



2025 Preconference and Session Schedule Denver, CO. November 7th-9th

Preconference Workshop Schedule

Friday, November 7th

8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Temple Grandin Equine Center at CSU Research Day – 4 rotating sessions**

Lunch and transportation will be provided with this preconference registration.

Research, 2 CR-All

A Demonstration of Technology That Can Be Used to Measure the Physiological and Behavioral Effects of Horse-Human Interaction

Dr. Caiti Peters, Ph.D., OT

This presentation will provide a live demonstration of various technologies that can be used to measure the physiological and behavioral effects of horse-human interaction. The demonstration will include how to put on heart rate monitors and electrodermal activity monitors. We will also demonstrate the use of an infrared thermography camera and Move 'N See devices to allow for video recordings of EAS sessions. Finally, we will demonstrate how to collect and store saliva samples to measure salivary analytes such as cortisol or alpha-amylase. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of how to analyze and interpret data from each of these different technology solutions.

Dr. Caiti Peters is an assistant professor and the director of research at the Temple Grandin Equine Center at Colorado State University. The Temple Grandin Equine Center's mission is to advance education and research in equine-assisted services for individuals with disabilities. Dr. Peters is a licensed occupational therapist, AHCB-certified, and holds a Ph.D. in occupation and rehabilitation science. Her research focuses on the scientific development of equine-assisted services broadly, with a particular emphasis on occupational therapy integrating horses for autistic youth.

Research, 1 CR-All

Physiological and Behavioral Responses to Mounted vs. Unmounted Human–Equine Interactions in Youth With Autism and Horses

Dr. Ellen Rankins, Ph.D., CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI

The presentation will provide an overview and preliminary findings from a recent study investigating the potential differences between mounted (therapeutic and adaptive riding) and unmounted (grooming) human-horse interactions in youth with autism and the horses involved. The session will include a description of the mounted, unmounted and no-interaction human-horse conditions. We used a Williams crossover design to assess the physiological (heart rate, heart rate variability, cortisol) and behavioral outcomes of the interactions in 23 youth and 12 horses. The presentation will include preliminary physiological findings from the horses and their implications for equine-assisted services and the horses involved in this work.

Dr. Ellen Rankins is a postdoctoral research fellow at a land-grant university. She holds a Ph.D. in endocrinology and animal biosciences from another land-grant university and is an advanced-level therapeutic riding instructor through PATH Intl. Dr. Rankin's research focuses on horse-human interactions and the welfare of horses in equine-assisted services.

Research, 1 DE

Impact of an Equine-Assisted Social-Emotional Learning Program on Middle School Youth and Horses

Dr. Sarah Matlock, Ph.D., Tamara Merritt

This study explored Changing Leads, an equine-assisted social-emotional learning (SEL) program developed for middle school youth with a history of trauma. The research examined the program's effectiveness in improving SEL skills, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, and enhancing self-efficacy in participating youth. Uniquely, the study also evaluated the impact of the program on the equine partners by assessing potential stress responses in the horses, offering a comprehensive look at how such interventions affect both human and animal participants.

Dr. Sarah Matlock, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in Colorado State University's (CSU) equine sciences program. Since 2017, she has led the development of CSU's equine behavior program, which now includes several equine behavior courses as well as undergraduate and graduate research opportunities. In 2023, Sarah co-founded the Applied Animal Behavior and Learning Lab (AABL), an interdisciplinary, interspecies behavior lab at CSU. AABL's mission is to improve human-animal interactions by helping others better understand the emotional and physical needs of animals—especially horses—and how compromising those needs can affect the human-animal bond. Her previous work includes developing low-stress methods for gentling mustangs, validating an applied equine behavior-tracking tool for monitoring management and training-related behaviors, and identifying early signs of stress in equine-assisted service horses. Sarah is passionate about advancing education and research in equine behavior, particularly as it relates to the well-being of domestic horses.

Research, 0.75 CR-All

Equine Axial Skeleton Dysfunction and Rehabilitation

Dr. Melissa King, DVM

Axial skeleton dysfunction is a common yet frequently underdiagnosed contributor to poor performance, behavioral changes and lameness in equine athletes. The complex interplay between appendicular pathology and thoracolumbar mechanics often perpetuates pain, neuromuscular inhibition and maladaptive movement patterns. Deep stabilizing muscles, particularly the multifidus, are prone to atrophy in response to chronic limb or spinal pain, compromising postural control and core stability. Diagnosing this is challenging due to its subtle, non-specific clinical signs and the limitations of current imaging and analgesic techniques, necessitating a multifaceted rehabilitation approach.

This presentation discusses the pathophysiology of equine axial skeleton dysfunction, emphasizing parallels with human sports medicine, including arthrogenic muscle inhibition and the role of neuromotor re-education. Evidence-based rehabilitation strategies are discussed, including dynamic mobilization exercises, core stability training, whole-body vibration, underwater treadmill work, proprioceptive challenges, elastic resistance systems and neuromuscular electrical stimulation. Collectively, these interventions aim to restore spinal stability, neuromotor control and symmetrical muscle function, thereby supporting both recovery and injury prevention. An individualized, goal-oriented rehabilitation plan addressing primary pathology and secondary axial dysfunction is essential to optimize performance, extend athletic careers and enhance equine welfare.

Dr. Melissa King, DVM is a board-certified diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation and is an associate professor of equine sports medicine and rehabilitation at Colorado State University's Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado. After earning her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree, Dr. King completed a year-long internship at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. She then spent a decade in private practice, focusing on equine sports medicine and the clinical management of performance horses. Driven by a passion for advancing equine rehabilitation, she returned to Colorado State University to pursue a PhD in equine biomechanics and rehabilitation. Her doctoral research focused on evaluating the physiologic, biomechanical and histologic effects of aquatic therapy on the progression of osteoarthritis in the equine middle carpal joint. Dr. King's current research interests center on the objective evaluation of rehabilitation modalities for treating equine musculoskeletal injuries and the biomechanical analysis of compensatory gait patterns. She is widely recognized for her commitment to evidence-based rehabilitation and advancing the science of equine performance and recovery.

8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. **Preconference Workshops at the Westin Westminster**

Lunch from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. on your own.

Research, 6 CE

Let's Learn Together - A Research Conversation to Support You in Reading and Doing EAS studies

Brenda Murrow, Ph.D., LCP; Amy Picco, D.O.; Erin Ginder-Shaw, MA; Sahil Kubavat, MA, CHW; David Juelfs, M.Div., MA, SEP

Are you aware that research is important to the EAS industry but not quite sure where to go from there? Would you like to learn more about the fundamental steps involved in research design so that you could conduct a study of your own? Or maybe just begin by understanding the importance of research to the EAS industry as your first step? No matter your level of expertise, this presentation will orient you to the purpose of research, the elements needed to begin a project, and how a general awareness of research principles supports the growth of our industry.

Join us for a full day of research discussions to build your confidence in both understanding and conducting research in the EAS industry, all while having a little fun along the way!

Presentations will include the following topics: Increase Confidence in Results by Measuring and Reporting Interrater Reliability; State of Research in EAS; Elements of a Research Project; Quantitative and Qualitative - The Importance of Balancing Data with Meaning.

Brenda Murrow, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist and owner of Connection Therapy, LLC, a small group practice that provides mental health treatment to rural communities. Brenda has experience in the assessment and treatment of a wide variety of conditions. She is a clinician, researcher and educator. She is an assistant professor and research coordinator in the clinical psychology program at Pacifica Graduate Institute. Dr. Murrow has also developed the "Connection Therapy" podcast, where she explains and explores psychological theory and practice.

Amy Picco, D.O. is an osteopathic family physician and practicing depth therapist currently finishing her Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. Amy is involved in EAS research exploring the client's experience of 'moments of meeting' or experiences of personal transformation within equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Erin Ginder-Shaw, MA, is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She has worked in crisis and community health and volunteered with PATH Intl. certified therapeutic equestrian centers. Her research interests live at the intersection of post-traumatic growth and the role of embodied, lived desire.

Sahil Kubavat, MA, CHW, is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. As a licensed community health worker, Sahil has delivered mental health trainings across Arizona, supporting frontline providers in community-based care. His clinical work focuses on facilitating group therapy for adolescents with moderate to severe substance use disorders. His academic interests include the philosophy of psychology and the integration of theory with clinical practice.

David Juelfs, M.Div., MA, SEP, is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute, where his research explores how physiological synchrony enhances therapeutic effectiveness in individual and group settings. As a somatic experiencing practitioner, David specializes in working with developmental trauma and couples therapy through a somatic psychotherapy lens.

12:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. **Administration, 3 CE**

Mental Health Services at PATH Intl. Centers: The Ins, Outs, and the Complicated Stuff

Nina Ekholm Fry, CTRI, ESMHL; Dr. Katy Schroeder, Ph.D., CTRI, ESMHL

Along with growing interest in mental health services at PATH Intl. centers come questions about how psychotherapy and clinical counseling that incorporate equine interactions fit within the broader center activities. Different services and related needs sometimes cause culture clashes at centers and raise practical questions for administrators.

This interactive workshop is designed specifically for PATH Intl. center administrators, staff and affiliated individuals who are interested in, or currently have, mental health professionals who provide services at their center, as well as for mental health professionals interested in practicing in this setting. It includes information about mental and behavioral health professions, their scopes of practice, professional needs, center-related needs and logistical considerations specific to PATH Intl. centers. The workshop features examples, role plays and chances to discuss challenges and opportunities from both center and mental health professional perspectives.

Nina Ekholm Fry is the director of equine programs at University of Denver's Institute for Human-Animal Connection and a faculty member in the Graduate School of Social Work and the Graduate School of Professional Psychology. She is the faculty coordinator of the Human-Animal-Environment Interactions in Social Work specialization within the Master of Social Work program and leads the post-master's Equine-Assisted Mental Health Practitioner Certificate program. For the past 15 years, her work has included animals in human services, with a focus on equine interactions in psychotherapy and counseling. Nina is a PATH Intl. CTRI and ESMHL who helps centers across the United States navigate challenges for both humans and horses.

Dr. Katy Schroeder, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Counselor Education and co-director of the Human-Animal Interactions for Wellbeing Collaborative at the University of Iowa. She is a National Certified Counselor (NCC) and a PATH Intl. CTRI and ESMHL. Her research, teaching and clinical work broadly explore multispecies interactions, with a special focus on the inclusion of horses in counseling and psychotherapy practice.



The PATH Intl. Conference Schedule

Friday, November 7th

3:20 p.m. – 3:40 p.m. **First Time Attendee Meet-Up**

Hosted by the 2025 PATH Intl. Host Committee

Come learn basic conference information to help navigate your way around the conference! This is also a great opportunity to meet new instructors and members in the industry!

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Disability, DE**

Session 1

Puberty: A Roadmap for Instructors

Jennifer Wineman, DNP, CTRI, Mentor

Ever wonder what's going on for your participants during puberty? Do the changes and challenges of their body and brain affect their ability to learn and process during lessons? How does the brain chemistry change? Is it different for clients with a diagnosis? What is specific to attention deficit disorder (ADD), Cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), Sensory processing disorder or Down syndrome? Do neuro active medications have an impact? Puberty is one of the biggest developmental transitions that occur in mammals and results in reproductive maturity. Having a deeper understanding of the changes that occur during puberty, and particularly with our client population and their diagnosis will allow instructors valuable insights into this seismic transition. What behaviors, and sometimes, setbacks in our lessons do we see that might relate to changes in their body and brain? What are the emotions behind these behaviors and how do we as instructors attend to these newly awakening feelings? By understanding the challenges they face, instructors can better create a supportive teaching environment to build confidence and skills. In this session, attendees will review basic physiology of puberty for females and males, discuss behavior changes that might be seen during a lesson, as well as the why's behind it. A short discussion period will be devoted to hearing from the audience/community about experiences with this transition in their students, including difficulties and successes to share our knowledge and expertise. This session will also highlight ideas to consider identifying teachable moments and craft effective lesson plans for our amazing participants and hopefully still have fun.

Jennifer Wineman has 20 years of experience working as a pediatric nurse practitioner in primary care and taught family life classes to 4th graders for years. To better understand her diverse patient population, she obtained her doctorate in nursing practice and began volunteering at a local therapeutic riding barn as a side walker. Fascinated and delighted by EAS, she became certified as a PATH Intl. CTRI in 2020, now mentoring and teaching therapeutic riding full time. Her unique perspectives provide valuable insights to her participants and therapeutic team.

Programming, CR-All

Foundations of Equine-Assisted Services (EAS) and Nature-Based Learning: Building Competencies in Somatic and Non-Verbal Practice

Dana Spett, CTRI, DSW; Bonnie Lavoie, LSW

This pilot program explores the integration of equine-assisted services (EAS) and nature-based learning into social work education, aligning with the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). Designed as a 12-week course or practicum, the initiative aims to enhance social work competencies through experiential and somatic learning. By fostering interoceptive awareness, self-regulation and relational presence, the program provides a transformative model for student development and professional practice. The curriculum combines hands-on activities at equine and nature-assisted centers, such as horse grooming and silent nature walks, with structured reflective discussions. Key learning outcomes include improving self-awareness, boundary-setting skills and the ability to integrate interoceptive insights into client-centered interventions. The program employs validated tools like the Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA) and qualitative methods, including Body Map Templates and reflective journals, to evaluate student progress. Preliminary findings suggest that experiential learning in nature-based settings not only strengthens foundational social work competencies but also holds broader applications for social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care. This pilot study lays the groundwork for multi-institutional collaborations, expanding its reach and scholarly impact across schools of social work. Attendees will gain insight into the innovative design and implementation of this program, including strategies for addressing logistical and institutional challenges. The presentation will also explore the program's potential to position social work as a leader in interdisciplinary, somatic-based education, paving the way for future research and scalable applications.

Dana Spett, CTRI, DSW and **Bonnie Lavoie, LSW** are accomplished professionals with a deep commitment to equine-assisted services, nature, and social work. They include the Founder, the Executive Director, and the Research Associate at a well-established, large nonprofit community-based EAS center. Dana and Bonnie are dedicated to creating an inclusive and transformative environment guided by nature. Recognizing the power of nature to promote healing and personal growth, Dana and Bonnie ensure that the center embodies true inclusivity in all aspects of its operations. A focus on equine-assisted social work (EASW) is reflected in their research and teaching, where they center on developing an ethical and competent practice model for this field.

Programming, CE

Bridging Practice and Evidence: A Center's Journey in EAS Research

Karolyn Hooper, CTRI, ESMHL; Scott Hooper; Emilie MacInnis, MSW

Effective partnerships between equine-assisted services (EAS) centers and researchers are vital for shaping research and informing evidence-based practice. This session will outline key success factors for collaboration and present approaches for developing strong partnerships between EAS centers and researchers. Strategies will be shared to address common challenges related to communication, expectations, realistic timelines and participant involvement. The session will conclude with guidance on how EAS centers can apply research findings to enhance program outcomes and demonstrate the efficacy of EAS interventions.

Karolyn Hooper is a co-founder, Instructor, and the Executive Director for a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center (PAC) focused on Veterans, Emergency Responders, and their families. She retired from the U.S. Army as a Colonel after twenty-three years of service, including multiple

combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. She is a certified PATH Intl. CTRI and as an Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL). A life-long learner, she is an Assistant Faculty Instructor in the Equine Studies Department of a major University. She has great love and respect for Veterans, Emergency Responders and their families, and has a passion for sharing the healing power of the horse with those in need.

Scott Hooper is a co-founder, Instructor, and the President of the Board of Directors for a PATH Intl. PAC focused on Veterans, Emergency Responders, and their families. A retired U.S. Army Colonel and combat veteran (Somalia, Iraq x3), he served over twenty-five years in the Infantry. During that time, he held multiple leadership and senior advisory roles across the globe. He is a PATH Intl. certified ESMHL. Personally impacted by the human-horse bond, he considers this program potentially life-changing for all participants and volunteers alike. It's all about the people! Serving our nation was his greatest honor. Serving those who have served our nation, and our community is his calling.

