

## **Veteran Voices: SITREP - Episode #24 - Hooves & Heroes**

[Sonia Jorgensen]

If you're presenting with this emotional turmoil and you're having trouble breaking through, sometimes the horses will show up to help you move through that because they know they can help bring that co-regulation to you to get you to shift. But the electromagnetic field of our heart extends about four to five feet. Horses, because their heart mass is so much larger and they generate so much more electricity, they've been measured up to 25 feet.

[Chris Faust]

Welcome to Veteran Voices SITREP with your hosts, Tom and Chris Faust.

[Tom Faust]

Welcome to Veteran Voices SITREP. I am your host, Tom Faust, with my son and co-host, Chris. We're both Army veterans.

Our mission is to empower fellow veterans by connecting them with the tools they need to thrive in civilian life. Together, we can build a supportive community that honors the service and sacrifices of our fellow veterans while paving the way for a brighter future. And today we have Sonja Jorgensen, and she is here to talk about her organization called Hooves and Heroes, which I believe you founded the organization.

That's correct. Is that correct?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

I did.

[Tom Faust]

Awesome. What can you tell us about yourself, how you got into this, and a little bit about Hooves and Heroes to get us started?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Absolutely. Hooves and Heroes was founded in 2021. We really built this organization with the goal of serving veterans and first responders by providing equine-based experiences and these experiences are designed to promote healing awareness and advocacy for the needs of veterans.

I personally am a registered nurse. I was a Navy corpsman before that. And after my time in service, I went back to nursing school, became a registered nurse, and started

working for the VA for a while.

And that really was where both my time in service and my time working with the VA is really where I started to come up with this idea to build an environment where veterans and horses could come together. I ended up including first responders as well in the design of this organization because they also struggle with resources. And many of our veterans are, there's a lot of crossover.

A lot of veterans are also serving as first responders after their time in service or were first responders while serving in the military. So I really wanted to include them as well. And then we just began this just a few years ago, even though my time with the VA was, oh gosh, close to almost 20 years ago, because it was sort of a dream of mine to do this as my retirement gig and then realized, you know, gosh, we really need this now.

We need to begin these programs now. We need to get this out there. And so I made some major life changes with my career and was able to, was really lucky to be able to have a facility to start these programs here in Stanwood, Washington at our facility.

[Tom Faust]

That's good. It really is. It really is needed now.

And I know from some personal experience, how working with horses can be calming. It can help, you know, horses, some of the stuff we've learned from previous interview as well, horses kind of reflect your, what you're feeling inside. They can sense what's going on.

Absolutely.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Absolutely.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. Someone recently talked about how horses can sense your heart rate. I guess that's part of the heart map.

Maybe that's what I read about.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Yes.

[Tom Faust]

And that can help them understand or get a feeling for where you're coming from or

something. Can you talk about that some?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Absolutely. My background with regard to this specific training that we're doing with this equine-based learning is I did some work with an organization called Natural Lifemanship that is trauma focused. And then I was certified with HeartMath Institute and that's just [heartmath.org](http://heartmath.org) to find them. They have a trauma sensitivity course that I took. And that really is the foundation of that is the understanding that when our heart beats, we have a variability in that heart rate. So we're not exactly 60 beats per minute in a beat to beat format, but 60 is the average of our heartbeat, if that makes sense across a minute.

So the theory that they were testing is that variability in which they've been able to prove is sort of a mapping almost of our emotional state. And what they also found was that when our hearts are, a little bit of a healthcare sciencey stuff for you, so hang in with me for just a minute, but when our hearts generate so much electricity, which is their job really to keep us alive, we need electricity and water, right? So they generate so much electricity, they actually create their own electromagnetic field.

Now, because our brain has a lot of neurosynapse as well, which generates electricity, our brain also has an electromagnetic field. However, the electromagnetic field of our brain is only about a half inch outside of our skull. So it doesn't extend much beyond our body.

