself”



Strengths & Limitations

- Standardized session
- Consistent partners
- Capture of reliable and valid, quantitative data
- Structured like a curriculum and replicated across sessions
- Stress of the van drive
- variation of individuals for each session may have impacted individual's self-perceived mindfulness since their relationships extend into the treatment process
- Compounding environmental factors
- Long term impact



Recommendations

- Safety!
 - physical space, interpersonal, inter-species
- Partnership
- Establish the environment
- Focus on mindfulness
- Ensure time to breathe
- Consistent horses



Thank you

References: see Aviva Vincent, Isabel Ballard & Kathleen J. Farkas (2021): Mind Full or Mindful? A Cohort Study of Equine-Facilitated Therapy for Women Veterans, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, DOI: 10.1080/15401383.2021.1984353

Questions: avincent@fieldstonefarm.org





FIELDSTONE FARM
16497 Snyder Road • Chagrin Falls, Ohio 44023

440-708-0013

www.fieldstonefarmtrc.com