Emilie MacInnis is a graduate research assistant and doctoral student studying human-animal interactions with Dr. Leanne Nieforth at the Center for the Human-Animal Bond at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Purdue University. She has a Master of Social Work with a focus on animal-assisted intervention from the University of Denver. She combines her community-focused non-profit experience with research to study human-animal interactions via a trauma-aware and community-engaged approach. Currently, she has peer-reviewed publications on human-animal interactions in the contexts of education and social work. She is a Certified Humane Education Specialist and has advanced training in data analysis.

Equine Welfare, CE

Beyond “Do No Harm”: Ethical Guidelines for Thriving in EAS

Cathrin Wilbanks, M.A., LPCC, CEIP-MH; Bryanne McDermott; Sophia Baig; Jamie Fletcher

If our equine partners could talk, what would they say about how we incorporate them into equine-assisted services and the guidelines currently in place to protect their wellbeing? What would our riders, clients and their families say about our current efforts to develop best practices? What would the natural environment say about our considerations for its wellbeing as it supports and sustains us and our equine partners? Finally, what is the future generation of EAS professionals saying about these challenging questions? Join us for a presentation that shares the unique journey of a group of EAS undergraduate students at Asbury University embarked on to develop a comprehensive code of ethics that attempts to address these questions and pave the way for a brighter future for all who are involved in the life-giving services of EAS.

Cathrin Wilbanks received a B.A. in equine-assisted mental health (double major in equine studies and psychology) from Asbury University and an M.S. in clinical mental health counseling with a specialization in equine-assisted mental health. As a licensed professional clinical counselor (LPCC), Cathrin has practiced in various mental health service settings (community mental health, outpatient mental health, private practice, nonprofit) and has had the privilege to provide EAMH in each of these settings. In 2018, Cathrin became certified through the CBEIP as a CEIP-MH. In 2020, she was recruited by Asbury University and started employment as a full-time faculty member in 2021 to develop the new EAS major. In 2022, she became a board member of the CBEIP and in 2024 became co-chair.

Bryanne McDermott is an undergraduate student attending Asbury University since 2022. Bryanne is majoring in equine-assisted services and psychology with a concentration in equine-assisted mental health. She has three years of experience volunteering in therapeutic riding, equine-assisted learning and equine-assisted mental health services.

Sophia Baig is a rising junior at Asbury University majoring in equine-assisted services (EAS) and minoring in Psychology, completing OT pre-requisites alongside. She grew up riding and competing and became interested in EAS because it combined her two passions - people and horses. She hopes to pursue a doctorate in OT after college and is currently pursuing her CTRI certification. Eventually, her dream is to open her own facility providing hippotherapy, therapeutic riding, and interactive vaulting.

Jamie Fletcher is a recent graduate of Asbury University with a bachelor's degree in psychology and equine-assisted services, and a concentration in equine-facilitated mental health. Jamie recently relocated to Denver, CO to continue pursuing the PATH Intl. CTRI certification and to begin working towards a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling. Jamie hopes to build a career specializing in providing mental health and adaptive services incorporating equines and is excited about opportunities to contribute to the equine-assisted services field, and to see how it continues to grow and advance in the years to come!

Administration, CE

Building a Culture of Abundance and Philanthropy - The Beauty of Fundraising in the Equine-Assisted Services Industry

Dana Butler-Moburg, CTRI

Each year there are new influences, opportunities, pressures and information about how to run a healthy nonprofit organization. How to sort through information and understand what approach will move your organization forward to the next critical success step is often overwhelming. This presentation will help each attendee identify where their strengths are and how to take the next steps toward a plan for success. There are also things that every leader needs to stop doing - the idea of "do, drop or delegate" is a vital tool to exercise in order for leaders and their staff to have enough time to implement new ideas and changes. The use of technology is also another major leverage tool for EAS organizations, but how to choose which technology is right for your center is always a challenge.

Dana Butler-Moburg has been in the EAS industry for 28 years and as the JF Shea Therapeutic Riding Center CEO, has grown their organization from \$335,000 per year to \$7.6 million in annual revenue. Dana has also consulted with over 20 EAS programs and helped them grow their organization's fundraising, board and staff management as well as program development. As a PATH Intl. CTRI., Dana is an accomplished horseperson and knows the benefits of hiring and training exceptional program staff. Dana is lively and engaging, always receives excellent reviews and loves to help the EAS industry thrive. The program Dana works at is 47 years old and is a Premier Accredited Center.

5:15 p.m. – 6:15 pm

Disability, DE

Session 2

Reining in Anxiety

Kimberly Hoagwood; Meghan Morrissey, LCSW, LAC, CTRI; Dr. Aviva Vincent, Ph.D., LSW, VSW, CTRI, ESMHL; Lauren Seibel, M.A., CTRI

In this presentation, we will share research and practice findings of Reining in Anxiety (RiA), a cognitive-behavioral therapy-based adaptive riding group for youth with anxiety, delivered by PATH Intl. CTRIs, which has been tested in two pilot trials. The presentation will involve didactic and discussion elements, with the intention of participants learning about the process of partnering with an academic research institute through the development of the RiA protocol and the results of the pilot studies.

Kimberly Hoagwood is a professor emerita of child and adolescent psychiatry at an academic medical center. She served as PI for the two clinical trial pilot studies leading to this research proposal. She is an internationally known researcher and director of a P50 NIMH-funded grant focused on improving the quality of state-delivered mental health care services for youth and their families.

Meghan Morrissey is a licensed clinical social worker, licensed addictions counselor, PATH Intl. CTRI, and researcher with Reining In. She is co-author of the RiA manual and has trained and supervised the CTRIs in the two pilot studies. She is co-author on papers published from the pilot studies. She currently works as a policy advisor for state government.

Dr. Aviva Vincent, Ph.D., LSW, VSW, PATH Intl. CTRI, ESMHL, associate professor at Cleveland State University, is an early-stage investigator with an established history of productive intervention research, publishing, and teaching within Veterinary Social Work including human-animal interaction and integration of physiological data in social sciences. Dr. Vincent joined the RiA research team in 2019 and provided oversight at Fieldstone Farm Therapeutic Riding Center for the second pilot study. Using her training in physiological data, she supervised human-saliva collection and personally collected samples from the equines.

Lauren Seibel is a PATH Intl. CTRI and clinical psychology doctoral student at George Mason University. She has been working in the field of EAS research for 6 years and has a master's degree in clinical psychology. She worked on both RiA trials as a research assistant and is currently completing her PhD dissertation project focused on EAS. She is also currently working as a PATH Intl. CTRI at Cloverleaf Equine Center.

Research, DE

Neuromechanics of Equine Therapy: A University Partnership Advancing Parkinson's Research

Deanna Kennedy; Priscilla Lightsey, PT, CTRI; Nancy Krennek, PT, DPT, MA, HPCS, CTRI; Lauren Crabb, BS, PTA, CTRI; Craig Huffhines; Madison Weinrich, Ph.D.(c)

This presentation explores the role of neuromuscular synchronization between horse and rider in equine-assisted therapy for individuals with Parkinson's disease. Using biomechanical tools such as electromyography (EMG) and inertial measurement units (IMUs), researchers examine how rhythmic equine movement influences motor control, balance, and coordination. Attendees will gain insights into the science behind equine-assisted therapy, assessment techniques and the impact of interdisciplinary collaboration in advancing evidence-based practices for movement disorders.

Deanna Kennedy is an associate professor specializing in motor neuroscience, with expertise in movement control, coordination and neuromuscular function. Her research focuses on

understanding motor learning and neuroplasticity, particularly in populations with movement disorders. She has extensive experience conducting biomechanical and neurophysiological assessments, including electromyography (EMG) and motion analysis, to examine motor adaptation and rehabilitation strategies.

Priscilla Lightsey is a licensed physical therapist with advanced clinical training in neurorehabilitation and a certification in equine-assisted services. She has extensive experience integrating physical therapy principles with equine movement to support individuals with neurological conditions. Her work emphasizes functional mobility, postural control, and adaptive movement strategies within equine-assisted interventions.

Nancy Krenek is a licensed physical therapist and certified equine-assisted services professional with expertise in therapeutic interventions for individuals with neuromuscular disorders. She has contributed to research on the physiological and functional benefits of equine-assisted therapy and have worked extensively with interdisciplinary teams to develop evidence-based approaches for movement rehabilitation.

Lauren Crabb is a licensed physical therapist assistant with experience in equine-assisted services and adaptive riding instruction. Her background includes working with individuals of all ages and abilities, utilizing equine movement to facilitate balance, coordination, and mobility improvements. She is committed to advancing best practices in equine-assisted interventions through education and hands-on programming.

Craig Huffhines is an equine sciences professional with expertise in horse biomechanics, equine-assisted services program development, and facility management. He has extensive experience overseeing research collaborations, equine welfare initiatives, and training programs that integrate equine movement with therapeutic and educational applications.

Madison Weinrich is a 5th-year Ph.D. candidate studying motor neuroscience in the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management. Her research focuses on identifying and modulating neurophysiological biomarkers associated with motor deficits and movement disorders.

Programming, CE

It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Improving Your Instructor Skills

Melissa Conner, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI, MTRI

Once accomplishing the impressive milestone of becoming a credentialed professional in EAS, many instructors feel as though they have arrived. Having crossed the finish line to instruct in the field, they settle into their careers and begin diving into the work using the tools they acquired during the certification journey. However, unless these professionals continue to seek mentorship and find creative ways to challenge themselves and acquire additional skills to serve a variety of people, they will remain stagnant in their professional journey.

According to the 2024 PATH Intl. Fact Sheet, 93.63% of credentialed therapeutic riding instructors are at the CTRI level; while only .05% hold an Advanced Instructor Certification and .006% hold a Master Instructor Certification. For the field of EAS to continue to grow and develop future leaders to inspire the next generation, professionals need to initiate change by encouraging growth and development through the pursuit of higher levels of certification for the foundation of CTRI's in our industry.

For this movement to grow, certified professionals at every level need to seek out those with less experience and become mentors to them, and in turn actively pursue others who are farther along and seek their guidance. Pursuing higher levels of certification requires time,

patience, endurance, self-awareness and a willingness to be challenged by others. It can be uncomfortable, and many are not successful in their first attempts. But in the end, the knowledge and skills gained along the way, and the powerful impact this growth has on participants in EAS makes the experience worth it.

It is important to have a strong mindset for this professional development journey.

Melissa Conner is the executive director of a Renew Therapeutic Riding Center, a CTRI, an ESMHL and Master Instructor. Melissa has been involved in EAS for over 20 years and has been a faculty member of PATH Intl. for committee leadership and education. In addition, she has mentored multiple instructors at all levels and is passionate about growing the industry and raising the professionalism of instructors in EAS.

Equine Welfare, CE

Strengthening Bonds: Helping Volunteers Build Confidence with Horses

Destiny Nugent, LMSW, ESMHL; Morgan Paepflow, ESMHL

This presentation is designed for volunteer coordinators and program directors to highlight the significant benefits of incorporating equine schooling into barn management. It will focus on ground-based equine schooling techniques to teach volunteers how to safely and effectively partner with program equines. Techniques such as liberty work, leading horses of varying difficulty in a safe, teachable environment, and more will be discussed. When properly implemented, it can be a powerful asset to any barn or equine-assisted program, improving both the effectiveness of volunteer teams and the overall welfare of the horses.

In this session, attendees will explore how equine schooling enhances horse-handling and communication skills, making it easier for volunteers to engage with horses safely and effectively. By using consistent training methods, horses become more predictable, responsive and comfortable in various situations. This results in improved safety for both volunteers and participants, as well as a better overall experience for the horses. Attendees will learn how to integrate equine schooling into their volunteer training programs, ensuring that volunteers are equipped with the skills to handle horses confidently and with respect.

Destiny Nugent is a Path Intl. ESMHL with a variety of program experience at a PATH Intl. PAC as well as a LMSW specialized in mental health and trauma. She is trained in a variety of treatment modalities such as ARCH as well as TF-CBT.

Morgan Paepflow is a PATH Intl. ESMHL with a variety of equine-assisted program experience at a PATH Intl. PAC. She teaches horsemanship skills to a variety of different programs, including the Boys and Girls Club, K-12 school programs and recovery programs.

Programming, CE

Building a Strong Equine-Assisted Psychoeducational Program: Collaboration and Creativity

Tasha (Natalya) J. Malinchoc-Federinko, LPC, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI; Emily Fields, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI

This presentation explores the essential components of developing and maintaining an effective equine-assisted psychoeducational program, with specific focus on the "Girls in the Barn" program. With over a decade of specific implementation experience, our team will share evidence-based practices for creating trauma-informed equine assisted learning environments that maintain appropriate boundaries between psychoeducation and therapy while maximizing therapeutic benefits.

This team brings together over 45 years of combined industry expertise, creating a powerful synergy between clinical knowledge and horsemanship. **Tasha (Natalya) J. Malinchoc-Federinko**, a Licensed Professional Counselor with dual master's degrees and 35+ years in the field, specializes in grief and trauma work while holding advanced PATH certifications since 1994. Their extensive trauma-informed training perfectly complements Emily Fields's hands-on leadership experience as Program Director and Herd Manager at a PATH accredited facility. **Emily Fields** contributes national-level APHA experience, veterinary technician background, and multiple PATH International certifications. Together, they offer a comprehensive approach to equine-assisted methodologies that bridge therapeutic practice, herd management, and advanced riding instruction—delivering insights informed by both clinical expertise and practical program implementation.

6:15 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. Opening Network Reception

Come celebrate in the exhibit hall after and network with friends and colleagues in a fun atmosphere. Meet the PATH Intl. Board of Trustees and PATH Intl. CEO. Network with solution providers who are eager to discuss the challenges and opportunities in therapeutic horsemanship and learn what the solutions exhibitors can bring to the table. Peruse the silent auction items and PATH Intl. logo merchandise and enjoy light snacks and a cash bar!

Region Networking Dinner hosted by PATH Intl. Region Representatives

Saturday, November 8th

7:00 a.m. – 7:30 a.m. **Breakfast**

7:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. **Annual Meeting**

Learn about the progress of initiatives and plans for the future of your organization.

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. **Disability, DE**

Session 3

Physiological Pathways of Equine-Assisted Services on Social and Behavior Outcomes of Autistic Youth with Psychiatric Comorbidity

Dr. Robin Gabriels, LCP; Tamara Merritt, CTRI, ESMHL

Autism is highly prevalent and often co-occurs with mental health symptoms. This population routinely engages in challenging behaviors that can require intensive interventions. Mounting evidence suggests that emotion regulation deficits underline these behavior challenges and that human-animal interactions (HAI) can induce a regulated/calm physiological state in autism. Empirical evidence supporting equine-assisted services (EAS) for children with autism will be highlighted, including implications for expanding research data collection methods and enhancing clinical practice. The presenters will report on the outcome and physiological mediation findings from a follow-up multi-site randomized clinical trial (RCT) examining three types of 10-week EAS interventions compared to a waitlist control for children with autism with co-occurring mental health symptoms (n= 169; ages 6-16 yrs). The ways this study replicates and expands prior work and discuss implications for including EAS as an adjunctive approach to traditional autism therapies will be highlighted. Results will be shared with the goal of elucidating the physiological mechanisms that underpin improved social and behavioral outcomes in children with autism. The presenters will provide an overview of the manualized approach used with both the therapeutic riding participants and non-riding participants.

Dr. Robin Gabriels is a licensed clinical psychologist and professor at a large research institution and has extensive experience working with neurodiverse psychiatric populations. Her research includes two NIH R01 grants evaluating equine-assisted services (EAS) in autistic youth.

Tamara Merritt brings 35 years of experience working in the field of equine-assisted services. As the director of a large EAS center, Tamara Merritt is responsible for program development, instructor education, research coordination and community outreach. As the site coordinator for various research projects, Tamara Merritt is excited to contribute to the widening body of scientific evidence that quantifies the specific benefits and unique elements that equine-assisted services can provide.