But the electromagnetic field of our heart extends about four to five feet from our body, which is pretty substantial. In that beat to beat heart rate variability, it's sort of sending a signal out into that EMF. The horses, because their heart mass is so much larger and they generate so much more electricity, they've been measured up to 25 feet outside of their body.

And so the theory goes, and what they've been proving with quite a bit of research, is that when our electromagnetic fields overlap, we can sense and feel each other to some degree, and that horses have a sensitivity to this. The belief is that in that field, in that crossover, the horses can begin to understand our emotional state through that transference that occurs in that space, because they're feeling the differences in our heart rate variability that is communicating certain emotions. So that's the current working theory that they have.

And that it also works with humans, which is a lot of the research too. We can feel this human to human. We can actually influence each other's heart rate, believe it or not, in this.

The feeling of calm that comes over us and being in this space with horses, their understanding is that as the horse, their heart rate is much slower than ours at rest

because there's much bigger muscle mass. They're much more fit than many of us. And so their heart rate is much lower than ours, that it actually slows our heart rate, which gives us that sense of calm.

And that there's a thing called heart rate coherence, where we sort of sync up our heart rates. And if their heart rate is well regulated, it can help us regulate our heart rate as well. So that's a lot of the kind of foundational research and science behind how many of these tools work, is that there's an understanding that there can be information that we are sending and receiving from each other and from human to horse, and also that we can influence through this connection that we have, this electromagnetic connection.

We can start to influence each other's heart rate as well. It's pretty neat stuff.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. It's pretty crazy how the body and things work like that.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Yeah, isn't it?

[Chris Faust]

It boggles the mind.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

It really does. Yes. This is what brought me into medicine.

Yeah.

[Chris Faust]

So going a little further into this, can you explain how interacting with the horses provides therapeutic benefits to participants other than the heart therapy thing that we just talked about? But what other kind of benefits does interacting with them give us?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Horses are herd animals. And as humans, we have primarily predatory makeup and biology. We have some prey features to us as well, but we are primarily built as a predator species.

Horses, being primarily a prey species, have a very different approach and outlook in how they interact with their environment and with their world. And there's a lot we can learn from that. They are very sensitive to their environment.

They are aware. They have a situational awareness that humans lack. Even those that are highly trained in situational awareness, such as many of our veterans, what happens with humans often, and I know they really try to help train some of this out of us, but what happens with humans a lot is that we get tunnel vision.

When we become hyper vigilant, hyper aware, when we are trying desperately to notice every tiny little blade of grass, we start to get tunnel vision. We become hyper anxious, in a sense. So our heart rate goes up, our breathing gets shallow, and we get fixated.

Horses are excellent at maintaining awareness of their environment while staying calm. And this is a tool that I use quite a bit when I work with veterans, in particular, is how do we have a 360 degree view of our environment without it causing anxiety? And if done in a way that horses do this type of awareness, where they exercise this type of awareness, we can see 300 yards off what's coming up over the horizon, so we can respond to it before it's a threat.

And this can help us when we're moving through the world in places like Costco, and sporting events, and these very stimulating environments, overstimulating environments that can be very stressful for many veterans to go into these environments when you're trying desperately to stay aware of everything going on around you, that we get tunnel vision. So now we're seeking, we're searching, and we're losing our peripheral vision. And horses are excellent at maintaining that 360 degree view.

Humans will go through a keep-toss process. Important, not important. Important, not important.

And it happens subconsciously. We'll just choose not a threat, threat, not a threat, very rapidly. Horses do not do that.

And I say that carefully to say that there is, after a while, they can become accustomed to a pattern, and it is no longer considered a threat. But they will never really let go of the possibility of that changing. So they never really relax into a squirrel is just a squirrel is always a squirrel.

There might come a time that the 30th squirrel is suddenly considered a threat. They don't ever lose sight of it. We can get numb to it.

