

Trafficked to Transformed with the Healing Power of Horses

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Licensure Credentials: Licensed Clinical Social Worker & Advanced Level 2 certified through EAGALA as an Equine Specialist and Mental Health Specialist

Secondary Presenter: Brooke Lichter, MSW

Licensure Credentials: Licensed Clinical Social Worker & Advanced Level 2 certified through EAGALA as an Equine Specialist and Mental Health Specialist

An in-depth look at the healing impact of rescue horses amongst a group of human and sex trafficking survivors from Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Sara and Brooke have partnered with a non-profit organization out of Atlantic City, New Jersey, HR Recovery Initiative, to provide equine assisted psychotherapy to a group of men and women who were exploited through the human and sex trafficking trade. Sara Velez has served as a board member for this non-profit since June 2023. Through real life and clinical data, we will discuss the ways our herd of rescue horses has facilitated healing, connection, and empathy among this group of survivors.

Through this transformative discussion we will discuss specific connections between the population of survivors of human and sex trafficking and the rescue horses who serve as our co-facilitators. These connections will be discussed to explore the healing partnership between survivors of human and sex trafficking and rescue horses. As a group, we will explore the ways horses are often discarded once they are no longer deemed "profitable". Just like unwanted equines, survivors of human and sex trafficking are often passed around and objectified. We will explore the similarities between both survivors of human and sex trafficking and with the rescue horses and the practice of "branding". We will also explore the specific language that is used among herd members as a way to communicate their dominance and connection. We will explore specific language that is used amongst the group of survivors as a way to communicate with one another and how this can relate to herd dynamics. Additionally, we will discuss the importance of trauma informed language when partnering with this population.

Objective 1: Participants will learn about the similarities between the human/sex trafficking world and the equine "kill pen" industry.

Objective 2: Participants will review a case study of a group of survivors of human and sex trafficking survivors from Atlantic City, New Jersey and how their healing was accelerated with the exposure to a herd of rescue horses during equine assisted psychotherapy group sessions.

Objective 3: Participants will learn ways to advocate for this population and practical ways to facilitate trauma informed equine assisted psychotherapy.

Presenter Bios:

Sara Velez, LCSW

Sara is the Owner & Founder of Operation HOPE, an equine assisted psychotherapy program located in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Sara is EAGALA certified through EAGALA as an Equine Specialist and Mental Health Specialist. Sara's educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Miami in International Studies and Spanish. Sara went on to earn her Master of Social Work degree from Monmouth University. Sara serves on the board of HR Recovery Initiative, a non-profit organization

out of Atlantic City, New Jersey that supports survivors and human and sex trafficking.

Brooke Lichter, LCSW

Brooke is the Owner & Founder of Operation HOPE, an equine assisted psychotherapy program located in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Brooke is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who earned both her Master's and Bachelor's Social Work degrees from Monmouth University with a concentration in Clinical Practice with Families and Children. Brooke is EAGALA certified through EAGALA as an Equine Specialist and a Mental Health Specialist. The ability to combine her love of horses with a passion for helping people is what she considers to be a privilege and truly a dream come true.