Research, DE

Quantifying Human-Equine Interaction During Rehabilitation in an Equine Environment

Dr. Julia Mazarella, Ph.D., DPT, AHCB, CTRI, Registered Therapist

There is a growing body of evidence to support the incorporation of equines into physical therapy for children with neuromotor disorders, such as cerebral palsy (CP). Research continues to demonstrate improvements in motor outcomes with hippotherapy and physical therapy incorporating equines for children with CP. Despite this, there remain gaps in our knowledge of the mechanism of treatment incorporating equines. The QUIRE study (Quantifying Human-

Animal Interaction During Rehabilitation in the Equine Environment) sought to explore this question through observing physiological, emotional and behavioral responses of the patients, as well as measuring biomechanical changes in the human movement on versus off the horse. In addition, the QUIRE study sought to better understand the equine's response to involvement in the physical therapy treatment, in terms of biomechanical changes with carrying a patient, and physiological and behavioral responses to the interactions.

The results of the QUIRE study provide insight into potential mechanisms of physical therapy incorporating equines, in terms of patient enjoyment and engagement, as well as quantifying the postural challenges afforded by equine movement in hippotherapy. Moreover, the results can help to guide decision-making with regards to the welfare of therapy equines incorporated into physical therapy treatment. In this interactive presentation, we will discuss the methods and results of the QUIRE study in detail, how we can use them to optimize the experience of physical therapy incorporating equines for both the human patient and the therapy equine, and avenues for future research.

The principal investigator on the study, **Dr. Julia Mazzarella**, is a licensed PT in the state of Montana, with a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) and a Ph.D. in health and rehabilitation science. She is currently a tenure-track assistant professor of physical therapy. She has five years' experience doing research on PT incorporating equines, including post-doctoral training in collecting behavioral, physiological, and motion capture data on equines. She is a PATH Intl. CTRI and registered therapist and has been practicing PT incorporating equines for seven years. She is also American Hippotherapy Certification Board (AHCB) Certified.

Programming, CE

Demystifying the Steps of Offering EAL to Corporate Groups

Jeffrey Arnold; Kimberly Tumlin

Many centers continually need ways to increase programming funding and ensure sustainability, particularly as they focus on advancing or expanding their center's mission and strategy. One-way centers can do this to offer equine-assisted learning (EAL) programming to corporate groups. EAL is a category of non-therapy services that includes educational programs, organizational development and personal growth experiences facilitated through interactions with horses. These services are conducted by specially trained or certified professionals. Offering quality, relevant, inclusive EAL workshops or programming to local organizations can add corporate exposure and revenue/funding to a center to support their mission and sustainability. Offering EAL workshops can also offer new programming and varied instructor skills for career growth. Additionally, local organizations (near a center) are continually looking for ways to develop their employees in new and innovative ways through experiential learning, so EAL corporate workshops can be attractive to local organizations. But it can be daunting if you don't know where or how to start. The key is finding ways to offer quality, relevant, inclusive EAL programming to corporate groups with minimal impact on current programming, minimal impact on our equine and human partners, and without having to become an expert in instructional design or information development. Offering EAL to local corporate groups can provide the perfect bridge between center and local organization needs, benefiting both entities.

In this session, we'll break down the steps of offering EAL workshops to corporate groups, based on our experience of working with more than 60 centers across six PATH Intl. regions over the last 10-15 years. We'll share examples and lessons learned of offering EAL programming to local corporate groups, as well as real case studies from centers and from companies/organizations that went through EAL programming. Our focus will be on sharing the importance of building a bridge between your center and the local business/corporate community, as well as walking through a framework of steps to demystify the process. We'll cover everything from obtaining contacts of local businesses, developing or acquiring EAL programming, business development and outreach process, contracts, and instructor training/certifications. We'll also share first-hand center and business/corporate group stories, and we'll poll attendees for additional best practices within the group.

Jeffrey Arnold has 15 years of equine-assisted learning (EAL) design, delivery, and implementation experience within a 31-year corporate consulting career focused on organizational design and leadership development. He has worked with more than 100 CEOs and client organizations worldwide, including Fortune 100 companies, non-profit organizations, colleges/universities, military and Veterans organizations, police and first responders and faith-based organizations. He is a student of leadership and believes that each of us is on a journey to become a better leader, and that becoming a better leader is an adventure requiring both new skills and practice opportunity. Jeffrey has partnered with more than 60 small to very large PATH Intl. Member Centers and Premier Accredited Centers to design, deliver and implement accelerated, experiential equine-assisted learning (EAL) to local organizations, colleges/universities, Veterans, police & first responders, and youth to advance their leadership skills using EAL. In 2023, he developed the biennial EAL Summit™ to help Centers collaborate, innovate, and accelerate their EAL journey. He has been the recipient of the Inspiring Leadership Award by the world's largest consulting firm as measured by revenue, a Fortune Global 500 company, is published in McGraw-Hill's Industrial Engineering Handbook, and was recently featured in JH Style magazine and PATH Intl. Strides magazine discussing the use of experiential, accelerated, equine-assisted leadership development as part of the Equine-Assisted Leadership Development Academy™ (EALDA™).

With over 25 years of academic and industry experience, **Kimberly Tumlin's** research focuses on equitable, person-centered care by integrating physical health, psychosocial recovery, and human-animal interactions. As director of the Equine-Assisted Collaborative for Health (EACH©), a collaboration across 30 sites in the U.S., Canada, and Ireland, Kimberly builds infrastructure to evaluate equine-assisted services and maintain active partnerships across colleges, communities, and clinical networks. As a lifelong equestrian, Kimberly integrates equine-assisted learning into leadership development, preparing students and professionals to navigate complex health systems and advance innovative care models. Her goal is to advance interprofessional workforce development through proven strengths-informed models including horse-human interactions.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

Adaptive/Therapeutic Riding Instructors' Knowledge of Horse Behavior and Learning

Dr. Ellen Rankins, Ph.D., CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI; Dr. Sarah Reega, Ph.D., CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI

Interactions with horses can carry a high risk of injury. This is of particular importance in adaptive/therapeutic riding (A/TR) where individuals with disabilities interact with horses. One way in which this risk might be mitigated is through correct recognition of subtle distress and discomfort behaviors indicative of negative affective states, and correct application of the principles of learning. Previous research has documented low levels of knowledge regarding horse behavior and learning in horses in various sectors of the equine industry. No research has

investigated knowledge of horse behavior and learning among A/TR instructors. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe A/TR instructors' knowledge of horse behavior and learning. An anonymous online survey was distributed to A/TR instructors in the United States. Seven short (approximately 15-second) video clips were shown to respondents who were asked to identify the behavioral profile of the horse as negative, neutral, or positive (in relation to the horse, its welfare, and its affective/emotional state). Correct answers were defined by a panel of three certified equine behaviorists with 100% agreement. Respondents identified operant conditioning (a type of learning) in four definition and five short scenario (one- to two-sentence) questions. Responses were summarized using descriptive statistics (counts and percentages). A total of 204 complete responses were received. Five percent of respondents correctly identified all the behavioral profiles of horses shown in the video clips, with correct responses in a single question ranging from 19% to 97%. Twenty-two percent of respondents correctly identified all four definitions for operant conditioning (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment). Twenty-one percent of respondents correctly identified all five short descriptions of operant conditioning scenarios. Positive reinforcement was the most often correctly identified term in both the definition (94%) and scenario (98%) sections. A/TR instructors demonstrated relatively low levels of knowledge in horse behavior and learning. Research-based education is needed to address these low knowledge levels. This research should be informed by future research addressing the underlying causes of horse behavior commonly seen in A/TR lessons and the identification of affective states, particularly positive affective states, in horses.

Dr. Ellen Rankins is a postdoctoral research fellow at a land-grant university. She holds a Ph.D. in endocrinology and animal biosciences from another land-grant university and is an advanced-level therapeutic riding instructor through PATH Intl. Dr. Rankin's research focuses on horse-human interactions and the welfare of horses in equine-assisted services.

Dr. Sarah Reega recently finalized a Ph.D. candidacy at a land-grant university. She holds a Master of Science in equine science from a university and is an advanced-level therapeutic riding instructor through PATH Intl. Their research focuses on equitation science, horse-human interactions and the welfare of horses in equine-assisted services.

Administration, CE

Stories that Inspire: Using Narrative to Strengthen Fundraising and Engagement

Hayley Plas, CTRI; Nicole Makos

Storytelling is a powerful tool in the therapeutic riding industry that can drive engagement, inspire donations, attract new participants, recruit volunteers and elevate an organization's social media presence. In this session, we will explore how the art of storytelling can be utilized across various communication channels to strengthen your organization's fundraising efforts, recruit new riders and volunteers, and increase visibility on social media platforms. By sharing compelling narratives of how equine-assisted services change lives, centers can foster deeper connections with their audience and stakeholders.

These presenters will share practical strategies for integrating storytelling into your organization's messaging and campaigns, drawing on real-world examples. Learn how to craft authentic, heartwarming stories that resonate with potential donors, supporters and participants. Attendees will gain insight into how to use storytelling to humanize their organization, build lasting relationships, and create content that drives action.

Hayley Plas is a lifelong equestrian with a deep passion for horses. Growing up riding and owning horses, Hayley has experienced the profound impact that horses can have on individuals, a passion that has shaped both her personal and professional journey. Hayley

initially worked in the corporate world, honing her skills in communications and strategy. However, driven by a desire to find more meaningful work, she merged her love for horses with her professional experience by earning her PATH Intl. CTRI certification. Over the years, she has taken on multiple roles at a Premier Accredited Therapeutic Riding Center, including Volunteer Manager, Instructor, and Program Manager. In her current role as Communications Director, Plas has successfully combined her two professional passions — marketing and equine-assisted services — into one impactful career.

Nicole Makos is a nonprofit manager with a wealth of experience from a diverse career in the arts, management, hospitality and human resources. Nicole is a Pennsylvania native and a proud graduate of Seton Hill University. Before relocating to Connecticut, Nicole had the pleasure of working with several Pittsburgh and Philadelphia based non-profit organizations. When a new opportunity brought her to New England, she dove right into the non-profit community, working with distinguished organizations such as Goodspeed Musicals and Long Wharf Theatre. Always looking to continue her education, Nicole expanded her expertise by earning a graduate certificate in Arts Leadership & Cultural Management from the University of Connecticut and completed the Leadership Greater New Haven program through the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce.

Fireside Chat: Innovation Circles Fireside Chat

Facilitated by Kitty Stalsburg, PATH Intl. Innovation Circles Program Manager and Nicole Pepper, PATH Intl. Innovation Circles Representative

10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. **Disability, DE**

Session 4

Understanding Seizures in EAS: Balancing Safety with Inclusivity

Dr. Kaiti Otte, OTD, CTRI

Seizures are complex neurological events that can affect individuals of all ages and backgrounds. As the equine-assisted services (EAS) industry continues to expand its reach, there is an increasing number of participants seeking our services that are at risk for seizures due to various medical diagnoses, including epilepsy, cerebral palsy, brain injuries, and complex genetic conditions. Therefore, it is crucial for EAS professionals to develop a comprehensive understanding of seizures, their potential impacts on safety, and how they may influence equine behavior, participant well-being, staff response protocols, and center liability.

This presentation aims to equip attendees with foundational knowledge of seizure pathology, focusing on the most common types of seizures and their physiological effects. While seizures can affect the brain and body in complex ways, the information presented in this session is designed to be easily digestible and relevant to EAS contexts. Attendees will learn essential “need-to-know” concepts, enabling them to better support participants living with seizures while fostering safety and success with their equine partners.

In addition to building foundational knowledge, this session will offer practical insights into developing and implementing personal, professional, and organizational policies that balance safety management with inclusivity and minimized liability. Participants will explore strategies for risk assessment, particularly when interacting with horses, whether mounted or on the ground. Additionally, we will discuss alternative programming options that may be suitable for individuals with increased seizure risks, as well as strategies to mitigate risks while maximizing the therapeutic benefits.

Attendees will also gain valuable guidance on crafting clear, effective protocols and policies that promote open communication between staff, families and medical professionals. By fostering transparent collaboration and establishing evidence-based practices, EAS centers can optimize participant safety and enhance program efficacy.

This presentation is suitable for a diverse audience within the EAS industry, including instructors, therapists, program directors, administrators and support staff responsible for policy development, personnel training, and risk management. Expect to deepen your understanding of how seizures impact the body, while building a safer, more inclusive environment for all participants.

Dr. Kaiti Otte is a doctorate level licensed occupational therapist and a PATH Intl. CTRI. She has an extensive background in pediatric clinical therapy, specializing in hippotherapy the last 8 years. She is the lead therapist at her center, managing a staff of 11 full and part time therapists. She is also the education coordinator at her center where she is responsible for mentoring professional students and producing robust educational content including numerous educational webinars, directing conferences, workshops and producing an educational podcast for the EAS Industry. She was honored to be named the 2025 PATH Intl. Region 7 'Credentialed Professional of the Year'.

Research, CR-All

Parallel Patterns: Exploring the Interconnectedness of Family Systems and Equine Herd Dynamics

Nancy Van Wyk, LPC, CTRI, ESMHL, Mentor; Nancy Beers, CTRI, ESMHL, Mentor, CHA

Family system dynamics and equine herd dynamics share striking parallels, showing human and animal groups' interconnectedness, communication, and relational patterns. Drawing on general systems theory, this presentation explores how family units and equine herds function as dynamic, interdependent systems in which individual behaviors impact the collective. By examining key principles such as roles, boundaries, hierarchies and the regulation of emotional reactivity, this session bridges the gap between family therapy practices and equine-facilitated psychotherapy. Through scholarly research and experiential case studies, this presentation highlights how equine herd behavior can serve as a metaphor and a tool for understanding family systems. Concepts such as nonverbal communication, attachment, and coregulation will be examined to show how equines mirror family dynamics and provide a unique avenue for therapeutic intervention. Attendees will gain insight into the therapeutic potential of equine-assisted models for addressing issues such as trauma, communication breakdowns, and relational conflict within families. This interdisciplinary approach underscores the value of equine-facilitated psychotherapy in fostering deeper emotional awareness and resilience. It offers practical applications for therapists, educators and researchers interested in systemic intervention models.

Nancy Van Wyk is a licensed professional counselor in Pennsylvania and a PATH Intl. CTRI. She also serves as a Mentor and Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL) and is a faculty member for PATH Intl.'s ESMHL program. Nancy has held leadership roles throughout my involvement with PATH Intl., including serving as Chair of the ESMHL Subcommittee. Currently, Nancy works as the Program Specialist for Veterans at Fair Hill Therapeutic Riding Center in Waymart, PA. With a background in law enforcement, she brings a unique perspective to her work in mental health and equine-assisted therapy. I hold a master's degree in clinical Mental Health Counseling and am pursuing a doctorate in Marriage and Family Therapy, specializing in Military Family Culture.

Nancy Beers is a PATH Intl. CTRI, ESMHL and Mentor, CHA instructor, PATH Intl. ESMHL workshop Faculty/Evaluator, EAL Fundamentals online faculty, and Chair of the ESMHL Certification Subcommittee. As a child, she learned about horse behavior from the Morgan mares and foals at a local farm. Those skills transferred easily into working in human behavior management, and Nancy worked in a variety of mental health settings for many years. Upon discovering equine-assisted services in the mid-1980s, she realized this field is her passion. After teaching adaptive riding for some time, she now focuses exclusively on EAS's mental health and learning areas. Nancy owns and operates The Equine Approach LLC in Colorado Springs, CO.

