



## Learning To Be Present



CJ (name protected) is a 20-year-old female client who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She experienced serious social disruptions while growing up as well as three separate episodes of sexual abuse while in daycare. As a result, she has dealt with anxiety, depression, isolation, and suicidal thinking and behaviors, resulting in psychiatric hospitalizations during her teenage years.

Approximately 2 years ago, CJ came to the Advanced Behavioral Health Care clinic for outpatient therapy. During the intake assessment, she told me she had participated in therapy for many years with very limited success and she wasn't motivated to begin therapy again. I suggested Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy

as an alternative therapeutic process to help her learn better self-regulation skills and mindful awareness of her body.

Her initial sessions were a struggle. She experienced fear, anxiety, paranoia, and self-doubt. We encouraged her to continue developing a relationship based on trust, honesty, and nurturing with her horse. Over a few months, CJ began to establish a relationship built on safety, boundaries, and expectations. She mastered three Parelli natural horsemanship games—the Friendly game, **(Continued...)**

## Third Annual Hogs & Horses Poker Run a Success!

On September 30, 27 riders joined the Hogs & Horses Poker Run with stops at Victoria's, Blue Shed Gun Garage, Hog Holler, and Game Day. The evening ended back at Victoria's with raffles, BBQ, and live music from Chris Moran's band, Evolution. Thank you to the businesses who donated prizes, to everyone who participated, and thanks to J.W. Patterson for organizing it.



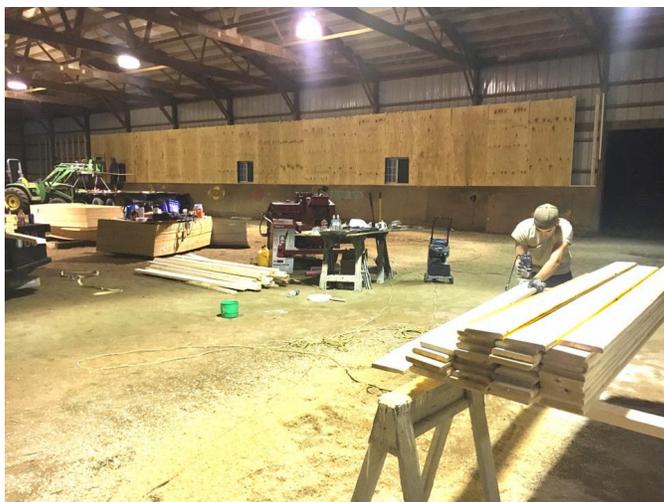
**\$2,700!**



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# Construction in Progress: Dr. Sami Solu Arena



During the two-week summer break, construction began on the indoor riding arena. Thanks to a generous donation from the Solu family, the dirt was replaced with a sand and magnesium chloride mix, which will retain moisture and cut down on dust. The walls were also replaced and repainted, and there are plans for activity stations on the edges of the arena for session work. Thank you to all who have helped in this massive project. Look to our next newsletter for dedication photos from the October 14 event and learn more about our donors!

**(...Continued)** the Porcupine game, and the Yo-Yo game. These particular games stress using self-regulation of energy, sustaining attention, being present and mindful, and using assertive verbal and non-verbal language skills. CJ began to feel different about herself. She felt more confident and comfortable with the therapy as it wasn't forcing her to talk directly about her trauma. However, she said she still was struggling with feelings of low self-esteem, and she did not trust what she was feeling was true positive change.

After many months, CJ was introduced to bareback riding. Immediately, she experienced overwhelming anxiety and dissociative symptoms. Her horse responded by not moving while she was mounted, which is a typical reaction when horses feel they have an unsafe rider on their back. CJ's primary triggers came from sitting on her horse. She was sensitive to any kind of pelvic pressure, as this triggered flashbacks of her abuse, resulting in her feeling unsafe and becoming aggressive to protect herself. This dissociation is a common reaction, where a person "checks out" from the present moment, becoming numb or unaware of what is going on around them. Although this natural defense mechanism is a way for the brain to protect itself during trauma, living your life in a state of dissociation every time you are triggered is extremely unhealthy and dangerous, and prevents new learning and development of social skills and intimacy.

The mounted therapy sessions began to change CJ slowly. In the beginning, the horse refused to walk, so the therapy focused on CJ staying present in the moment, feeling her body in contact with the horse, and reinterpreting the sensations she was feeling as safe and okay. Over a period of months, CJ and her horse began to evolve their relationship, moving from one or two small steps to walking multiple steps as they worked on staying present and mindful and reinforcing their safety with each other.

Fast-forward eight months. CJ and her horse now ride independently. She is working on using reins and trotting on a bareback pad. These skills provide independence, freedom, and confidence building. CJ's therapy continues, and she is transforming into a self-aware, responsible, and mindful adult who is more capable of self-regulating her emotions.

**By Chris Moran, Director, LSCSW**

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# Volunteer Spotlight: Marley Dinwiddie



## How long have you been volunteering with HAHA?

I've been with HAHA since May 2015, so two and a half years.

## How did you first hear about HAHA?

Two of my friends were volunteers and I finally asked one of them how I could get involved!

## What is your favorite part of volunteering?

My favorite part is being able to witness the amazing impact this program has on people's lives. It's truly an honor and privilege to behold.

## What would you tell someone who is thinking about

**volunteering?** Come and check it out! The program offers volunteer orientations where you can come and see what the program is like. Odds

are you'll love the family-like atmosphere and find yourself almost to your 3rd year of volunteer work!

## What do you like to do in your spare time?

When not doing homework, I love to read, ride my horse, crochet, and spend time with my husband.



## Winter is Coming!

As temperatures start to drop, remember to dress warmly at the barn!

The barn often feels a few degrees colder than it does in the sun, so wear layers, bring gloves, and wear warm shoes. If you ever wonder if sessions might be canceled, check our Facebook page or text or call Chris.



## Thanks, Third Thursday!

On Thursday, September 21, the monthly Third Thursday event at the Heritage Hall in the KS Expo Centre let HAHA set up an information table and serve concessions to receive a portion of the proceeds. Thank you for this opportunity!

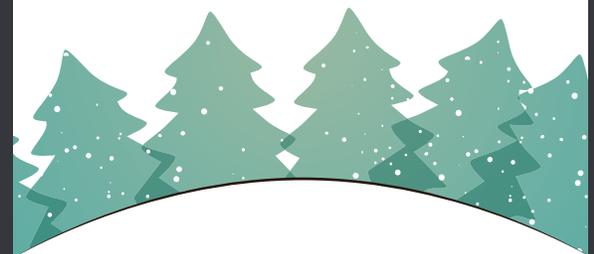
## Chris Locke Memorial

The Chris Locke Memorial patio was completed in September. The area between the barn and the arena features seating and shade for parents and volunteers. Thanks to Brett Sidesinger and other volunteers for completing the construction.



## Upcoming Dates

**December 24-January 2:  
Winter Break**



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