



Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) Paves the Way for Horse-Related Therapies in Helping Victims of Terrorism, Trauma and Other Challenges

GLOBAL EXPANSION INTO 38 COUNTRIES INCLUDING ISRAEL, COLOMBIA, MEXICO, SLOVENIA, BRAZIL & CHILE ADDRESSES NEEDS OF POPULATIONS

SANTAQUIN, Utah, June 7, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- As the demand for alternative therapy grows worldwide - partly to address the unique needs of increasing numbers of veterans returning home with war-related trauma, partly because of the augmented stress and coping challenges among our workforce during this down economy and these times of natural disaster, and partly due to the trigger effects from world events such as Osama bin Laden's capture and 9/11 - the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) is expanding into 38 countries including Israel, Colombia, Mexico, Slovenia, Brazil and Chile, it was announced today by Lynn Thomas, co-founder and Executive Director of the 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. EAGALA has set the standard for horse-related therapy including both equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) and equine assisted learning (EAL) and has trained over 8,000 individuals globally in this experiential modality since its founding in 1999.

According to psychologist Annie Ricalde, the Association's Regional Coordinator for Latin America, "The pervasiveness of organized crime and poverty has left many children vulnerable to trafficking, drug and alcohol addiction, and recruitment to commit crimes. Our programs focus on EAGALA activities which help our youth understand that they have the strength and option to choose a more productive path and take back their lives."

Recently, EAGALA hosted its first-ever training certifications in Guatavita, Colombia, Sao Paulo, Brazil and Santiago, Chile. Each of these countries now have formal EAGALA network groups which support local members and programs in collaborating, learning and addressing the needs, culture and standards of their respective regions. They join other network groups and programs already in operation in Africa, North America, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Australasia.

Dr. Yoni Yehuda, Director of the Havayot Center outside of Jerusalem and animal assisted therapy expert stated, "Because of the complex security system in the state of Israel with ongoing terrorism attacks, the victims need extensive support for years after the traumatic event. The capture of bin Laden and its concomitant emotions has triggered the trauma in many of our clients, some of whom were victims of the Twin Towers in New York City. EAGALA work has been so successful that elite units from the Israeli Defense Force have come to the center for help coping with the loss of friends during service as well as to help them deal with the terrorism that surrounds them everyday."

"Because of their size, acute sensitivity and history with humans, horses have a unique appeal worldwide, helping clients become more engaged in the therapeutic process," said Thomas. "The EAGALA model has a solution-focused, client-centered approach believing clients have the best solutions for themselves when given the opportunity to discover them. Coupled with the non-verbal nature and appeal of horses, our model

has expanded globally crossing cultures and languages and addressing issues indigenous to a respective population," she added.

Horse therapy, according to a growing number of mental health professionals, can be significantly more productive than talk therapy. According to the RAND report (April 2008), nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan — 300,000 in all — report symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder or major depression, yet only slightly more than half have sought treatment.

"Horses are the best therapists for many veterans, because most vets don't want talk therapy," says Julie Giove Sardonía, MA, LMFT, a therapist in California. "Healing happens in nature, especially for the military. Equine sessions, as opposed to traditional talk therapy, are more impactful and shorten treatment time. A soldier's relationship with a horse can provide emotional insights and self-understanding," she concluded.

"We have conducted a number of EAGALA EAP sessions with our veterans including a series of workshops focusing on coping resources, resilience and anger management. Across the board, veteran participants have told me that never have they found a group or individual session so useful and life-changing, and that they have found hope. After these workshops, many reflect frequently on the experience and skills learned then take them into their daily lives," said Susan T. Lisi, AFGE Local 3306 Chief Steward, VA Medical Center in Canandaigua, New York.

Renowned educational consultant Douglas Bodin considers equine therapy an important option when designing plans for treatment and has utilized it in cases involving family reintegration, communication and boundary issues and trauma. Reflecting on a case involving a 23-year-old woman who had been raped and who he had referred to an EAGALA treatment program, Bodin shared: "We gained more insight in a couple of days with equine therapy than we saw in years of the traditional therapy she had been in. When confronted with complex and challenging cases, all of our consultants look to consider and integrate this modality. It is not a 'magic pill' but it can play a very powerful role."

Unlike therapeutic riding where a client is mounted on a horse, EAGALA sessions take place on the ground, are facilitated by both a Mental Health Professional and Equine Specialist, are solution-focused and based on a code of ethics. EAGALA Model EAP and EAL can be used as an adjunct or alternative to talk therapy. Horses often break through the barriers that in more traditional modes can stall individuals, couples, families and groups. Certified professionals work with a broad spectrum of behavioral/mental health issues and learning goals including ADHD, autism, depression, addiction, eating disorders, couples therapy, stress management, recidivism, teamwork, sexual abuse, leadership skills and trauma-related disorders.

"Since 2005, equine assisted counseling has been increasingly used in a variety of Hazelden programs. Our partnership with EAGALA Certified professionals at Acres For Life, Inc. has incorporated recovery based experiences and learning that have directly assisted patients in identifying and beginning to address recovery issues more quickly than is accomplished through the use of only traditional counseling," stated Patti Hall, Manager of Wellness and Related Services at Hazelden, one of the world's largest and most respected nonprofit alcohol and drug addiction treatment centers.

Clients, for example, might be charged with the task of helping a horse through an obstacle. Instead of simply talking about their problems or being led to solutions, the client works with the animal to *find* solutions. The horse acts as teacher and unlocks the client. The animal facilitates emotional breakthroughs, and the effect, therapists report, can be magical.

As Carolle A. Bell, Ph.D., LCSW, Clinical Director of Falcon Ridge Ranch residential treatment center, says, "The EAGALA Model helps our adolescent girls develop confidence, improve their self image and develop genuine self worth as they seek to develop appropriate boundaries and build positive relationships."

Or, as one Iraq War veteran reported, "Seeing how differently 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."

Why EAGALA?

EAGALA is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization developed in 1999 to address the need for resources, education and professionalism in the fields of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning. The association has set the standard for professional excellence in how horses and humans work together to improve the quality of life and mental health of individuals, families and groups worldwide. In partnership with the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF), EAGALA provides an opportunity for a second career for horses retired from racing. EAGALA has more than 3,500 members in 38 countries and continues to grow. Click here <http://eagala.org/Global> to see the complete list of countries.

For more information on EAGALA go to www.eagala.org.

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