Programming, DE

Obesity and Eating Disorder Recovery through EAL

Jo Anne Miller, CTRI, ESMHL, Mentor

Equine-assisted learning (EAL) is an emerging therapeutic modality that offers an innovative approach to addressing the complex challenges faced by youth with eating disorders and obesity. Approximately 3% of U.S. teens are diagnosed with conditions like anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa or binge-eating disorder. Alarmingly, studies show that traditional therapies have non-response rates of 20-50% for anorexia nervosa, 30-40% for bulimia nervosa and 20-30% for binge-eating disorder. Additionally, about 17% of youth aged 6 to 17 are classified as having obesity, with 20-40% of weight-loss interventions encountering resistance.

EAL leverages the unique and transformative bond between humans and horses to foster personal growth, emotional healing and the development of essential life skills. By focusing on solution-based strategies tailored to individual needs and supported by contemporary research, EAL empowers participants to overcome barriers to emotional and physical well-being.

This abstract examines the efficacy of EAL through four detailed case studies, showcasing how participants, under professional guidance, cultivate healthier relationships with food and peers. By bridging the gap between traditional therapeutic methods and experiential learning, EAL provides a holistic path to healing. The approach also helps participants address emotional challenges, identify triggers and develop resilience, all of which are crucial to managing eating disorders and obesity.

Central to the EAL framework is the emphasis on emotional regulation and problem-solving abilities, skills essential not only for managing disorders but for achieving overall personal growth. Interacting with horses in a safe and supportive environment enables participants to build self-awareness, empathy and confidence. The nonjudgmental nature of horses fosters a unique therapeutic dynamic, allowing participants to process difficult emotions and gain deeper behavioral insights.

Understanding that horses, like humans, can experience nutritional deficiencies not only fosters empathy but also helps participants connect more deeply with them. This shared focus on health and well-being can enhance the therapeutic process. By learning about equine nutrition, such as how deficiencies in essential nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and proteins can affect a horse's physical and emotional state, participants might develop a better understanding of their own nutritional needs and the importance of balance in diet and care. This mutual journey of healing can serve as a metaphor for building healthier habits and resilience, reinforcing the bond between participant and horse.

Equine-assisted learning exemplifies a groundbreaking and impactful therapeutic approach, equipping youth with the skills necessary to achieve healthier lifestyles while effectively tackling their eating disorders. The four case studies presented underscore its promise as an innovative treatment strategy for addressing eating disorders and obesity in vulnerable populations.

Jo Anne Miller is a CTRI, ESMHL, and Mentor, is the Executive Director of a fully accredited Equine Rescue and PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center (PAC). The farm is home to a full-time school for at-risk youth, combining equines and academics and runs many unique EAL programs for at-risk youth. She is a retired professor of Equine Science at Randolph College and was a previous co-chair of the Equine Welfare Committee for PATH Intl., and currently serves on committees for HETI, the EQUUS Foundation, HHRF, and the Virginia Horse Council.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

Retraining Horse Leaders as Equine Advocates in Mounted Work: Preliminary Concepts

Dr. Emily Kieson, Ph.D.; Dr. Helen Sabolek Consilgio, Ph.D.

This interactive session presents a framework for equine-assisted services that prioritizes equine welfare and emotional wellbeing. Through roleplay and discussion, participants will explore the horse leader's role as an advocate; recognizing stress signals, providing social-emotional support and integrating positive experiences into sessions. By reimagining equine-human interactions through the lens of mutual wellbeing, participants will gain practical strategies and hands-on tools to improve welfare, enhance safety and reduce reliance on operant-based techniques.

Contributors not presenting:

Anna Nolan, MA, serves as the assistant director of communication access at Advocates, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals with developmental, mental health, addiction and other challenges. In this role, she focuses on enhancing communication strategies to better serve the organization's diverse clientele.

Dr. Laura Ryan, D-OT, has over 20 years of experience in occupational therapy incorporating equines. She is a Massachusetts-licensed riding instructor and occupational therapist at Holliston Public Schools and Breezy Hill Farm in Holliston, Massachusetts.

Dr. Emily Kieson holds a Ph.D. in comparative psychology. She has over 20 years of experience in equine-assisted services, and her research and teaching focus on equine behavior, equine welfare and human-horse interactions, with a particular focus on interactions occurring in a therapeutic setting. Dr. Kieson teaches courses in equine-assisted services and animal behavior.

Dr. Helen Sabolek Consilgio holds a Ph.D. in behavioral neuroscience, is a licensed riding instructor and is currently working toward their certified therapeutic riding instructor (CTRI) credential. She has over 10 years of experience in riding instruction, including more than three years in equine-assisted services. She is an associate professor and teach psychology and neuroscience. Their research focuses on equine neuroanatomy and behavior and the impact of yoga and equine-assisted services on mental health and well-being.

Administration, CE

Rebranding with Purpose: The Transformative Journey of Maryland Therapeutic Riding

Amanda Gluck

Rebranding is more than just a change of logo or colors; it's an opportunity to redefine identity, communicate impact and build a stronger connection with your audience. In this presentation, we'll explore the strategic rebranding journey of a therapeutic riding center--a leading nonprofit dedicated to improving wellness through the transformative connection between humans and horses. From assessing brand perception to implementing cohesive visuals and messaging, this case study will highlight the collaborative process that brought their mission to life in a fresh and compelling way. Attendees will learn how strategic rebranding can elevate a nonprofit's visibility, engage key stakeholders and inspire community growth, all while honoring its core values.

Amanda Gluck serves as the founder and CEO of a marketing and communications consulting firm. With a dedicated focus on empowering companies to showcase their achievements, establish credibility, demonstrate thought leadership and cultivate strong organizational cultures, company excels under her leadership. Amanda's proficiency lies in formulating impactful marketing and communication strategies that deliver tangible results. She harnesses the art of storytelling, engaging content and strategic messaging to propel her clients to success.

Fireside Chat: Supporting equine veterinarians: A path to career-life balance and industry sustainability

Facilitated by Dr. Jacquelin Boggs, MS, DVM, DACVIM, Senior Veterinarian – Zoetis Equine Technical Services

11:15 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. **Awards Luncheon**

Come to celebrate this year's award winners and help us recognize their hard work and dedication to the equine-assisted services industry!

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. **Disability, DE**

Session 5

“Essential Tools for Essential Work,” Working with First Responders

Jaclyn Manzione, M.S., ESMHL; G Thomas Manzione, Ph.D., LPC, ESMHL

Every day, emergency responders encounter highly stressful situations involving traumatic injuries and fatalities. Frequent exposure to these critical incidents and other occupational stressors can place them at heightened risk for anxiety and depression, substance misuse and addiction, strained social relationships, stress injuries and post-traumatic symptoms (sleep problems, flashbacks, heightened reactivity). Through proactive intervention, these challenges can be effectively prevented or minimized. The information we present will provide PATH Intl. certified professionals with the appropriate knowledge, tools, and resources so that the responders they work with can thrive in this demanding field.

Jaclyn Manzione, M.S., is a registered psychotherapist in Colorado and a certified practitioner of equine-assisted Gestalt psychotherapy. She is a PATH Intl. Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL). With over 30 years of experience in the medical field, Jaclyn has established a robust foundation in her area of expertise. She holds a Master of Science degree in clinical physiology and is currently an advanced Ph.D. candidate. She has volunteered her expertise as a clinical physiologist for a local therapeutic riding program. Jaclyn is also the founder and Chief Executive Officer of a local equine-assisted services (EAS) facility. In addition, she serves as the vice president of the Board of Directors for a nonprofit foundation that supports first responders.

G Thomas Manzione, PhD., is a licensed and certified mental health clinician possessing more than 30 years of experience as both a psychotherapist and chief administrator in various mental health organizations. He holds a doctorate in counseling psychology and is recognized as a Licensed Professional Counselor and Certified Addictions Specialist in Colorado. Furthermore, he is a certified PATH Intl. Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL). In addition to his clinical work, G Thomas serves as the president of the Board of Directors for a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting first responder.

Higher Education, CE

The State of Equine-Assisted Services Coursework in Higher Education

Nina Ekholm Fry, CTRI, ESMHL

An increasing number of universities and colleges in the United States are offering coursework related to equine-assisted services in areas of therapy, learning and adaptive/therapeutic horsemanship. Undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in pursuing a career that includes interacting with horses within these services or activities can find a variety of programs, courses, majors, minors, and certificates offered by higher education institutions. The content of these offerings varies widely in prerequisites, scope, specificity, learning objectives and cost. In addition, no dedicated network exists for academic professionals who administer coursework in these specific areas. This may contribute to delays in adopting the latest terminology, concepts, and guidelines, and a lack of clarity about what constitutes foundational and advanced knowledge in the focus area of the coursework. Discussions about academic coursework in EAS raise many questions: how does this relate to the more prevalent non-academic training programs? What is the overall role of academic institutions in EAS training? What are advantages and disadvantages to offering coursework in these areas at academic institutions? It is also important to evaluate the nature and applicability of such academic programs. Terms such as accreditation, certification, certificates and the role of national regulation, both for EAS and for particular professional categories, are important to understand in this context. In this presentation, the audience will be provided updated and accurate information about coursework on horses in human services at academic institutions, directed to applicable resources, and will receive practical considerations for those considering course development in these areas. This presentation provides an update on the national prevalence of coursework in equine-assisted services along with developments over time. The content and purpose of coursework and current challenges and opportunities for academic programs offering coursework in EAS are explored in an interactive discussion with relevance for the EAS industry as a whole.

Nina Ekholm Fry is a director and faculty member at a university research institute focused on human-animal interactions. She has 18 years of experience in higher education, including developing and leading programs and courses in EAS. Nina brings national and international experience related to education, organization and regulation of professionals who include horses in their services.

Programming, CE

Essential Efforts in Effective Mental Health Services at your Center

Jody Enget, MA, LMFT, CTRI, ESMHL; Kaitlyn Siewert, MBA, CTRI

Adding mental health services to your PATH Intl. center does not just mean hiring a therapist and recruiting clients. There are specific procedures that need to be implemented to ensure effective program and ethical practices. We will review a list of operating procedures that are unique to mental health programs, pointing out how they can complement or conflict with the existing procedures in your other program areas. The adjustments are inclusive of administrative set-up, program preparation and implementation. Especially important is the training required for staff and volunteers prior to any client engagement. Mental health services are required to operate within state regulations, and it is essential for all those involved in the program to understand what those regulations are and how to function within those regulations in their center role. Program volunteers must have a mental health orientation to understand their rules of engagement, in addition to hands-on training with the horses to practice supporting clients with mental health needs, as the assistance given is more relational based than physical support. Additionally, the program should have an established curriculum and goals that are measurable. We will review simple steps to create a curriculum through your horse handling routines, connect treatment goals and document the sessions so that you are measuring impact from the start.

Collaborating with other mental health organizations in your community can maximize your program's strategic opportunities. We will cover specific examples of how partnering with organizations can assist with the burden of setting up your new program but also maximize your marketing and funding potential. Mental health grants have become a priority area for many foundations and foundations love partnerships. We will discuss how to capture community support to assist in funding your mental health programs.

The benefits of partnerships do not end there; we will also share tips on marketing, client referrals and fundraising.

Jody Enget is the executive program director of a nonprofit mental health organization. She received their PATH registered instructor status in 1997, completed a Master of Arts degree in psychology from Chapman University in 2000, and is now licensed in marriage and family therapy in Colorado and Texas. Jody has worked in multiple environments in the equine-assisted services industry for the last 28 years, including residential treatment facilities, therapeutic riding centers, private practice and behavioral health organizations. Her expertise is in mental health programs incorporating horses.

Kaitlyn Siewert is the executive director of a therapeutic horsemanship program. She has worked and volunteered in the equine-assisted services industry for 30 years and has experience in both programming and administration within nonprofit organizations. Holding a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology as well as a master's in business administration, Kaitlyn has experience in conducting therapeutic sessions as well as navigating the challenges of fundraising and fiscal management. As a Marine Corps spouse, she has lived the personal trials of military

life and is aware of the tribulations and celebrations that affect those who have served, which fuels their passion for providing services to veterans, active-duty military and first responders.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

The Harmony Way: Thinking Differently About our Equine Partners

Melissa Conner, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI, MTRI

For many who work in EAS, our equine partners are like our family members. We care for them deeply, and we expect a great deal from them as they are the catalyst for change in the service offered at our centers. With a growing body of research studying equines' neurology, nervous systems, ways of learning, memories, senses, emotions and how they relate to other beings, we are challenged to shift our thinking. Many of us might have grown up with a dominance mindset regarding horses - meaning that we need to be the "boss" of them in order to have a successful partnership. This hierarchical way of thinking has worked in the past, but there is a new way of thinking that has emerged that is worth consideration. This presenter believes that there is a better way, a way that leads to harmony and connection in the horse-human experience.

Are the equines in our programs happy in their work? Have we considered that they might not be? What might this mean for our centers? These questions will be considered and explored utilizing the latest research and literature available in the field of animal assisted services.

In addition, we will dive into what it means to be dominant, what hierarchy actually looks like and the dangers of only seeing equines as commodities, or tools, in EAS programs. Instead, a new way of thinking will be presented with practical applications that allow the equine to participate in their vocation in a way that helps them to flourish and engage with their world without fear or anxiety. The shift will embody a mutual flourishing for both the equines and the humans in EAS and will equip professionals to consider their herd care and conditioning differently. After all, if we are not concerned with the welfare of all parties, then what we are doing is not therapeutic.

Melissa Conner is the executive director of a Renew Therapeutic Riding Center, a CTRI, an ESMHL and Master Instructor. Melissa has been involved in EAS for over 20 years and has been a faculty member of PATH Intl. for committee leadership and education. In addition, she has mentored multiple instructors at all levels and is passionate about growing the industry and raising the professionalism of instructors in EAS.

Administration, CE

When Your Greatest Challenge Is Having Too Many Volunteers

Susy Turnbull; Erik Stoeckle

Successfully managing volunteers can be one of the most difficult roles in the equine-assisted services industry. This presentation will explain how ROCK recovered after COVID when dozens of volunteers chose not to return. ROCK restructured the process of recruiting, training, and welcoming new volunteers. They also developed promotional opportunities for current volunteers and created opportunities to engage new volunteers when there are limited opportunities to serve as side walkers and horse handlers. ROCK is located in Texas on 60-acres of land, employing 27 staff and partnering with 40 horses. On a weekly basis, our staff and volunteers serve 140 riders, filling 250 positions with 350 regular volunteers. Susy Turnbull, volunteer director, came to this agency in December 2022. Susy brought 27 years of experience in volunteer management working in the field of emergency management. She implemented

the concept of the Incident Command System and span of control used by our first responders. This concept ensures strategic recruitment and training, leadership, and personalized support for all volunteers coming on board. This concept has helped with volunteer retention, to the point where this agency's greatest challenge is finding opportunities for new volunteers to fill. Erik Stoeckle, volunteer team leader/trainer, came to 'this agency' in June 2008. Erik has served more than 17 years at ROCK. With over 20 years' experience as a leader, he helped create and implement a training program with the volunteer director to give additional opportunities to volunteers and support the volunteer team on a daily basis. At ROCK, our greatest challenge is having available positions for new volunteers that are enthusiastic about serving. We have a high retention rate, filling an average of 250 volunteer positions each week for horse handlers and side walkers. Due to the high demand to volunteer, we have developed job descriptions for service opportunities that will immediately engage the new volunteer. Once in the system, these volunteers are then moved to the top of the waitlist for the next available training as a side walker. In this session we will review volunteer job descriptions, training, volunteer commitment requirements, advancement opportunities, creative ways to engage new volunteers, and filling last minute needs when volunteers call in sick. We will also discuss how to use current volunteers in a leadership capacity. This helps to provide peer-to-peer support and will hopefully decrease the burn-out rate of the volunteer coordinator.

Suzy Turnbull, volunteer director, has 29 years of volunteer management experience. She worked for the American Red Cross in disaster relief for 20 years, organizing and managing up to 500 volunteers in local responses and 5000 on large, national level relief operations. Immediately before coming to ROCK, she worked for a local fire department managing 80 volunteers of the Community Emergency Response Team.