We may never notice that squirrel. We don't hear the birds in the trees, the traffic disappears, right? Things that our brain just starts to filter and get rid of.

Horses don't do that. They maintain awareness. It's not an anxiety awareness, but it's still there so that if it changes, if the squirrel moves differently, or the bird comes in too close, or the traffic sound changes, they can respond without it causing anxiety because they have that awareness where those kinds of things can sneak up on us and surprise us.

So we work a lot with that is one big example of how we kind of take our military training and experience, partner it with the horse's experience, and how do we bridge the gap where we can reach our goal of what we're really trying to achieve, which is situational awareness to bring calm and peace and not increase anxiety.

[Tom Faust]

What kind of specific activities are involved in this therapy in helping the veteran or the first responder, whoever it is, to get used to maybe they've never been around a horse before. So I know people, you know, they're big. People are afraid of them sometimes, even though they're like giant dogs in many ways.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Giant dogs can kill you, if we're being fair, yeah.

[Tom Faust]

They can, yeah. Don't walk behind them too close. But anyway, so how do you deal with getting the veteran used to the horse and able to come close and feel comfortable with the horse?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Absolutely, yes. It's very important. We spend a lot of time before we even encounter the horses talking about regulation and dysregulation in our own bodies and what that feels like.

Majority of veterans are disassociated from their body. That's a survival technique. That is not a fault on anyone.

That is just simply how our biology is wired to survive. However, to maintain awareness of our environment, we have to get reacquainted with our bodies, and we do it in a very gentle way. And by going through this process, we begin to talk about how we keep ourselves safe in environments.

We also work with what is our, you know, where is our energy level at right now? And we have some different techniques we do to figure out where we're at. One of them is actually a pretty simple exercise where we just twirl a rope.

But the difference between the internal and external feedback, if there is a disconnect in that, it really shows that disassociation. So if I'm twirling a rope and I say, gosh, my energy level is at a five, but that rope is just singing through the air. Visually, it appears to be an eight or a nine, but I feel like a five, that's something to reflect on and be aware of and get curious about.

And how do we start to align? And then we play with that energy up and down. We start playing with bring it to an eight, drop it to a two.

What are the differences? So we can feel back into our bodies a little bit and feel that bringing energy up and dropping energy down and try to find that elasticity again in our energy level. When we can do that, then we can move out with the horses.

And I have safety briefs and things like that that I do that everyone's very comfortable with, especially in the military, what not to do, right? We go through some of that for sure before we go into the environment. But once we've kind of got a feel of where our energy range is, and we have an understanding of what not to do around a horse, we move out into the field.

And the horses are what we call at liberty, meaning they're not tied up, they're not restrained, and we're not putting anyone in a very tightly enclosed space with a horse right away. We move into a field that's about five acres. And those horses are out just doing what horses do.

In that space, it gives us an opportunity to remove the fence barrier, but also talk about boundaries and how do we create a safety boundary. And then we really work on, as I talked about earlier, that situational awareness. How do we become aware of the horses without it creating insect anxiety?

And how do we know the horses are aware of us? And so we talk about their body language and their communication back to us. And as we move through that, then we start doing this, you know, I call it see the world like a horse activity, where we learn how to bring in all of our senses, but maintaining a very calm state where we can be aware of the sounds and the sensations in our environment without it causing any kind of anxiety.

And actually, most people find it very relaxing because now there's no surprises. They also find it a bit energizing, which normally that activity drains us because we get anxious about it and we kind of tunnel vision. But if we kind of let all that go and just let it come into our awareness, then all of a sudden it's very relaxing.

So a lot of different things sort of lead up to being in the horse's environment. As soon as we start to relax and really participate with the herd in a way that the herd understands, meaning we are starting to become more co-regulated, that alignment starts to happen where we're reassociating with our bodies, with our brain and our hearts start to line up. When those kinds of things start to happen, we are now safe.

