



Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association

TO: Commission for Certified Equine Facilitated Mental Health and Education Professionals

**From: Amy Blossom, Chairman, EAGALA Board of Directors
Lynn Thomas, Executive Director, EAGALA**

RE: The Commission's Certification Process

Date: May 12, 2008

Thank you for your recent communication to EAGALA about the Commission's Certification.

This letter is in response to the email from Dr. Nancy Waite-O'Brien, the Trade Show Flyer she had attached, and our review of the Commission's website.

At this time, our position is that we do not endorse the Commission's Certification. Based on this, we feel that "spreading the word" about this Certification per Dr. Waite-O'Brien's email would be indicating an endorsement from EAGALA. So, please know our stand at this time is to not market this Certification in any manner.

There are several concerns and questions we have that have led to our position in this matter. The following outlines some of these, and we would welcome your response to help us better understand the Certification being offered.

1. EAGALA recognizes EFMHA's efforts, through its early discussions about certification and the contribution of funds to start the Commission, to help start a certification process. However, EAGALA, and to our knowledge, other national and international organizations and independent practitioners were not asked to come together to discuss:
 - a. Whether the concept of an "umbrella" Certification is beneficial or needed.
 - b. What would be the best structure and process for this type of certification.
 - c. Who would best represent the entire profession in forming a Board for the Commission and to ensure it is truly "independent."
 - d. An agreement on what terminology/acronyms to use to be inclusive and representative of the industry as a whole.
 - e. Whether the Certification should include an exam. The National Certification Commission, which is an association that educates and certifies organizations that have Certification programs of which EAGALA is a member, has recently been addressing the concerns about exams and the importance of offering non-exam options. Additionally, with equine assisted work being an experiential modality, we question the validity of an exam-based certification as a true measurement of skills, knowledge, and quality of services that will be provided.
 - f. If an exam is decided to be an important part of any Certification process, how that exam would be developed and what it would include.
 - g. Which agency/group could best help develop the Certification process

2. In the past, we have requested a copy of the exam and answers to know if it fits with our philosophies of skills and knowledge, but we have not yet received a copy. We can not support an exam without knowing its scope and content.

3. Per Dr. Waite-O'Brien's email, the attached flyer she sent, and your website, you state, "*CCEFMHEP is the only organization providing certification based on theoretical grounding in broad competencies that meet national credentialing standards.*"

We want to clarify that EAGALA does have a Certification process that involves individuals participating and progressing through a structured training and support program that includes experiential trainings based on a set curriculum, submission of a professional development portfolio, mentored / supervised practice and other assignments, signed statements committing to upholding standards and ethics, and professional development and renewal requirements. Additionally, EAGALA has an Ethics Committee and protocol in place to uphold our standards and further ensure quality and safety in the industry by providing to clients, funders, and the public an additional method of accountability. As a result of a great amount of work, expenditure of resources, and the quality of our programming, this Certification is widely recognized in over 25 countries and is being implemented by demand in other countries. We recognize that the EAGALA certification is different than the type being offered by the Commission, but it is one that has proven to be extremely beneficial for EAGALA members and others who have gone through the process.

Based on this, we feel a more accurate statement would be that "*The Commission is the only organization providing a Certification based on the successful passing of written examination testing knowledge in the field.*"

Also there is some question of the use of the phrase "*that meet national credentialing standards.*" The reality is that any group of individuals can come together and say "here are national standards" to live by. We are not questioning your work. However the reality is that without the input of all organizations and independent practitioners it might be better stated as "*CCEFMHEP is an organization providing certification based on the successful passing of written examination testing knowledge in the field on core competencies that have been identified by the Commission's Board of Directors.*"

The Commission should acknowledge that there are other organizations and training programs that offer Certification of the successful completion of their curriculum and experiential training. The use of the words **only organization providing a certification** is confusing to visitors to the website and we feel is misleading and inaccurate.

4. We have concerns about the use of the word "Commission" in your name. The term "Commission" is widely used internationally to denote a panel or board that has been given authority by a government or public body. We have had several questions from our international members asking what is this new certification being offered by the "U.S. Government?" Even in the U.S., the term does tend to connote a governmental association, and even though it is used more broadly, the actual definition of "Commission" indicates an authority being granted to a group of persons for a particular action or function. Who granted this authority as the process did not include the various organizations you are claiming to have authority? Like the paragraph above, we also feel the use of the term "Commission" in your name may be confusing and misleading, especially if you are focused internationally.

Our overall impression after reviewing your website and from discussion with other practitioners in our field is that there is a question as to whether this is truly an independent Certification. The Certification concept and process was not one in which all organizations and independent practitioners had an

opportunity to develop. From the information presented on the website, there is also a strong perception that the certification is heavily influenced by EFMHA philosophy and consequently it is not the general Certification for the whole field that is initially stated on the website. EFMHA, as an organization and philosophy, is not being questioned. The question is why would others feel comfortable with this certification if other points of views, models of practice and/or philosophies do not appear to be recognized from all of the information provided on the website or if it was not included in the development of the process?

Again, thank you for contacting us. We look forward to any additional dialogue.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amy Blossom
Chairman, EAGALA Board of Directors
and
Lynn Thomas
Executive Director, EAGALA