Erik Stoeckle, volunteer team leader, has 17 years and more than 18,500 volunteer hours with the agency. A retired Army Officer with more than 14 years' experience, he served as a chief logistics officer for a more than 20,000 employee organization. Erik currently serves on the board of directors for a County Veterans Memorial.

Fireside Chat: The Aged Horse & Retirement: An Open Conversation Facilitated by the Equine Welfare Committee

Facilitated by PATH Intl. Equine Welfare Committee Members – Dr. Ellen Rankins, Dr. Sharon Butler, C Jane Burrows

2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Disability, DE

Session 6

Together We Are Stronger

Jaclyn Manzione, M.S., ESMHL; G Thomas Manzione, Ph.D., LPC, ESMHL

Every day, emergency responders encounter highly stressful situations involving traumatic injuries and fatalities. Frequent exposure to these critical incidents and other occupational stressors can place them at heightened risk for anxiety and depression, substance misuse and addiction, strained social relationships, stress injuries and post-traumatic symptoms (sleep problems, flashbacks, heightened reactivity). Through proactive intervention, these challenges can be effectively prevented or minimized, as knowledge empowers us with enhanced education, resources, and tools to address these issues effectively. This course is designed to enhance mental health support for emergency responders, including healthcare professionals, and their families through a dual focus on intervention and prevention.

Jaclyn Manzione, M.S., is a registered psychotherapist in Colorado and a certified practitioner of equine-assisted Gestalt psychotherapy. She is a PATH Intl. Equine Specialist in Mental Health

and Learning (ESMHL). With over 30 years of experience in the medical field, Jaclyn has established a robust foundation in her area of expertise. She holds a Master of Science degree in clinical physiology and is currently an advanced Ph.D. candidate. She has volunteered her expertise as a clinical physiologist for a local therapeutic riding program. Jaclyn is also the founder and Chief Executive Officer of a local equine-assisted services (EAS) facility. In addition, she serves as the vice president of the Board of Directors for a nonprofit foundation that supports first responders.

G Thomas Manzione, PhD., is a licensed and certified mental health clinician possessing more than 30 years of experience as both a psychotherapist and chief administrator in various mental health organizations. He holds a doctorate in counseling psychology and is recognized as a Licensed Professional Counselor and Certified Addictions Specialist in Colorado. Furthermore, he is a certified PATH Intl. Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL). In addition to his clinical work, G Thomas serves as the president of the Board of Directors for a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting first responder.

Research, DE

Partnering Occupational Therapy and Therapeutic Riding for At-Risk Youth

Bonnie L. DePue, CTRI, ATRI

This qualitative secondary research study addressed the use of equine-assisted services in the lives of at-risk youth from a military-modeled school and how it can impact their social life, schoolwork, behaviors, emotions and decision-making. Cadets participated in a therapeutic riding program run by an occupational therapist/therapeutic riding instructor. Participants completed surveys before participation and after completion of the 10-week program to gain their perspectives on how the use of the horse and environment in the activity of a riding lesson produced a change in their lives. The staff at the school completed surveys reflecting on anger/frustration incidents from the students they worked with and any changes they saw over the 10-week program. The data was gathered over 5 years with two 10-week programs per year and an average of 10 participants per program. This study aimed to determine how using TR in occupational therapy could affect the lives of at-risk youth, and not only was there a positive effect, but several key themes and other notable findings emerged. Findings from this study suggest that including occupational therapy as an adjunct with the activity of therapeutic riding can allow for personal growth and resiliency, improved engagement, positive connections with others, improved mental health, and the ability to learn a new skill for at-risk youth and, as a result, positively affect their social lives, schoolwork, and behaviors, emotions, and decisions. Participants stated growth in improved behaviors, emotions and decision making that can impact other areas of their life. Through participation, cadets increasingly reported a positive effect on schoolwork due to improved concentration and focus, decreased stress, improved motivation, and encouragement to complete the work. Resiliency was seen in improved coping skills and confidence to take on new and challenging situations. In the end, these youth went from seeing their future as 'get through today without getting in trouble', to not only having a plan but implementing their plan with great excitement as they shared 'their future' on their last day in the program.

Bonnie L. DePue has been involved in therapeutic riding since 1980, founded a program in 1999 and became an occupational therapist in 2001. Over the years, 18 research projects have been a part of this program with several universities and medical disciplines. Bonnie continues to explore and share all the amazing gifts of equine-assisted services whether locally with educators, medical professionals and the surrounding communities to far reaching national presentations and international OT interns.

Programming, CE

Forward and Backwards Lesson Plans - Making Skills Fun!

Heather Henken, CTRI, Mentor

Therapeutic riding instructors often face challenges when designing lessons that balance the two essential components of any riding session: skill development and rider enjoyment. This session will demonstrate how to use both forward and backward planning methods to achieve a comfortable variety for rider engagement. Forward planning starts with identifying the objective related to the aids of a specific skill to be achieved. This approach is ideal for sessions where clear skill acquisition is the primary goal. In contrast, backward planning begins with selecting an engaging activity that motivates the rider, followed by identifying how that activity can incorporate skill development. This method can be particularly helpful when engagement and motivation are key challenges.

Understanding motor learning is a central theme of this session, as it informs instructors how to teach task analysis in a way that is most effective for the rider's current level. The session will explore how different types of learners, such as individuals with varying levels of cognitive or physical ability, may benefit from one approach over the other. Instructors will gain insights into adjusting lessons in real time, providing strategies for when things are not working or when riders are disengaged. This flexibility is essential to keep riders motivated and ensure progress toward their riding or therapeutic goals.

The session will include interactive exercises to help instructors apply these concepts, allowing them to design lessons that are not only structured and purposeful but also enjoyable. Instructors will walk away with practical tools and creative strategies for engaging riders through activities that encourage skill acquisition while maintaining a fun and supportive atmosphere.

No more boring lessons—by blending structure with engagement, instructors can ensure that every lesson is a positive and productive experience for both riders and instructors.

Heather Henken brings over 20 years of professional equestrian experience, including a decade devoted to adaptive and therapeutic riding instruction at Sprout Therapeutic Riding and Education Center. As the founder of Instructor Half Halt, she is committed to empowering, educating, and inspiring riding instructors through comprehensive mentoring and educational resources. Heather Henken is a PATH Intl. CTRI and Mentor and additionally holds Level II certifications in both Dressage and Hunt Seat from the American Riding Instructors Association. Known for her work with riders facing significant challenges, she draws on extensive experience gained from countless hours in the arena. A dedicated lifelong learner, she is currently traveling the US to connect and learn from equine-assisted services (EAS) centers all over the country. Her expertise and dedication has her as a growing figure in advancing adaptive riding instruction and fostering the professional growth of instructors.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

Assessing Interaction Quality in EAS: A Practical Ethogram for Professionals

Dr. Emily Kieson, Ph.D.; Dr. Christine Rudd, Ph.D., CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI

Equine-assisted services rely on safe and bilaterally engaged interactions between horses and participants. While ethograms to measure horse welfare via individual behaviors have been proposed, there is limited research on behavioral indicators of wellbeing in unmounted settings which focus on interaction quality, animal agency, and engagement. This project developed a preliminary ethogram for practitioners to use in the field to track key behaviors and interactions that may contribute to increasing working equine quality of life. Videos (N = 40) recorded at four European centers during provider training workshops were used for this preliminary stage. All interactions occurred outside in large pastures while horses were at liberty. Ethogram development involved a literature review and two trained coders recording horse and human behaviors observed in a randomly selected sub-sample (n = 4, 10%), followed by iterative refinement against the entire dataset. Researchers identified 23 distinct behaviors linked to interaction quality, equid wellbeing and participant agency. The ethogram was refined down to 13 behavioral options: 10 behavioral groupings and three distinct behaviors, categorized as affiliative, avoidant, or neutral. Coders demonstrated almost perfect inter-rater reliability on the refined ethogram ($\kappa = 0.98$), indicating consistent identification across observers. Observation coding resulted in a total of 1199 unique horse-human interactions (HHI). Sequences of interactions were analyzed using Observation Oriented Modeling (OOM) software and looked at possible cause and effect models and how behavior options, category, or actors (horse or human) might influence the next behavior, category, or option. Overall results indicated that actors predicted actors (turn-taking) (PCC 59; c-value < .001) with high percentage of affiliative leading to affiliative interactions (65.8%), neutral leading to affiliative (68.5%) and moderate percentage of avoidant transitioning to affiliative (40.1%). This ethogram appears to be a reliable tool for tracking therapeutic HHIs. Results suggest that underlying functions and motivations are a stronger predictor of interaction sequences than the individualized expressions of the behaviors and that neutral and avoidant behaviors could possibly serve as “reset” factors in relational interactions. Recognizing that underlying behavioral affect plays a large role in interaction sequences can provide additional insights in HHIs, especially when behavioral expressions differ. This has the potential to provide practitioners with an accessible and reliable method for longitudinal behavior tracking and making data-informed management and use decisions to enhance their working equids’ wellbeing.

Dr. Emily Kieson holds a Ph.D. in comparative psychology. She has over 20 years of experience in equine-assisted services, and her research and teaching focus on equine behavior, equine welfare and human-horse interactions, with a particular focus on interactions occurring in a therapeutic setting. Dr. Kieson teaches courses in equine-assisted services and animal behavior.

Dr. Christine Rudd has a Ph.D. in animal science with a focus on equine well-being in therapeutic and adaptive horse-human interactions. She has been involved in the sport horse and EAS industries for 20 years and holds the credentials of PATH Intl. CTRI, advanced TRI and ESMHL. Her teaching, education development and research focus on physiological and psychological animal well-being in human-animal interactions and data-informed care and management practices.

Administration, CE

Holistic Equine Assisted Learning-Therapeutic Horsemanship (HEAL-TH): Growing your Center with Unmounted Programs for School Groups and Agencies

Liz Fortes, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI; Jeffrey Rumpf

Many centers face underutilization during daytime hours when schools and other agencies are in session. The goal of this presentation is to guide centers on how to harness the potential of these groups to drive growth, enhance their programming, and generate revenue. School groups and agencies currently generate more than \$100,000 annually and are all unmounted programs.

By partnering with local schools and outside agencies, centers can tap into a new pool of participants, offering therapeutic horsemanship sessions that are both beneficial and educational. This approach not only supports the participants but also helps centers operate more efficiently during hours that would otherwise be less active.

We will explore strategies for establishing successful collaborations with schools and agencies. Key challenges often inherent to these groups, such as transportation, obtaining necessary paperwork, and scheduling, will be addressed with practical solutions and best practices. We will also review how to utilize school group/agency staff by providing training, enabling them to be the volunteers for their students during program activities. Integrating school groups and agency staff into our therapeutic horsemanship programs brings numerous benefits. Providing comprehensive training empowers the staff to effectively engage with their students, fostering a deeper connection and understanding. This collaborative approach not only enhances the therapeutic benefits for the students but also promotes inclusivity and teamwork. As a result, we see improved outcomes in both the therapeutic goals of the program and the personal growth of all involved. This synergy creates a supportive environment where everyone can thrive.

Join us to discover how your center can thrive by embracing these collaborative opportunities. Together, we can expand the reach and effectiveness of therapeutic horsemanship programs. The presenters represent more than 50 years of combined experience to share!

Liz Fortes has been a professional in the horse industry for over 40 years as an instructor and trainer, with the last 19 years in therapeutic riding. Liz Fortes is an Advanced TRI, CTRI, ESMHL, PATH Intl. lead evaluator, video assessor, certified mentor, special Olympics coach, EAP-PTSD, PATH Intl. Equine Services for Heroes, ARIA Certified Level 3 Hunt Seat, ARIA Certified Level 2 Dressage, facilitator for The Equus Effect and program director at a therapeutic center.

Jeffrey Rumpf is the Executive Director at a therapeutic riding center, which has more than doubled services in 5 years. Previous executive director with award-winning experience in organizational growth and strategic planning. MSED in experiential learning and counseling, founder and executive director YMCA Camp Combe experiential learning center. Founder and executive director for Catholic Charities Little Heroes Camps for 9/11 Children who lost a family member, including developing an equine experiential learning and counseling program.

Fireside Chat: Grants 101

Facilitated by Kitty Stalsburg, PATH Intl. Innovation Circles Program Manager and Mary Lavin, Horse Sense Philanthropy, LLC

4:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m. **Networking Break – Book signing with Dr. Temple Grandin in Exhibit Hall**

5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. **Disability, DE**

General Session - Insights into Animal Behavior and Autism with Dr. Temple Grandin

Step into the world of equine perception and emotional intelligence in this thought-provoking session that bridges the experiences of horses and individuals with autism. Dr. Grandin will explore how horses perceive novel objects—and why allowing them to view all sides can transform fear into curiosity. Discover how sudden exposure to new experiences can be overwhelming and how voluntary exploration can foster confidence and calmness in both animals and neurodivergent individuals.

This presentation will also explore how equines may form lasting associations between sensory cues and traumatic events, offering insights into behavioral responses and training approaches. Finally, Dr. Grandin will review the latest neurological research on animal emotions, shedding light on the science behind what our animals feel—and how we can better support them.

Whether you're a certified professional, licensed therapist, educator or simply passionate about animal behavior, this session will offer valuable perspectives on empathy, learning and connection.

6:15 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. **Dinner on your Own**

8:15 p.m. – 10:15 p.m. **Movie Screening – Rescued Hearts Documentary**

Join us in the general session space for some inspiring downtime as we screen the 2-hour documentary, Rescued Hearts. Through deeply moving personal stories, expert insights, and research, Rescued Hearts explores how horses serve as catalysts for health and wellbeing. The film producers will be in attendance for questions afterward.

Sunday, November 9th

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast & Poster Presentations

Poster Presentations:

- Summer Camps
- A Look Inside a Master Level Therapeutic Riding Instructor Portfolio
- Serving with Faith: Navigating in an EAS World
- Riding Towards Safety: Enhancing Accessibility for Older Adults

8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. Disability, DE

Session 7

Equine Assisted Counseling for Survivors of Human Trafficking and Supporting Professionals

Dr. Hallie Sheade, Ph.D., LPC-S, RPT-S, CTRI, ESMHL

Survivors of human trafficking face profound mental health challenges, including PTSD, anxiety, depression and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. At the same time, professionals and peer supports working with this population are at high risk for vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout (Kenny, Staniforth, & Vernals, 2023; Marburger & Pickover, 2020).

Traditional therapeutic approaches alone may not always meet the complex needs of these individuals, highlighting the need for innovative, trauma-informed interventions. Counseling and psychotherapy incorporating equines offers a unique, evidence-informed approach that leverages the neurobiological benefits of the human-equine bond to foster healing, empowerment, and resilience.

This presentation will provide attendees with a comprehensive understanding of how counseling and psychotherapy incorporating equines can be effectively integrated into mental health services for both survivors of trafficking and their supporting professionals (Kim et al., 2022). The session will begin with an exploration of the psychological and physiological effects of trafficking, including how trauma impacts brain function, attachment and self-regulation. It will also examine the phenomenon of vicarious trauma, detailing how working closely with survivors can lead to emotional exhaustion, altered worldviews, and secondary traumatic stress in professionals.

Attendees will gain insight into the neurobiological underpinnings of counseling and psychotherapy incorporating equines, including how interactions with equines influence positive neurobiological effects in humans. Emphasis will be placed on how equines provide nonjudgmental, attuned responses to human emotions, offering survivors a safe and effective pathway to rebuild trust, develop emotional awareness, and strengthen relational skills. Through case studies and research-backed insights, the session will illustrate how structured equine-assisted interventions can address trauma symptoms, improve self-regulation, and restore a sense of control and agency in survivors (Naste et al., 2018).

By the end of the session, attendees will be equipped with practical strategies to implement equine-assisted counseling for survivors of trafficking and supporting professionals, expanding access to trauma-informed care while enhancing the longevity and effectiveness of those working in this demanding field.