So again, in that prey predator relationship, we are not safe to be around if we are not coherent and if we're not congruent. And so if you don't have situational awareness, and you are not aware of your body, you're not safe for that horse to be around. They're going to find somewhere else to be.

But if we're lined up and we're aware, and we are congruent inside and outside, then we're safe to be around because we know ourselves, we know them, and we know our environment. Because if they come into our space, and we're not safe to be around because we don't have situational awareness, we could put them at risk. Even if they're not afraid of us, there could be another predator.

And if we're not going to have an awareness to that predator, that could be risky for them and their survival. So we start to watch how the horses respond to us. That gives us that immediate feedback, like you mentioned, Tom, that mirroring effect, we get immediate feedback from the horse of whether or not horses move towards comfort and away from discomfort.

It's pretty simple, right? They, they come in because we are safe, or we're comforting, or there's something that they need from us, or they feel, you know, you're, you're welcome into that there's a welcoming into the herd almost activity, where, yes, you can be a part of us, because you understand our culture, and our ways and mores. There's a rejection, but it is not ever an emotional decision, that moving away from us is not a we don't like you, a lot of people take it personal, there's no, there's no emotional thing, technically, really, for the horses going on there, what's happening is they're moving away from risk or tension, or they're not necessarily moving away from us, they're moving towards something they need, right? A lot of times they're like, oh, he left, that means he doesn't like me. No, that's not what that means.

What it means is he's thirsty, and he just went over to get a drink of water. That's all it is, right? Like, let's not read too much into it.

But they'll move away from us if our energy shifts sometimes. And it's no longer safe for them to be in our space. I have seen horses come into people who are having some emotional turmoil.

So it's not to mean that we always have to be Zen for the horses to interact. But if, if you're presenting with this emotional turmoil, and you're having trouble breaking through, sometimes the horses will show up to help you move through that because they know they can help bring that heart, that co regulation to you to get you to shift. If you just need that little push, right?

So I have seen horses use discernment and choose to participate, even if we're not in that kind of Zen environment, I guess that they typically do seek. Yeah.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah, there's, yeah, it is interesting, because you get the, you know, horses, you know, animals in general, it's like, they can tell the difference between the tension where they feel threatened, and tension of, oh, okay, this person's going through something, you



know, maybe I can help. It's just like, it's just like human beings on a on a level two, it's like, yes, you know, you can tell when somebody is feeling something. And then you're like, okay, it's like reaching, it's like, subconsciously or unintentionally reaching out for, you know, for some kind of help.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Exactly, you know, when someone's like, ooh, they need some space, or maybe if I just, you know, lend a hand, just place my hand on their shoulder, that's all they need to help them move through that. And yes, it's that same kind of discernment, like, do they need me in their space right now to help them? Or should I clear out?

Right? There's, there's very much that happens with with your dogs, like people that have dogs, the same kind of thing, dogs are either cower and hide, or they will come in when you're having an emotional moment, right. And, and it's that same kind of idea is what is the energy right now in this space?

And can I be of support in a safe way for all of us? Or do I need to give this person space? Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And so it's a good barometer check a lot of times for people that are disassociated, and they can't recognize feelings or emotions or the biophysiology of the changes that occur with emotions, which is very common with PTSD and other traumas.

Horses are a good feedback, you walk out into the field, and every horse looks at you and goes, Oh, not today. And they all scatter, right? Something's up.

Okay, something's going on. And that's a great kind of a pin in it, I guess, to check in with ourselves.

[Chris Faust]

So kind of going along through the, you know, through all the, you know, participants that have gone through this. Do you have any, like, you know, examples or maybe success stories of how the equine therapy has helped participants with anxiety or PTSD?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Oh, absolutely. Yes, I have. I have one gentleman that comes out specifically, because he's still working on that reassociation to his body.

