

My Story & Why Our Program is Unique

I don't believe the reasons & the way this program was created is unusual. But the fact that child abuse trauma with it's debilitating psychological, emotional & spiritual scars is left almost totally untreated because there has been NO therapeutic module for mental health professionals created to use IS unusual... and cruel in the neglect.

To say that child abuse has been the prevalent cause of most adult dysfunction is to state the obvious. Several web sites can give you the statistics of the impact of child abuse on society. One of the most informative is <http://www.childhelp.org/resources/learning-center/statistics>

Child abuse is a societal illness epidemic that knows no social or economic boundaries.

Healing the psychological & emotional scars from child abuse is very personal to me & for me. I am the 7th of 8 kids from a very wealthy "good Catholic family". I was molested by one of my brothers when I was 9 & my father started beating me at age 12. My brother admitted it & apologized, & even though that is more than what most incest victims get from their perpetrator, it doesn't "make it go away" or heal the scars even though all my family thought it should... wished it would.

Alcoholism runs in my family, so when I became a teenager & "got my memories back" of the sexual abuse, I immediately fell into the crowd that did drugs & drank. By 16, I was in alcohol & drug treatment for the 1st time & then again at 18 for my 2nd & final treatment center. I am very proud to say that my sobriety date is September 23, 1987. I thought sobriety would cure my problems, but it was merely the necessary start to mental & emotional healing.

Because I hadn't received any significant treatment concerning the abuse, I still had all the debilitating scars that were the psychological equivalent of broken bones that had never been set to heal correctly, so I made many behavioral & major life decision mistakes because I was, in effect, disabled. It is a classic pattern for an abuse victim to involve them selves with yet another abuser when they grow up if they do not heal. Unfortunately, I did just that with my 1st & 2nd husbands.

When my daughter came to me in 2006 just before her 14th birthday & told me that my worst fears were real & her father had been molesting her since she was 7, I swore I would do for her what my mother didn't do for me & get her all the help she needed... only to find that there is almost none available...still! I had thought that surely the psychological field HAD to have come a long way since I was a child in the late 70's since sexual abuse was much more talked about & addressed now. I was dismayed to find that I was very wrong.

I had her in 3 programs in a year's time with very little progress to her healing. When my daughter came & woke me up at 2:00 am with self inflicted cuts on both forearms, there was no where to take her except an emergency psychiatric hospital. After her 1 week stay, they could give me no follow up aftercare plan for her healing besides a once a week group, individual therapy plan & medication for her sleeping so she wouldn't be wakened by the night terrors survivors experience almost every night. Not enough to even scratch the surface of her issues.

Every day has been a struggle for her with emotional & mental triggers - seeing a truck that is like her father's triggering fear that it's him "coming to get" her sending her into a panic attack or having a friend betray her, bringing up all the feelings of the ultimate betrayal she's not healed from starting her into a deep depression & making her either "cut" to transfer the intense emotional & mental anguish to a manageable physical source that releases endorphins & actually makes her feel good, or just abuses drugs & alcohol to numb it all out.

While I was going to therapy once a week for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder because of the relationship & horrific divorce with my abusive 2nd husband, I was seeing my daughter struggle with all the same issues I did as a child, then teenager & knowing she was doomed to follow in my footsteps unless I helped her heal. It has been the most excruciating thing I've experienced as a parent.

The connection I had with my horse I had as a child was so healing because he was the one totally unconditional loving & SAFE being in my life. He was the savior to my sanity & my very best friend. We would spend hours together on trails in the beautiful sanctuary of nature. I wanted my daughter to have that experi-

ence of love & serenity too, so had encouraged her to get involved with horses when she was 10. My family is also very artistic & creative, so I've been blessed with a lifetime of experiencing the joy of artistic expression when there was no other outlet for my feelings.

As I was looking for programs for her, I kept seeking out an equine therapy based program that would also have a psychiatric module with them incorporating some form of art therapy as well for a total mind, body & spirit healing. There were none that I could find that sufficiently dealt with healing all the issues of an abused child, of which I am personally & intimately familiar with as an adult survivor. There are faith based programs that do wonderful work with abused kids & horses but don't have a psychological therapeutic module, very expensive (\$15,000+ per month) psychiatric treatment based "private school" facilities that have outdoor programs & some very capable people trying to do what they can on individual fronts, but the psychiatric field as a whole does NOT have a standard cohesive therapeutic treatment plan to heal child abuse core issues... until now. We have created the treatment program to heal wounded children & adult survivors.

I know that nothing happens by mistake or without a purpose, so all my experiences have been for a reason. There was a reason for me suffering as a child & into adulthood; a reason I had a wonderful horse as a child & was taught artistic creativity as a positive form of expression; a purpose in my learning as an adult by making the tragic mistakes a person makes as a result of unhealed deep wounds of the psyche & had to search & try the different methods for healing them to become whole; a purpose in the anger, pain, terror & frustration as a parent watching the cycle of abuse continue into my eldest child while being seemingly powerless to heal her.

I had to experience all this personally to KNOW the pains & then find healing for myself, & in so doing the process that would heal other victims of abuse as well as give support to the parents & family of the victims. I had to make the evolution myself from wounded & disabled victim into an empowered & capable person. I had to want to heal my child more than I wanted to breathe so I would be moved to piece together the process that would provide the healing others could begin as children so as adults they not only don't suffer or continue the cycle, but are actually enriched by everything that has happened in their life.

WHAT MAKES OUR PROGRAM UNIQUE

We provide a total therapy that consist of 3 modules to heal all the main core issues caused by the trauma of child abuse. Whether the abuse was severe neglect, abandonment, physical, mental, emotional or sexual abuse, the core issues are:

1. Low Self Esteem
2. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
3. Depression
4. Severely impaired social skills

For a child to receive the type, quantity & quality of therapy we provide in our intensive day program, they would have to attend a minimum of 3 separate therapeutic facilities 6 times a week because we have combined equine, art & Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).

The equine & art therapies are well known modules.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a psychosocial treatment that was developed to treat Borderline Personality Disorder, a diagnosis that has parallel root mental & emotional

dysfunctions as those of victims of child abuse. It has been shown to be the most effective treatment for these disorders with a wonderful 95% retention rate!

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a782025723~db=all~order=page>

"Therapeutic horseback riding, used for over 30 years to assist riders who are physically and/or mentally disabled, is now being recognized as a treatment tool for psychotherapy. In addition to physical benefits, therapeutic horseback riding yields psychological gains such as increased self-confidence and self-esteem and encourages the development of communication and interpersonal skills."

– Drewry, P., *Christian Counseling Today*, (6, 31, 1998) "Therapeutic Horseback Riding."

Art therapy is an essential module because with abuse, there are some things that a person cannot verbalize or even know is repressed with in them & this tool is an essential outlet. Here is a wonderful article about the success & application of art therapy:

<http://articles.latimes.com/2006/mar/20/health/he-art20>