Dr. Hallie Sheade holds a Ph.D. in counseling and is a licensed professional counselor supervisor (LPC-S) and registered play therapist supervisor (RPT-S). With more than 30 years of equine experience and nearly 15 years specializing in equine-assisted mental health services, they bring

dual expertise as both a mental health and equine professional. She is a credentialed equine specialist in mental health and learning (ESMHL) and certified therapeutic riding instructor (CTRI) through PATH Intl. Dr. Hallie Sheade has developed evidence-informed counseling approaches that incorporate equines and has authored multiple articles, book chapters and a book on counseling incorporating equines. A frequent speaker at local and international conferences, she is dedicated to advancing the field of equine-assisted mental health services. As executive director of a PATH Intl. Member Center they have conducted or supervised more than 15,000 individual sessions, and she continues to contribute to research, professional training and industry standards within PATH Intl. and other professional organizations.

Research, DE

Standardized Assessment Protocol to Measure Quality-of-Life Outcomes of Adaptive/Therapeutic Riding

Dr. Caiti Peters, Ph.D., OT; Kathy Alm, PATH Intl. CEO

Adaptive/therapeutic riding (A/TR) has been demonstrated to improve health and well-being in a wide variety of populations. Despite these documented benefits in the research, there are often barriers to measuring quality-of-life outcomes of community-based A/TR. Barriers include the time and cost of administering outcome assessments, availability of qualified personnel and selecting appropriate assessments. In 2021, the Temple Grandin Equine Center (TGEC) and PATH Intl. formed a partnership focused on creating a standardized assessment protocol to measure participant outcomes of community-based A/TR at PATH Intl. centers.

We formed a working group whose first task was to create a survey to gather input from industry stakeholders (CSU IRB #3229, February 2022). This survey found that many riding instructors and PATH Intl. centers measure horsemanship outcomes using unstandardized assessments, but there was great interest in outcome assessments that could measure the effects of A/TR on participants' quality of life outside the barn.

Based on the survey results, the working group selected a battery of PROMIS® and NIH Toolbox® assessments. In fall 2022, we conducted a pilot study to assess the feasibility of implementing the standardized assessment battery at three PATH Intl. centers (CSU IRB #3579, July 2022). Ten certified therapeutic riding instructors administered the assessments to their A/TR participants on the first and last day of their 10- to 12-week fall sessions. Twenty-seven of 122 riders or their caregivers completed the assessments, representing a 13% completion rate. Riders demonstrated significant improvements in self-efficacy ($p=0.01$) and nonsignificant trends toward improved empathic behavior ($p=0.06$) and emotional control ($p=0.15$). After this pilot, we concluded that some of the selected assessments demonstrate promise, but we needed to revise the process to increase the completion rate.

In 2024, we conducted focus groups with interested parties from the original three centers and other PATH Intl. centers. Focus group participants affirmed the value such an assessment protocol would hold for their center and the industry broadly. Further, we found that most of the reported barriers to implementation of the assessment protocol could be overcome with a technology solution that allowed: 1) streamlined data collection, 2) immediate reports of assessment results for the center and 3) simple communication of assessment results to PATH Intl. Finally, participants largely agreed that the most valuable incentive for completing the assessment process was for centers to have access to their own data and aggregated data from other centers.

In 2024, our working group grew to include a team member with Salesforce expertise, and we created a process in Salesforce that allows A/TR participants' parents to complete the assessments from their smartphones. Further, the Salesforce process allows centers to have

access to their own center's reports and allows PATH Intl. to have access to data across centers for periodic aggregation. In 2025, we will launch a pilot study of the revised assessment protocol to assess its feasibility and utility in capturing quality-of-life improvements in A/TR participants. The presentation will include an overview of the assessment process for attendees to consider if their center may be interested in future use of the assessment protocol.

Dr. Caiti Peters is an assistant professor and the director of research at the Temple Grandin Equine Center at Colorado State University. The Temple Grandin Equine Center's mission is to advance education and research in equine-assisted services for individuals with disabilities. Dr. Peters is a licensed occupational therapist, AHCB-certified, and holds a Ph.D. in occupation and rehabilitation science. Her research focuses on the scientific development of equine-assisted services broadly, with a particular emphasis on occupational therapy integrating horses for autistic youth.

Kathy Alm has been in the equine-assisted services industry for more than 25 years. She began her service as chief executive officer of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.) in August 2014. Throughout her tenure in equine-assisted services, she has facilitated numerous workshops and presentations on equine-assisted services (EAS) nationally and internationally, as well as trainings on fundraising, board development, and organizational sustainability. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Pacific Lutheran University.

Programming, CR-All

Natural Mindfulness: Integrating the Environmental Model into Equine-Assisted Services

James Meaden, BA, MA; Katie Fallon, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI, EAGALA

The environmental model of mindfulness, recently published in *Frontiers in Social Psychology*, offers a revolutionary framework that reconceptualizes mindfulness as an adaptive cognitive style naturally shaped by environmental contexts rather than an effortful practice or a trait to be cultivated. This model reveals why equine-assisted services (EAS) are uniquely positioned to foster mindfulness: EAS environments inherently contain all four research-identified elements that naturally elicit mindfulness; immediate feedback, observational learning, nature exposure and the interconnected self-construal developed from the human-horse bond.

While traditional models frame mindfulness as either a Buddhist ethical practice or a Western therapeutic intervention, the environmental model demonstrates how specific contextual factors spontaneously evoke mindful states without explicit instruction or effort. This perspective transforms our understanding of EAS by identifying the underlying ecological mechanisms that naturally foster mindfulness.

The EAS environment embodies all four key mindfulness-facilitating elements: As prey animals, horses provide immediate, honest feedback on human emotional states and behaviors, creating conditions for present-moment awareness. Observational learning inherent in equine environments engages participants in sustained attentional states that parallel traditional mindfulness practice. The outdoor natural setting offers well-documented cognitive restoration effects. Most profoundly, the human-horse bond fosters an interconnected self-construal, expanding personal boundaries to include connection with the horse and surrounding environment.

This presentation integrates insights from cognitive psychology, anthropology and environmental studies to demonstrate how EAS practitioners can optimize program environments to enhance these mindfulness-facilitating elements. We will present evidence showing how properly structured EAS environments naturally cultivate mindful cognitive states

comparable to those achieved through traditional training; without requiring explicit mindfulness instruction or meditation practices.

Attendees will receive practical implementation strategies and assessment tools to identify environmental strengths in their current programs and enhance areas of opportunity. By understanding and amplifying these environmental elements, practitioners can create evidence-based experiences that leverage the natural mindfulness-inducing qualities of EAS settings, leading to more sustainable outcomes across diverse populations based on sound scientific foundations.

James Meaden is an industrial-organizational psychologist, certified mindfulness teacher and equine-assisted learning specialist with 15 years in psychometric assessment and research, and four years working directly with horses. He holds a master's degree in industrial-organizational psychology from George Mason University, along with bachelor's degrees in psychology and business administration (minor in neuroscience). James holds certifications in equine-assisted learning from the HERD Institute and in mindfulness from The Mindfulness Center's Science of Mindful Awareness (SOMA) program. His work includes the groundbreaking environmental model of mindfulness paper published in *Frontiers in Social Psychology* (August 2024). A regular speaker at the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) conferences, he also leads program evaluation for EAP and EAL initiatives and is the founder of an organization dedicated to helping individuals reconnect with their innate mindfulness through evidence-based practices and experiential learning.

Katie Fallon is the founder and executive director of a PATH Intl. Member Center and a PATH Intl. CTRI with Advanced Certification. With more than 20 years of experience in facilitating sessions for clients with a wide range of physical, cognitive, psychological and emotional challenges, Katie is an EAGALA certified equine specialist and a PATH Intl. Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL). She also serves on the faculty of the HERD Institute in the field of equine-assisted learning and holds a Level 1 certification in equine-facilitated learning from the HERD Institute. In addition, Katie has presented on various aspects of EAS at national, regional and local conferences and has served as a volunteer coordinator, program director, board member and board president for multiple EAS programs.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

Technology for Equine Welfare: Wearables, AI and the Path Forward

Dr. Ashley Phelps-Dunn, DVM

The integration of wearable sensors and artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming equine welfare by enhancing our ability to monitor movement and assess pain with greater precision. This session will explore advancements in wearable technology and AI-driven motion and facial expression analysis, providing a glimpse into the future of objective equine health assessments. Recent research has demonstrated the potential for wearable technology to detect subtle physiological and behavioral changes in horses. Equine fitness trackers are being validated for ECG and arrhythmia detection, enabling early identification of cardiac irregularities. Recumbency monitoring can provide insights into sleep patterns, stress levels and overall well-being. Additionally, innovative wearable technology for real-time particulate monitoring is improving management strategies for horses requiring soaked hay due to respiratory conditions. Equine veterinarians may also use AI technology for lameness detection, aiding in early intervention and better treatment planning. These advancements contribute to a growing body of evidence supporting the integration of technology into equine care. Even the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) is investing in wearable technology, launching a study to evaluate wearables from six manufacturers to determine their effectiveness in injury

detection. This investment underscores the growing recognition of the role that AI and sensor-based technologies can play in improving equine health outcomes. Could similar approaches benefit horses at PATH Intl. centers? Understanding how these advancements translate to therapy horse welfare is critical for ensuring long-term health and sustainability in equine-assisted services (EAS). Attendees will gain insights into how these innovations can be integrated into therapeutic and performance settings, particularly within EAS, to ensure the well-being of therapy horses. This presentation will also address ethical considerations, challenges, and future directions for wearable technology and AI-driven equine welfare assessments.

Dr. Ashley Phelps-Dunn, DVM, is a dedicated equine veterinarian with over 20 years of experience in equine health, welfare, and industry leadership. Throughout her career, she has combined clinical expertise with a passion for advancing equine veterinary medicine, including areas such as lameness evaluation, sports medicine, reproduction and innovative therapeutic approaches. Dr. Phelps-Dunn has served as an equine practitioner, a technical consultant in the animal health industry and an influential thought leader in equine care and education.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

Investigating Unmounted Horsemanship: Expanding Opportunities in Equine-Assisted Services

Susie Rehr; C Jane Burrows, ESMHL

As awareness of equine welfare and weight-carrying capacity grows, there has been an increasing shift toward unmounted horsemanship in equine-assisted services. While weight limitations are a key factor, unmounted work provides a range of additional benefits, including improved communication and bonding with the horse, increased accessibility for individuals who may not be appropriate for riding, and expanded opportunities for meaningful horse-human interactions. Whether used as a standalone learning approach or as a preparatory step before mounted lessons, unmounted work plays a critical role in skill development and participant success.

Introducing new students to unmounted horsemanship offers valuable insights for both instructors and participants. It allows instructors to assess an individual's ability to engage with the horse, follow directions, and develop foundational skills without the added complexity or anxiety of riding. Unmounted work can help establish trust, improve a participant's comfort level around the horse, and create a strong foundation for future learning. Additionally, incorporating unmounted work broadens the selection of suitable equines, as size and weight restrictions are no longer the primary considerations. Participants benefit from a new perspective—both figuratively and literally—on horsemanship, fostering a deeper connection with the horse and the learning process.

Unmounted work also supports cognitive and social skill development. Activities such as grooming, leading, and groundwork exercises help participants develop key learning skills, including attention to tasks, problem-solving, and direction-following. Furthermore, unmounted sessions encourage social interaction, teamwork, and leadership development, particularly in group settings where participants must communicate and collaborate with peers.

This session will explore the key benefits of unmounted horsemanship, including its role in weight-carrying considerations, its value as an introduction to mounted work, and its impact on reducing participant anxiety. Attendees will gain insight into a variety of lesson options designed to enhance participant experiences and skill development. The topics covered will include foundational horsemanship skills such as grooming and ground-based interactions, as well as structured lesson formats such as long-lining, obstacle courses, dressage patterns on the ground, and team-based activities like Pas de Deux or drill work.

Susie Rehr is the Executive Director of a PATH Premier Accredited Center (PAC). She is a hippotherapy clinical specialist and has been a physical therapist for 38 years providing physical therapy services to the pediatric population and specializing in the integration of hippotherapy treatment principles for the past 25 years. Quality care, clinical education, organizational resource development, educational presentations, published writing, and national involvement are hallmarks of her career. Susie is involved at the committee level for both PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. To round out her skills, she earned her Master of Science in Organizational Leadership in May 2023.

C Jane Burrows is the Director of Operations at a PATH Premier Accredited Center (PAC). She brings her 50 years of broad experience as a physical therapist, equine specialist in mental health and learning, and a CHA credentialed instructor to bear on developing educational materials and resources for therapists and adaptive riding instructors. C Jane earned her Hippotherapy Clinical Specialist credentials in 2010. As a long time, supporter of both PATH Intl and AHA, Inc., she has been a member of numerous committees. Together with Susie Rehr, she has co-authored and presented courses on various topics, including disability education, equine training, and equine welfare.

Fireside Chat: Nonprofits and AI: The Risks, The Benefits, The Unknowns, The Future

Facilitated by Teri Walker, CommonTeri Founder and CEO

9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. **Disability, DE**

Session 8

Communicating with Our Participants: Valuing All Forms of Communication

Melanie Dominko-Richards, MS, CCC-SLP, HPCS

As professionals who work with individuals with differing abilities, it is important to recognize that not all people communicate the same way and that communication styles are heavily based on user preference. It is vital that, as professionals, we value all the different ways in which a person communicates, as all forms of communication are valid, whether it be with picture cards, spoken language, sign language or a combination of all three. In addition, as technology advances, high-tech communication devices are becoming more widely used in the variety of settings our participants engage in during their day-to-day lives. This can be school, the community, and even the farm. Having these devices at the barn can be intimidating for professionals who are not familiar with augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and how to best implement it in their sessions or riding lessons.

In this presentation, attendees will learn the difference between speech and language, identify the five domains of language, how these domains contribute to communication and learning and recognize barriers to communication across the lifespan. Attendees will also learn strategies that can be implemented in a variety of communicative settings; these will include how to be a better communication partner with those who utilize AAC and how the concepts of presuming competence, autonomy, and privacy play an important role in being an effective communicative partner who values all forms of communication. Attendees will also have the opportunity to discuss their experiences with AAC and brainstorm ways in which AAC can be better implemented at their facilities.

Melanie Dominko-Richards is a New Jersey-licensed speech-language pathologist with a certificate of clinical competency from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Melanie graduated from Seton Hall University in 2011 with a Bachelor of Science in education and in 2013 with a Master of Science in speech-language pathology. During her graduate studies, she completed clinical internships in an elementary school, a traumatic brain injury outpatient rehab, and a clinical externship at two facilities that provided therapy services utilizing equine movement as part of an integrated plan of care. Melanie works at a day program for adults with developmental disabilities, helping to improve the functional communication skills of participants in their day program and residential settings. In addition, she works part-time at an equine-assisted services (EAS) center where they incorporate equine movement into their speech-language pathology plans of care. Melanie has attended the Hippotherapy Treatment Principles Part I and Part II courses through the American Hippotherapy Association Inc. and has been a board-certified hippotherapy clinical specialist through the American Hippotherapy Certification Board since 2017. Melanie is a PATH Intl. CTRI and registered therapist. She has also received training through the PROMPT Institute and DIR/Floortime.