And he was able to start going back to work again, and start volunteering again and helping with some other organizations that he was feeling comfortable in those environments before. But being with the horses, he was able to get to a place where he can start recognizing when things are shifting in his body. Because you know, the the

thing about that I love about heart math, when we teach a lot of these, these principles is that they really explain that emotions come from the body, they do not come from the brain.

That it's the physical body, and is actually the heart, the heart muscle at the center of it that communicates to the body when there's a change or a difference. So if you are suddenly entering an anxious state, that body, the physical response to that is coming from the chemicals and the electrical communications coming out of your heart to the rest of the body. There's a thing called limbic hijacking, where only what we call the reptilian brain, right, there's there's different levels of your brain development.

And those fight or flight survival components of your brain are the only ones that are communicating with the heart and the body at that point, that committee, the higher order thinking that we have that frontal cortex is is completely shut off and cut off, it has no idea what's happening in the body. It has no opinion, it's not given a vote, it can't participate, you can't rationalize your way out of these things, it's just not chemically possible. At that point, your body is really running the show and that limbic system, that lower part of your brain.

So when those things are happening, and the heart is having this conversation with the body, and now there's this feedback loop, right, it can it just gets worse, the anxiety just builds, and we turn into panic. A lot of times, because our higher brain does not have awareness of it, we can be in a panic state and have no idea, right? You can be standing there and being like, gosh, like, why am I so shaky right now doesn't make any sense.

But you're actually in a panic state, but your brain is like out to lunch, it has no idea. But the horses can tell you. So when you stand there, and you're like, I don't know what's going on, I'm calm, but you're not at all, the horses will be like, no, something's not right.

And so a lot of the veterans have come out and the horses are like, I'm not having anything to do with this person. But if they suddenly like we go, there's some techniques that I take them through. And if we start going through these techniques, and all of a sudden, they can check in with themselves.

And most people can't put words to their emotions. You know, a lot of people are like, I have no idea what emotion I'm feeling. Like, we want me to say what, like, I just I'm feeling stuff.

I don't know what it is. But we can check in. And we can do some of these techniques that HeartMath has to get back into this coherent rhythm and this regulation state.

And then we can start to stitch back together the brain and the body, get everybody back in line, and get that higher brain to participate again. Now you can start to have some of that discernment and that rationalization. When that starts to happen, then you

can be like, oh, so there's an awareness doesn't mean that it goes away.

It doesn't mean that we fix it. It just awareness is kind of that first key. So being able to bring awareness, and I've had some, you know, veterans that come out there with the horses, and they're like, something must be up.

I don't know about it. But obviously, something's up. So it's in my body.

So let's do these techniques. Let's get back into our body and be like, oh, there is something in there. I feel like my shoulders are super tight, like relax, you know, like, take a deep breath.

But you know, they start to do these things. And they're like, okay, now I can feel it. Now I found it.

You know, they don't have to have a word for it. But there's like, I feel it something's different. I'm having that tool when you go out into the workforce, for example, and you walk in and like everybody scatters, and nobody makes eye contact.

And you're like, what's going on? Right? To be able to hold on, let me check in.

I'm going to check in with myself and be like, Oh, you know what, I am carrying tension. Like you just walk in like a bowl in the China closet. And they're like, everybody goes, Oh, not today.

You can check in, you can pull it back, right? You can start to get things re regulated and be like, Oh, okay, okay. Because humans are herd animals, too, right?

We're going to respond the same way. So it gives them that tool to get out into public spaces, and, and take in the information they're getting from the outside world and be like, wait a minute, let me check in with myself really quick, because I think it's me. Right?

I'm the problem. It's me. Isn't that how the song goes?

So they start to check in a little bit, and then they can realign. But that's not possible. If you can't check in with yourself, that's kind of the first step, right?

Because you can go completely oblivious through life that you have any impact or any effect at all. So the horses really help with that. I've had a number of female veterans, quite a few female veterans come through the program.

