

“This beats any training or anything I have ever done in office. We go through these trainings when we come home - endless hours of being talked to, watching videos. I like to be outside, like to do things. I didn't believe that I would learn anything - my wife dragged me out here. Doing things keeps me busy enough to not get bored - but the outcome is always different than I expect. I have learned more about myself here than anywhere else. And it sure beats sitting in an office.” (15 years in service, transitional issues, marital difficulties)

“Everybody here at Bragg knows how hard it is when they come home. You are happy that 15 months are finally over - but they are not “home” for several more months after that. They are so angry. We have a good relationship, our marriage is solid - but coming here has brought him back so much faster.” (spouse, coming in for transitional issues after deployment)

“I have been to so many therapists over the years. Nothing ever worked. The horses have a way to put it right into your face - it's intense, but it works for me.” (female, 7 years in service, PTSD)

“Having come out here has brought peace into my life. Being accepted the way I am and working with my family together on these activities has shown me how to understand them better. We used to fight about things, and my wife has blamed me for many years over not seeing her. Seeing how different the horses reacted to each one of us has helped me get closer to my wife. It has brought our entire family closer than we have ever been.” (11 years in service, suffered injuries in Iraq, mTBI)

“It takes a special type of person to be in the Special Forces. Throughout these years, I had my missions and got them done. That's what counted, that's what I was needed for. Coming out here - with these animals - has helped me more than anything I have ever been to. We are not just sitting here, talking - I don't understand why these horses understand what I am really feeling, but they do - and yet they still accept me. It has made it possible for me to not just be a tool in the military, but to get re-connected with my family and myself.” (23 yrs of active duty service, Special Forces)

“I want to say how much I enjoyed the horses and what they did for me. I learned how to approach a relationship in a very different way. This is something that should be a part of therapy for any returning veteran.”

# H. O. P. E. For Warriors



## The Missing Piece for Psychological Health For our Warriors... A Horse.

[reinsofhope-ojai.org](http://reinsofhope-ojai.org) (805) 797-5539  
Julie Sardonía - Executive Director

**EAGALA Model Equine Assisted Psychotherapy for warriors** is a growing modality of treatment and education where horses are teamed with a licensed mental health professional and equine professional in working with warriors. On the ground activities with the horses are designed to **mimic real life issues**. This allows the warriors and therapist to “see” where the problems are and find solutions that work. The warriors quickly recognize unhealthy patterns, acknowledge their personal strengths, and enact new behaviors.

How can it be especially effective assisting warriors and their families when it comes to psychological health and traumatic brain injury? It utilizes the strengths of the experiential model of learning already implemented by the military in training warriors for combat and implements it into addressing the issues our warriors our facing “out of the field.”

This approach has a tremendous impact on “Maintaining the psychological health, enhancing the resilience, and ensuring the recovery of service members and their families are essential to maintaining a ready and fully capable military force.” – Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health, June 2007.



**Benefits of this experiential modality include:**

**Action, not talk** – principles of healthy transitions are practically applied and practiced.



**Overcome barriers of care** – warriors challenge themselves in activities with horses which removes much of the “stigma” associated with traditional “talk therapy” treatment methods. Participation in these activities makes this treatment modality more interesting and appealing, therefore increasing the probability of having a greater impact. Horses respond to nonverbal communication which removes cultural barriers.

**Solution-focused** – warriors must find their own solutions to proposed exercises through hands-on experience; they learn to rely on themselves and their team members.

**Fostering resilience** – experiential activities re-create frustrations, stressors, and relationship problems. Warriors learn to adapt, improvise, and overcome perceived stressors as effectively at home as they do on the battlefield.

**Focus on non-verbal communication** – horses confront unhealthy non-verbal messages, providing awareness of how participants communicate and promoting change to healthy communication styles.

**Adaptability** – warriors must respond to the unpredictability and inability to “control” the horses and discover ways to make the relationship work.