Research, DE

Effects of Simulated Equine Motion Therapy for Gait and Balance in the Elderly

Brian Garner

The effectiveness of a realistic, mechanical, horse-riding motion simulator was investigated to reduce the fall risk among the aging population. The motion simulator is a medical grade device facilitating indoor, convenient access to realistic, natural horse-riding motion. A simulator can serve as a complementary tool to improve accommodation and safety, reduce cost and needed human-power, and increase opportunities for more frequent dosage. An institutional review board-approved study was conducted with independent living residents older than 60 in collaboration with a local senior care center. Measures for manual muscle tests, walking trials and timed up and go (TUG) trials were recorded before and after six weeks of treatment involving 10 to 15 minutes riding the device twice per week. Of 20 participants enrolled, 10 treatment (TX) and three controls (CX) completed the study. Several dropped out due to illness or frustration at not getting to ride the device. Muscle strength improved for TX at the hip and core, while for all CX it declined or didn't change. No change was observed in muscle strength at the knee. Forward walking speeds increased in eight of nine TX (by about 38% average), whereas in CX it slightly decreased. Backward walking speeds improved by 70% on average in TX, and 21% in CX. All TX and CX groups showed at least some improvement in TUG, though TX improvement was much more pronounced. Of the 10 in TX, nine began at or above the fall-risk threshold, and four of those (44%) improved to below the threshold. None in CX improved to be close to the threshold. Eight of TX improved forward walking speed, whereas CX dropped speed. Backward walking speed improved about three times as much in TX as in CX. The encouraging results of this preliminary study should be of interest to those treating elderly clients for balance and gait challenges.

Brian Garner is an associate professor in mechanical engineering at an R1 research university. Brian's background includes experimental and computer modeling methods in biomechanics, the study of forces and motions in living things. In 2014, he was awarded a patent for the technology behind the mechanical horse-riding simulator device. Brian has conducted numerous research studies involving the device, including children with Autism, and with the elderly.

Programming, CE

Where is the Line? Understanding Scope of Practice and Professional Competency in Equine-Assisted Services

Dr. Veronica Lac, CTRI, ESMHL

The scope of practice in the equine-assisted services (EAS) is often widely misunderstood. From terminology to professional competency, there are increasing trends that blur the line between services that incorporate horses in education and therapy. This, in turn, creates confusion for service users who may then perpetuate the use of inaccurate terminology and makes it more difficult for practitioners to maintain their scope of practice. For practitioners incorporating horses into educational and coaching settings, navigating the line between being trauma informed without stepping outside their scope of practice is difficult. What constitutes “outside”? Where is the line between therapy and learning? The same questions apply for practitioners incorporating horses into psychotherapy and counseling settings, who then transition into organizational work. For equine specialists working in either setting, how clear is their scope of practice? What training and/or support is provided to equine specialists working in a mental health setting? What training and/or support is provided to educators or therapists when working with horses? Does scope of practice apply to our equine partners? The EAS industry continues to expand into new arenas. This means that more people are being offered services in increasingly diverse settings. Practitioners need to be aware of the different skills required to work with different populations. An educational session with horses for high school students is different than working with veterans. Increasing awareness of the needs of different client populations is part of professional competency and an important part of continued education. This presentation offers clarity and guidance to centers and practitioners to ensure that they are operating within scope of practice and professional competency guidelines. Drawing from EAS practitioner-led research, this presentation will explore how to navigate the line between scopes of practice, consider the type of skills and experience needed when working with different populations and offer suggestions on how to increase clarity and competency for centers, practitioners and service users.

Dr. Veronica Lac has more than 25 years’ experience as a mental health practitioner, coach and educator, with an academic background that spans organizational training, and psychology. Veronica has developed equine and canine-assisted programs for at-risk adolescents in collaboration with residential treatment centers and eating disorder clinics and has worked with city police and fire divisions to train and implement equine assisted wellness programs. Veronica has multiple publications internationally in peer-reviewed journals, serves on the Executive Board of numerous professional organizations and is a peer-reviewer for multiple psychology journals. Veronica has designed, developed and delivered equine-assisted learning and psychotherapy training to practitioners for more than 10 years.

Programming, CR- Riding

Six in a Class? Strategies for Teaching Group Adaptive Riding Lessons

Katie Luessenhop, CTRI, Mentor

Teaching adaptive horseback riding lessons presents unique challenges, especially when managing large groups of riders. Instructors often face the complexity of meeting individual rider needs while ensuring that safety, engagement, and individualized instruction are maintained. This session is designed to equip instructors and instructors-in-training with practical strategies for effectively managing group lessons with up to six riders, offering them tools to optimize the experience for both riders and volunteers. Throughout the session, we will cover a variety of essential topics, including lesson planning, arena management, volunteer coordination, equine selection and placement, teaching techniques and risk management.

One of the key areas of focus will be on lesson planning and teaching techniques, particularly how to incorporate inclusive and creative methods to address diverse learning styles and abilities. Instructors will be encouraged to think outside the box, adapting their lesson plans and teaching methods to ensure that all riders are engaged and involved in the lesson, regardless of their skill levels or challenges. Interactive discussions will allow participants to share their favorite group lesson activities, and brainstorm new group lesson ideas.

This presentation will also focus on arena management. Attendees will gain insight into how to optimize space, minimize congestion and maintain smooth traffic flow in a potentially busy environment. Attendees will explore how to use the available space most efficiently, ensuring that all riders have room to safely participate without interruption. This is particularly important when working with large groups, as ensuring that each rider has a meaningful experience while preventing accidents and disorganization can be a challenge.

Ultimately, this session will equip instructors with the tools, strategies and confidence to run successful, accessible group adaptive riding lessons, ensuring that each rider has a positive experience while learning and growing through adaptive horseback riding.

Katie Luessenhop is a PATH Intl. CTRI with 12 years of instructional experience and a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Katie's involvement in the equine-assisted services industry spans 20 years, including eight years as a volunteer, 12 years as an instructor, 10 years as a Volunteer Coordinator, and two years as a Program Coordinator. Additionally, she is a PATH Intl. Mentor, dedicated to supporting the development of future instructors in the field.

Administration, CE

Protecting Your Passion: Essential Insurance Insights for EAS Operations

Jonathan Killian

The insurance landscape for equine-assisted services (EAS) operations is constantly evolving, with rising premiums, new exclusions, and increasing complexities. This session will provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of the EAS insurance marketplace, the key coverages available and critical factors to consider when evaluating existing policies and insurance agents.

We will explore recent industry trends, including common exclusions, restrictions and policy changes affecting renewals. Attendees will gain insight into essential liability coverages, including the distinction between general and professional liability, coverage considerations for instructors, volunteers, students, and the herd, and the importance of care, custody, and control

(CCC) for non-owned horses. Additional topics will include off-premise activities, events, pony rides, petting zoos, and the implications of new exclusions on renewal policies.

Property coverage is another critical area, requiring careful evaluation of replacement cost vs. actual cash value, wind and hail deductibles, and policy limitations. Finally, we will discuss the importance of working with a knowledgeable and engaged insurance agent—one who understands the unique risks of EAS programs, provides on-site support, and can tailor coverage to nonprofit and business structures, including 501(c)(3) organizations, LLCs, and trusts.

By the end of this session, participants will be better prepared to assess their insurance needs, identify potential gaps and work with the right professionals to secure comprehensive protection for their programs, facilities, and horses.

Jonathan Killian has a family history of farming in Minnesota and Iowa. He has been licensed and working in the financial and insurance industry since 2000. Jonathan has a great appreciation for the EAS community and regularly volunteers locally. He is married with three amazing kids and is highly involved in their education and sports, including horse riding lessons for their oldest. Jonathan takes great pride and joy in providing solutions for the EAS industry regarding all things insurance-related, plus whatever else a facility may need, including herd procurement.

Fireside Chat: Understanding Our Veterans

Facilitated by Eileen White, PATH Intl. ES4H Committee Member

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **DEI, CE**

Session 9

Fostering Inclusion in Equine-assisted Services

Steph Pharr; Brenda Corujo Orraca

Time spent with equines can provide a haven for people experiencing marginalization because they offer a unifying opportunity to bring people together in the barn. This presentation is centered on the importance of ensuring historically marginalized individuals are invited and welcomed to become a part of the equine-assisted services (EAS) community, that service providers are culturally competent to work with a diverse population – which includes but goes beyond understanding disabilities – and that PATH Intl., its centers and credentialed professionals recognize the barriers that exist for historically marginalized individuals. Led by members of the PATH Intl. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee, this recorded webinar is about DEI within EAS and PATH Intl. specifically. Viewers will learn about the current action plan, accomplishments, current efforts, challenges; and gain resources for continued learning, on-going research and opportunities to get involved. And it's FREE for PATH Intl. Members!

Steph Pharr is the DEI Committee chair for PATH International (since January 2025) and serves as program administrator at Heart of Horse Sense in western North Carolina. They received a Master of Critical Psychology from Prescott University and currently teach Neurodiversity 101 for instructors, volunteers and staff at equine-assisted therapy barns across the Southeast. An award-winning artist, mother and music lover, Steph brings creativity, compassion and lived experience to their work in equine-assisted learning and inclusive program development.

Brenda Corujo Orraca (she/her) is a Puerto Rican who grew up on an island and has resided in Florida since 2016 with her two young adult kids. She holds a BA in Communications from Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. She became certified with PATH Intl. in 2015 as a CTRI and as an ESMHL in 2018.

Her educational background in communications, along with her passion for the visual arts and horse behavior, has guided her interest in reading to learn more and her work experience. She taught in Explora education center in Puerto Rico and worked with kids within the autism spectrum. This inspired Brenda and her mare Rosie to search more on what was available to work with the kids at Explora. This started Brenda's journey to get certified with PATH Intl. to learn and be part of a community. Previously, also in Puerto Rico, she had co-founded Grupo Misuko, a program directed towards improving parent-child interaction through the visual arts in which parents participated with the children in guided art lessons. In Florida, she co-developed, managed, and instructed an equine-assisted services groundwork-based program for a nonprofit residential foster children group home until the group home had to close and the EAS program had to be dismantled.

Her interest in collaborating with the PATH Intl. DEI Committee is inspired by her experiences as a Hispanic woman in the U.S. through all the different times residing in the mainland. During her life, she has often sought ways to be part of a group to create awareness for change. Brenda along with Rosie and Giddy (her mares) are now on a "quest" to share stories on the benefits of connecting with horses to as many people as possible.

Research, CE

The "Trickle Down" Effect: How does research really help? Introducing Science Open

Dr. Pebbles Turbeville; Jo Ann Miller, CTRI, ESMHL, Mentor

Science Open collection was created by Horses & Humans Research Center (HHRF) to be a no-cost database for you to access all equine-related research in one place. Learn easy ways to find what you're looking for in a quick, efficient manner to implement best practices that affect your bottom line, horse well-being, and social licensing. Hear about real life examples of how research data has affected the best practices, and how Science Open is the key to access for all.

Dr. Pebbles Turbeville is the Chief Executive Officer of the Horses and Humans Research Foundation (HHRF), where she leads international efforts to advance scientific research on horse-human interactions. Under her leadership, HHRF not only funds research but also advocates for equine well-being and provides educational resources to support evidence-based practices among the public and professionals working with horses. She oversees the organization's grantmaking process and education programs on how horses help humans but also how humans can help their horse partners.

Dr. Turbeville holds an Ed.D. in Sports Management with a focus on leadership, a master's degree from NC State University, and a BA from Columbia College. Prior to joining HHRF, she served as Chair of the Equine and Sport Studies Department at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, NC, where she was an associate professor teaching Therapeutic Horsemanship, Equine Studies, and Sports Management. She also led the university's therapeutic horsemanship program.

A recognized leader in the EAS field, Pebbles was honored with the James Brady Professional Achievement Award from PATH Intl. in 2022. She is a PATH Intl. Certified Advanced Instructor, Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor (CTRI), and was a mentor instructor. Her extensive service includes roles on the NARHA board (now known as PATH Intl.), multiple PATH Intl. committees, and she has been a faculty member for various instructor workshops.

Dr. Turbeville is a seasoned presenter at international, national, and regional conferences, where she shares insights on equine-assisted services, horse and human interaction research, equine well-being, the equine industry, program leadership, and research-informed practices.

Jo Anne Miller is a CTRI, ESMHL, and Mentor, is the Executive Director of a fully accredited Equine Rescue and PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center (PAC). The farm is home to a full-time school for at-risk youth, combining equines and academics and runs many unique EAL programs for at-risk youth. She is a retired professor of Equine Science at Randolph College and was a previous co-chair of the Equine Welfare Committee for PATH Intl., and currently serves on committees for HETI, the EQUUS Foundation, HHRF, and the Virginia Horse Council.

Programming, CE

Virtus Sport and Dressage: Opening Doors for Riders with Intellectual Disabilities

Kristen Moreland

Spreading awareness about international competitions, such as Virtus Global Sports, for riders with intellectual disabilities, offers numerous benefits, both for the riders themselves and for society. First, it promotes inclusivity and equality. Through Virtus Global Sports, the world acknowledges the abilities and talents of athletes with intellectual disabilities. It reinforces the message that individuals, regardless of their challenges, have the potential to excel in sports. International competitions provide a platform where riders can showcase their skills in a fair and structured environment, just as able-bodied athletes do. Making more people aware of the fact that international competitions are well within reach will increase opportunities for participation to those interested. Awareness can help increase funding, sponsorship and support, making it easier for riders with intellectual disabilities to access the training, equipment and facilities they need to compete. When people see that opportunities exist at an international level, it may inspire more riders to pursue dressage and reap the benefits from it.

Spreading awareness of these opportunities can also promote social inclusion and break stigmas about therapeutic riding. The more visibility these athletes gain, the more society moves toward breaking down the barriers of stigmatization that often surround intellectual disabilities. This helps foster greater social acceptance and inclusion. International events draw attention not only to the athletes but also to the communities and organizations that support them, promoting greater social cohesion.

We are all familiar with the mental and physical benefits from equestrian sports, especially dressage, including improved motor skills, enhanced concentration and emotional well-being. Awareness of these events can help highlight how such sports contribute to the overall quality of life for these individuals while also building confidence and independence. Competing at an international level provides riders with the opportunity to grow personally, build self-confidence, and develop a sense of achievement.

The success of the U.S. Paralympic team this past summer, shed light on the inspiring stories of the riders as they became role models for the physically impaired. The visibility of successful riders with intellectual disabilities can inspire others with similar challenges to pursue their own goals, whether in equestrian sports or other areas. These athletes become role models, showing

that intellectual disabilities should not limit potential, and that success is possible in all aspects of life.

Not only do international competitions encourage global collaboration but they also help build stronger support networks. By spreading awareness, growing the rider base and promoting international competitions, advocacy for riders with intellectual disabilities can gain traction, leading to more support from organizations, governments and the public. In addition, competitions offer a unique opportunity for riders, trainers and supporters to connect with others in the global equestrian community, creating networks that extend beyond the event itself.

Raising awareness of international dressage competitions for riders with intellectual disabilities is crucial in promoting equality, encouraging participation, fostering social inclusion and showcasing the incredible talents of these athletes. It has the potential to drive positive changes in both the equestrian community and society.

Kristen Moreland is a passionate and dedicated professional with a rich background in therapeutic riding and horsemanship. She graduated from St. Andrews University with a degree in Therapeutic Horsemanship and Equine Business Management and has since spent over 18 years trying to make a significant impact in the world of therapeutic riding. After graduation, she embarked on a fulfilling career teaching therapeutic riding, with a focus on helping riders achieve independence in the saddle while finding competitive opportunities for them to shine. In 2011, Kristen co-founded Beyond Limits Therapeutic Riding (BLTR) in Cartersville, Georgia, where she has been instrumental in fostering growth in horsemanship and riding skills to riders with a variety of diagnoses. Her experience from her own riding career in eventing is ever present as she relays her knowledge to her students with lessons focused on learning a solid foundation in dressage. Under Kristen's leadership, BLTR has become a beacon of support for riders of all abilities looking to gain confidence, competence, and independence in their riding skills.

In addition to her work with BLTR, Kristen has been an influential figure in the South Region Pony Club community. For the past five years, she has served as the District Commissioner of the Atlanta Pony Club, where she has worked tirelessly to bridge the gap between neuro-divergent and neuro-typical riders. Her efforts have helped encourage participation from both communities in Pony Club activities and membership, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all.