And a lot of them are dealing with not feeling safe with MST with some other stuff that really does not allow them to fully relax into their environment and not feel safe. And this program has really helped them realize that they can have situational awareness and be grounded and calm and not have to do it in a state of anxiety and fear. And they can

really relate to how horses feel with regard to being, you know, a prey animal and feeling like they're in a predator environment all the time.

And how do we shift that for them? How do they start to have that situational awareness and their body awareness to a place where they can feel safe in their own skin and safe in other environments? So it's really worked wonders for them as well to be able to move through those spaces.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah, I know that just in the military in general, and not even always in the military, but especially with men, I think, we tend to try and suppress what we think are the feelings and do everything logically. And it's like, this has to make sense to me. And kind of like you said, the tunnel vision, we kind of block out other things that might be getting in our way, where we really need to stop and think about it and like, yeah, listen to what's really going on and take in some more information.

And so do the horses and working with the horses that help people develop maybe a little more empathy or assertiveness and that kind of thing, but to be able to kind of work into a situation a little better with, you know.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Yes. Yeah, we start out talking quite a bit about emotional regulation and resiliency. And we talk about fight or flight and freeze and fawn and how those are the extremes and how we bounce.

And we kind of miss that band of resiliency, which is where we're regulated and where we have discernment, where we're not, we're responding instead of reacting, right? We skip that zone if we're in a trauma state. And we lose all sensitivity.

We lose all awareness, right? Because we're in survival mode. And to your point, a lot of situations, the military has placed people in, they train you to quickly put things aside and focus on the mission, that you're not to have all of this stimulus coming in because they need your brain to be focused on a singular item.

And that's survival. That's important. It's not that there's anything wrong with that or you should get rid of it, but it's our ability to shift.

It's our ability to come in and out of that state that has to return to us, right? That ability to start kind of relaxing into things a little bit and expanding that band of resiliency, meaning that the more stressors that come into your day-to-day life, how are we coping with those stressors? If those, if one small stressor throws me into fight or flight or drops me into that freeze fawn, it's either I feel everything or I feel nothing is essentially how I describe it to people.

When small stressors are really, you're just ping pong in between those two walls. That's where this kind of work can help you find the middle ground and expand that band of resiliency to be able to start getting more sensitive to your environment, have more awareness of self and be able to discern where that committee, that higher brain can actually participate in the decision-making. And it's not just all survival and reaction, right?

How do we like get back into it? Horses are very sensitive creatures that if we come in and we're super high energy, way more energy than is needed for the situation, they will be gone. They will go for the hills.

They won't have anything to do with you. If we come in and we don't have enough energy, if we're just checked out, they will take over because someone has to be in charge for everyone to survive. Someone's got to be taking control.

And if you're not going to do it, then they will. And that can be dangerous for us because we are small and fragile in comparison, right? So it's finding that middle ground and sharing leadership with them and really having that, that calm assertiveness where you're in alignment and in control of your environment and your body and aware, and then the sensitivity grows.

And then you can start noticing subtle shifts and changes before they become big deals, either shifts in the environment, shifts in the horse, shifts in yourself. And that's where we really want to place our attention is in those three places. And once we can start to notice those subtle shifts in the horse, then we start to become more sensitive to the shifts within ourselves.

I do a technique called Masterson method, which is a bodywork technique on horses. However, we've been able to translate that into a tool for veterans and first responders to tap into themselves because they're tapping into the horse and watching for very subtle shifts and changes in the horse. So it's increasing their sensitivity and awareness of how the horse is responding and shifting.

And that actually has this reciprocal effect. And we have to tap in and check on how we are subtly shifting in that interaction and how we're impacting and affecting the horse's mood. So it's been a very interesting tool to watch people start to use that and realize how it shows up for them and themselves.

[Tom Faust]

So how does, is there anything you work with the veterans on their sensitivity to, is it to situations or is it, I mean, we talked about sensitivity a little bit and I just kind of want to get a little more into that.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Sure. Sensitivity to situations and sensitivity to a little bit. Yeah.

