



Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS CONNECTED HORSE?

Connected Horse is a non-profit organization pioneering therapeutic equine-assisted workshops, programs, and trainings to improve the lives of people affected by dementia and memory loss along with their care partners. Through in-person workshops at barns and equine facilities and through activities at home or in adult day centers, the program strengthens social bonds, improves life quality, and results in a greater sense of closeness and more engagement for participants.

WHO ARE THE WORKSHOPS FOR?

Connected Horse workshops are for people with memory changes and their primary care partners, who may be spouses, partners, adult children, or friends. Both participants need to be able to safely walk without assistance and participate in a group setting. There are very few non-pharmaceutical programs to help people with early memory changes and even fewer that are geared toward nurturing their relationships with their care partners. Connected Horse meets an urgent need.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE WORKSHOPS?

Participants learn to relax, focus, and connect with themselves and each other. There is no horseback riding; all activity takes place from the ground. Trained facilitators guide on-the-ground interactions between horses and participants and lead awareness activities that bring participant attention into the moment. After guided sensory exercises, participants meet the horses in a slowly paced introduction. Participants spend time observing, meeting, grooming, and interacting with the horses. The Connected Horse workshops are comprised of three sessions. They provide opportunities for engagement together and enrich the lives of participants.

WHY HORSES?

As large prey animals, horses are highly attuned to their surroundings. As herd animals, they are aware of and move with others around them. Horses and humans have evolved together for millennia, and as a result, horses are sensitive to human emotions. Therefore, therapeutic work with horses can help people stay present and engaged as they experience difference emotions. Additionally, human-horse interactions provide calming feedback. As the human releases stress and anxiety, so does the horse. Additionally, non-verbal interactions with horses enable people affected by memory changes and their care partners to recognize that spoken language is not the only way that we communicate.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS?

Connected Horse programs activate social engagement and improve quality of life for participants, who have reported increased levels of confidence and feelings of improved social connection. People with memory changes and dementia often struggle with a sense of disconnection. Feelings of loss, apathy, and isolation are also common for care partners who are spouses, partners, adult children, and friends. Connected Horse workshops help participants feel engaged and relaxed and become more aware of nonverbal communication. The workshops help strengthen bonds.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE?

Research conducted at University of California, Davis School of Medicine, Alzheimer's Disease Center, and the School of Veterinary Medicine, Center for Equine Health and Stanford University School of Medicine and Red Barn Leadership Program studied the Connected Horse program. Over four years, 88 people participated in the studies. Participants reported positive quality of life outcomes including increased feelings of social support, greater self-awareness, reduced anxiety and depression, and improved sleep. Workshop participants reported that they "feel alive again" and empowered to do things that they want to do.

HOW DOES THE PROGRAM AFFECT HORSES?

Many horses are looking for purpose or a "second career." The typical lifespan of a horse is 25-30 years. Older horses who are injured from performance riding, racing, or otherwise retired need a less physical routine but still crave work and human connection. Connected Horse works with barns that advocate for the welfare of horses including PATH-certified centers and rescue barns.

HOW CAN I ACCESS A WORKSHOP IF I DON'T LIVE IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA OR NEVADA?

Connected Horse is committed to expanding workshops across the country. Barns and equine facilities can become Connected Horse Certified and offer workshops through participation in the Training Institute. Connected Horse also offers virtual programs and sensory engagement kits that may be a beneficial option for some people who cannot attend an in-person workshop.

HOW CAN I OFFER CONNECTED HORSE WORKSHOPS?

The Connected Horse Training Institute offers an in-depth training program and resources to barns and equine facilities to become certified to provide Connected Horse workshops at their locations.

HOW IS CONNECTED HORSE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH MEMORY CHANGES OR DEMENTIA?

Connected Horse's trailblazing program is the first and foremost program nationally to address the needs of those with memory loss together with their care partners. This research-driven program is the first to include both the person with memory changes and the primary care partner in equine programs.

HOW IS CONNECTED HORSE DIFFERENT THAN "PET THERAPY"?

Pet therapy refers to guided interactions with animals intended to help people reach physical and mental health treatment goals. Connected Horse is not pet therapy because both the person with dementia and care partner participate together in a learning process and build a relationship with the horse, who is not a pet. The focus is on the learning process and experience, not a set of treatment goals. As a result of this three-way learning relationship, people with dementia and care partners learn about how to be emotionally present and communicate in non-verbal ways.

DOES IT SLOW DOWN OR REVERSE MEMORY LOSS?

Connected Horse workshops and programs are designed to facilitate engagement and encourage participants to strengthen their relationships and connect with their larger communities and support systems. The program has not been shown to slow down or reverse memory loss.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Connected Horse is committed to increasing access to its programs; therefore, we fundraise to be able to offer the workshops for free. The costs for the Training Institute and Barn Certification can be found at the Connected Horse website.

WHO CREATED CONNECTED HORSE?

Founders Nancy Schier Anzelmo, MSG, and Paula Hertel, MSW, are experts in dementia-support programs and older-adult services. They are also lifetime equestrians. They recognized the value of early-intervention programs for people with memory changes and theorized that supporting people with memory loss and their care partners with guided interactions with horses could strengthen primary bonds and activate social engagement. Motivated to provide research-driven programs to benefit people affected by memory changes and dementia, the founders continue to expand Connected Horse programs and trainings.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Find out about upcoming workshops at connectedhorse.org. You can become a certified Connected Horse Facilitator or Barn Partner. Reach out to us to learn more. Help us reach more people with our free workshop series by donating to Connected Horse [QR Code to donate page?] WE CAN ADD THIS ONCE SITE GOES LIVE

CONTACT US

(669) 245-6327

info@connectedhorse.org