Kristen is also the U.S. Dressage Team Coach for Athletes Without Limits (AWL). Through AWL, she has coached athletes from across the country, and in 2023, she led U.S. team riders to Vichy, France for the inaugural Virtus International Dressage Competition. This groundbreaking event for athletes with intellectual disabilities, part of Virtus Global Sport, marked a significant milestone in the sport's inclusivity, and kick-started a whole new era for riders in therapeutic riding programs around the world!

With her unique combination of expertise in therapeutic riding, competitive dressage, and commitment to inclusivity, Kristen continues to inspire and lead individuals toward achieving their equestrian goals, no matter their background or abilities. Her work remains a testament to the transformative power of horses, competitive opportunities, and the positive impact they can have on the lives of individuals with varying abilities.

Administration, CE

The Heart of Change Management: People, Emotions, and Growth

Patricia McCowan, CTRI, ESMHL, ATRI; Kitty Stalsburg, CTRI, ESMHL, MTRI

Leadership transitions can be challenging times for organizations, or they can be periods of strengthening and growth. They are often complex and emotional processes requiring focus on many essential needs. This is especially true for founder transitions or any leader who has served the organization for many years.

This presentation will provide both seasoned and novice EAS leaders alike with hands-on management knowledge and tools to support long-term organizational stability. Learn how to prepare for and safely navigate significant leadership transitions from theoretical and practical examples focusing on organization planning, communication, financial stability, and human resources.

The presentation will reference different change management models. Discussion will focus on commonalities between all the models. With an emphasis on areas preventing and navigating the potential pitfalls of resistance and push back.

Participants will gain valuable insights into fostering collaboration and support during times of change. They will leave with a deeper understanding of how to engage more people in the changing process, transforming resistance into momentum. Remember, you don't have to navigate this journey alone. You can create a culture that embraces change and fosters resilience.

For Executive Directors & Program Directors: Leaders often face complex challenges that require more than just technical know-how. This talk will equip them with the skills to lead effectively by understanding the human dynamics involved in change management. This presentation will help executive directors and program directors to discover ways of fostering collaboration, navigating resistance, and building a culture of adaptability - ensuring they remain effective and responsive to community needs during times of change.

For Board Members: The board's decision-making, change management and communication approach can significantly influence the organization's future success. Board members often face resistance to change, and learning to engage effectively can turn that resistance into support, enabling smoother transitions. By instilling confidence in staff and the community, the board reassures everyone that these transitions will be successful and beneficial for the organization as a whole.

Participants will leave with actionable strategies that can be immediately implemented, enhancing their ability to lead their organizations through change effectively.

Patricia McCowan has been involved with the equine-assisted services industry for more than 30 years at NARHA/PATH Intl. accredited centers in roles that include: program volunteer, volunteer coordinator, certified instructor, executive director, and board member. She has volunteered for PATH Intl. as a program consultant, region representative, accreditation sub-committee member, PICC member, accreditation lead visitor, and faculty for the Standards Course and Associate Visitor Training. She owns a consulting practice for not-for-profits and is a frequent trainer on leadership continuity and board governance for regional and national organizations serving not-for-profits.

Kitty Stalsburg has over 30 years of experience in the equine-assisted services field, from program volunteer to executive director, Kitty provides "lived" experience-based knowledge. A PATH Intl. Master TRI, Visitor, Evaluator, faculty and committee member, she has strong familiarity with PATH Intl. centers and members. In her current role as the Program Director for

the PATH Intl. Innovation Circles Program, she frequently hears from center leadership that are struggling with transitions and change.

Equine Welfare, CR-All

Managing the Aging Equine Herd: Strategies for Obesity Prevention and Improved Health

C Jane Burrows, ESMHL; Susie Rehr

Overweight and obesity are emerging as significant health concerns in the United States, impacting both humans and horses. Recent studies suggest that 20-50% of horses in the United States meet the criteria for obesity, with a body condition score (BCS) of seven or more. Researchers have identified obesity as "the most important welfare issue affecting equines in Western countries." These concerns are especially relevant to equine-assisted services (EAS) programs, where the majority of herd members are older horses, typically 16-20 years old. As horses age, they become more susceptible to metabolic diseases, increasing the risk of conditions such as insulin resistance, osteoarthritis and laminitis. This presentation offers suggestions to effectively manage these risks. EAS centers must adopt a comprehensive, integrated approach that includes dietary management, exercise regimens and appropriate hoof care. Traditional strategies for addressing equine obesity often focus on reducing caloric intake by limiting simple sugars and starches while transitioning horses to high-fiber forages. In addition, controlled exercise programs are essential, as they improve insulin sensitivity, promote weight loss, and maintain muscle condition; and in some cases, veterinarians may recommend pharmacological interventions to support metabolic balance. While diet and exercise are commonly discussed strategies, appropriate hoof care is a critical and often underemphasized element in maintaining the health and mobility of aging EAS horses. Older horses are more prone to issues such as osteoarthritis and may have a history of injuries that require specific hoof care interventions. Evaluating hoof function and ensuring proper trims for barefoot horses or effective shoeing strategies for shod horses can significantly enhance mobility. Improved comfort and movement allow horses to participate in exercise regimens that are essential for weight control and overall wellness.

By combining thoughtful dietary planning, structured exercise routines, and proactive hoof care strategies, EAS professionals can better support the longevity, comfort and well-being of their equine partners. This integrated approach is key to mitigating age-related diseases and ensuring the ongoing success of EAS programs.

C Jane Burrows is the Director of Operations at a PATH Premier Accredited Center (PAC). She brings her 50 years of broad experience as a physical therapist, equine specialist in mental health and learning, and a CHA credentialed instructor to bear on developing educational materials and resources for therapists and adaptive riding instructors. C Jane earned her Hippotherapy Clinical Specialist credentials in 2010. As a long time, supporter of both PATH Intl and AHA, Inc., she has been a member of numerous committees. Together with Susie Rehr, she has co-authored and presented courses on various topics, including disability education, equine training, and equine welfare.

Susie Rehr is the Executive Director of a PATH Premier Accredited Center (PAC). She is a hippotherapy clinical specialist and has been a physical therapist for 38 years providing physical therapy services to the pediatric population and specializing in the integration of hippotherapy treatment principles for the past 25 years. Quality care, clinical education, organizational resource development, educational presentations, published writing, and national involvement are hallmarks of her career. Susie is involved at the committee level for both PATH Intl. and AHA, Inc. To round out her skills, she earned her Master of Science in Organizational Leadership in May 2023.

Fireside Chat: The Future of PATH Intl., the EAS industry, & you

Facilitated by Kathy Alm, PATH Intl. CEO

12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. **Disability, DE**

Session 10

Navigating Emotions and Behavior: Creating a Supportive Learning Environment in Equestrian Lessons

Heather Henken, CTRI, Mentor; Paul Haefner, Ph.D.

Regulating emotions can be a challenging responsibility for instructors. Strong emotions can be closely linked to disruptive behavior and can easily derail the learning process. By understanding the connections between emotions, learning and behavior, instructors can transform their approach to their participants to improve both learning outcomes and overall well-being.

This presentation will explore the nature of emotions, focusing on the neurological foundations of emotional regulation through the lenses of polyvagal theory and affective neuroscience. We will examine the links between emotions, behavior, and learning, while emphasizing practical strategies for creating optimal learning environments, fostering emotional regulation, and addressing common emotional and behavioral challenges in lessons.

By understanding and addressing strong emotional states, instructors can create a more supportive and responsive learning atmosphere that enhances rider autonomy and promotes growth. Walk away with tools for recognizing and supporting emotions to create an optimal learning environment for participant success.

Heather Henken brings over 20 years of professional equestrian experience, including a decade devoted to adaptive and therapeutic riding instruction at Sprout Therapeutic Riding and Education Center. As the founder of Instructor Half Halt, she is committed to empowering, educating, and inspiring riding instructors through comprehensive mentoring and educational resources. Heather Henken is a PATH Intl. CTRI and Mentor and additionally holds Level II certifications in both Dressage and Hunt Seat from the American Riding Instructors Association. Known for her work with riders facing significant challenges, she draws on extensive experience gained from countless hours in the arena. A dedicated lifelong learner, she is currently traveling the US to connect and learn from equine-assisted services (EAS) centers all over the country. Her expertise and dedication has her as a growing figure in advancing adaptive riding instruction and fostering the professional growth of instructors.

Paul Haefner, Ph.D. is a Virginia-licensed clinical psychologist with more than 35 years of experience as a psychologist, mentor and educator. He is the founder and owner of Riding Far, LLC., established in 1998 to provide equine-assisted psychotherapy, professional development and sport psychology services tailored to the unique needs of riders. Paul has served on the board of directors for the Loudoun Therapeutic Riding Foundation and as president of the board for the Horses and Humans Research Foundation (HHRF), where he also served as a scientific advisor. Additionally, he played a pivotal role in establishing the research committee for the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association.

Research, DE

Galloping through Adversity: EAL Academic Interventions for At-risk youth

Jo Anne Miller, CTRI, ESMHL, Mentor

The high school dropout rate among at-risk youth is higher than other student populations, leading to the development of non-traditional approaches like equine-assisted learning programs. This specific program for at-risk youth uses equine-assisted learning combined with conventional education to reduce the high school dropout rate among its participants. The program began in 2002, and by 2008, the staff observed that all the at-risk youth that participated in this program had graduated from high school. In the program, students partnered with rescue horses, which, in theory, helps the students learn resilience, social-emotional skills, and academic strategies through deliberate practice, with the goal of transferring these skills and concepts successfully into the classroom. Between the years 2008 and 2022, all 86 at-risk youth participating in the equine-assisted learning program graduated from their traditional high school on time. In addition, 100% of this cohort of students entered post-secondary education or technical job training. We conclude that the factors identified in the program merit further study to understand the positive effects of Equine-Assisted Learning in reducing the high school dropout rate among at-risk youth.

Jo Anne Miller is a CTRI, ESMHL, and Mentor, is the Executive Director of a fully accredited Equine Rescue and PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center (PAC). The farm is home to a full-time school for at-risk youth, combining equines and academics and runs many unique EAL programs for at-risk youth. She is a retired professor of Equine Science at Randolph College and was a previous co-chair of the Equine Welfare Committee for PATH Intl., and currently serves on committees for HETI, the EQUUS Foundation, HHRF, and the Virginia Horse Council.

Programming, CR-Driving

Driving for Independence

Anna Koopman, CTRI, DLI

Carriage driving is a discipline of precision, communication and control, requiring drivers to develop technical skill, adaptability and strategic thinking. However, many drivers—especially those in adaptive programs—face limited opportunities for structured skill progression beyond the basics. This session aims to educate, support and elevate drivers at all levels by exploring skill frameworks, course design, adaptive tools and competition pathways to enhance driver effectiveness.

Beyond training, competition pathways offer drivers motivation, goal-setting opportunities and a chance to apply their skills in real-world settings. Structured challenges foster engagement, skill refinement and a greater sense of achievement. This discussion will highlight ways to create competitive and recreational opportunities tailored to drivers at various levels, ensuring clear advancement opportunities that build confidence and mastery.

By educating on skill development and course design, supporting drivers with the right tools and strategies, and elevating their experience through structured training and competition pathways, this session will provide actionable strategies for creating a more inclusive and progressive approach to carriage driving. Attendees will leave equipped with methods to ensure that all drivers—regardless of ability—have access to continuous growth, goal achievement and long-term engagement in this rewarding sport.

Anna Koopman brings a well-rounded competition-oriented background to the Therapeutic Driving Program at Sprout Therapeutic Riding and Educational Center. As a child she participated in 4-H and Pony Club, competed in eventing and hunters and was on the Equitation Team at Mount Holyoke College. After college her competition focus has been on combined driving and is part of Team Koopman. Since 2003 they have traveled extensively competing in events on the East Coast. In 2023 Anna and her horse, Chandler Creek Eclipse, competed at the FEI World Championships for Ponies in Oirscot, Netherlands. They learned a lot from the experience and continue to pursue international aspirations with dreams of bringing home a medal for the USA. In 2025 they were added to the USEF Elite Athlete Program for combined driving. At Sprout, Anna is the operations director, with her hands in almost every aspect of the program. She oversees the facility, herd health, coordinates volunteers, teaches the Sprout Driving Program and steps in to teach adaptive riding when needed.

Equine Welfare, CE

Western Saddle Fitting: Horse & Rider Comfort for Successful Sessions

Sarah Racheter-Loftin, B.S.; Vashti Watson, B.S.

The objective of this presentation is to enable attendees to establish comfort for both horse and rider by identifying some common topline conformation and muscle problems, reviewing western saddle fit issues, learning how to measure a horse's back, creating a back map and showing how to use it when purchasing saddles. Shimming and saddle pad solutions will also be shared.

During this session, the presenters will discuss and teach attendees how to do a basic topline evaluation, which can drastically impact saddle fit, especially as the topline changes. Photo examples will be used to illustrate the discussion. From there, the session will discuss common saddle fitting issues and how to identify them, while showing the parts of a western saddle with a bare tree so participants can see what we are referencing and know what is inside of a saddle. Then a demonstration of how to measure a horse's back and creating a back trace that can be used when purchasing a saddle or checking the fit of current saddles will be shown. During these demonstrations, there will be audience contributions and sharing to prompt and questions about specific examples or problems. Shimming techniques and "how-to" will also be discussed. At the end, these topics will be tied together with a discussion on the seat comfort for riders and flexibility in seat size to emphasize that a comfortable ride means comfort for both horse and rider.

Sarah Racheter-Loftin is a principal owner at Crest Ridge Saddlery and has been working with and fitting horses since she was able to ride. She and her mother founded their business based on proper fitting saddles and tack for healthy horses. Sarah has a BS in Business also serves on the Board of Directors for a therapy center and uses her own beloved draft cross horse, Marcelle, and retired endurance mount, Tuesday, for sessions. She has completed most requirements needed by PATH Intl. and hopes to test for the instructor certification this year.

Vashti Watson has been a trained western saddle fitter for almost 10 years, serving the southern half of Florida. She has a BS in Education from Penn State University and certifications in project management and strategic leadership from The George Washington University and Stanford University. Her horses are too feisty to serve in a therapeutic program.

Programming, CE

From Idea to Arena: Mentoring New Voices in Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) Program Design

Dr. Terry Chase

Are you new to Equine-assisted learning and ready to design your first workshop, retreat or multi-session program but not sure where to begin? Or are you an experienced PATH Intl. member with a desire to mentor and support the next generation of EAL practitioners?

This hands-on, interactive session is designed to bring both emerging and seasoned professionals together in a creative, collaborative environment. Guided by a master equine-assisted learning (EAL) program developer, participants will explore the art and science of designing impactful EAL experiences that are rooted in relationships, reflection, and growth.

Whether you're in the early stages of shaping your ideas or have years of facilitation under your belt, this session offers the opportunity to engage in collaborative design exercises to bring your EAL program ideas to life. You'll discover foundational tools for effective facilitation and experiential learning and explore strategies for enrolling and connecting with your ideal clients. Participants will receive real-time feedback to help refine program vision and delivery and depending on where you are on the path, you'll have the chance to mentor others or be mentored yourself.

This session is ideal for PATH Intl. professionals looking to deepen their impact by creating programs that matter and by uplifting others in the EAS field. Whether you're dreaming, designing or mentoring, this session will provide valuable insights.

Dr. Terry Chase has created numerous programs incorporating equine-assisted learning over a 30+ year career in education, healthcare and personal development. Her programs include multi-week sessions for at-risk youth, half-day retreats for corporate and healthcare teams as well as a unique in-patient program for patients with neurological injury. Dr. Chase is retired as associate professor of nursing-mental health/leadership at Colorado Mesa University, Grand Junction, Colorado. Currently she is a professional coach offering individual coaching and group experience for growth and transformation including personal growth mini retreats incorporating horses in. Dr. Chase was recently appointed to the Board of Directors, Certification Board of Equine Interaction Professionals (CBEIP) and is a graduate of the HERD Institute and the Gestalt Equine Institute of the Rockies (GEIR).