The situational sensitivity that we covered was really about awareness of self and others and environment, but without anxiety. And I think that's been a big thing for people is not walking into these spaces that can be overwhelming and just be flooded with so much information that they just have to start filtering things out. Then the tunnel vision and the anxiety starts.

And so, yes, a lot of our tools really help them have that situational awareness where they don't have to put the blinders on, but it doesn't cause anxiety. It's just information and they let it wash over them like water. But the big piece of it is really tapping into themselves and having sensitivity of self and understanding the shifts, the biological and biophysical changes that are beginning to happen in their body when they're moving towards a more anxious state or a more apathetic or kind of blank state where they might be shutting down and noticing those subtle shifts before they become an issue.

That's where a lot of the work is, is how do I know when I'm becoming anxious? Those early steps. How do I know when I'm beginning to shut down and disassociate?

What are those early signs? And so we really focus on how we check in with our bodies, especially in the case when we have that limbic hijacking and the brain is no longer communicating, you know, who's aware, who is it that's telling me these things are happening? Right?

And then even if we can start to notice, then it's like, how do we identify? Right? How do we identify what emotion I'm having?

I mean, I could say, you know, if I tell somebody like, what does it feel like to be courageous? What? Like, what word is that?

What do you mean by that? What does it feel like to carry? I being overwhelmed?

What does overwhelmed feel like? What does it feel like? We know the word, but how, where do I carry that in my body?

Right? So people are like, some of this is very foreign stuff. So we don't start there.

Right? We start with first, how do you notice there's a shift in your body? What is that sensation change feel like?

Not that it has to be, we're not labeling it yet. We're not giving it a good, bad or otherwise. There's no positive, negative in any of this.

Emotions and sensations are just information. It's just information. We don't say that it's good, bad or otherwise.

There's no shame. There's no blame, nothing like that. So you might notice attention.

You might notice a heat. You might notice something like that. And so then they'll go, oh, okay.

So then we'll go through a heart math, does the heart centered breathing technique. And this is meant to calm that dysregulated heart rate that tells the body that you're in a panic state that tells the body that you're in fight or flight. We have a technique to bring them back from that kind of panic state where they can then regulate and their bodies that those panic communication signals start to calm and stop telling the body that.

So it's like, now we're going to tell the body that we're safe. Now we're going to tell the body that you're okay and that you're balanced. So we do those techniques that tell the body a different signal.

We send that other signal out to the body. When that signal goes out, now that limbic hijacking can reverse and now the brain can participate in the conversation. As soon as the brain is back online, now we can move to emotions.

Now we can move to narratives. Now we can talk about what triggered that so that we can figure out how to work with it. And what HeartMath Institute has developed and what we've used a lot for people because emotions are like a whole nother animal is instead of labeling exact emotion names is we have a grid that we use this in four different quadrants.

And we call it the depletion to renewal grid. So emotions can be put in four categories. It's either going to energize me, right, I'm going to heighten my energy level, my heart rate goes up, or it's going to deplete me.

And depletion isn't always a negative thing. It's not necessarily draining, it can be draining, but can also be calming. So I'm either going to lower my heart rate, I'm either going to be drained or tired or relaxed, or I'm going to increase my heart rate, I'm going to be energized, forward moving, right.

And then on that continuum, there is those emotions that are more cortisol stimulating type ones, and then there are more that are more DHEA. And so this is where we kind of get into the hormones. But along that continuum of heightened and relaxed.

Now, if we're up, are we up because we're excited? There's, you know, we're joyful, we're happy, right? Is that our up?

Or we up because of anger, panic, and anxiety. Both of those are up. So which up?

And so that's when we kind of start to figure out is this a up excitement? Or is this a up anxiety? And the body can't always tell the difference.

So some people that have like panic disorders, if something exciting happens, their body can throw them into a panic attack. Not that there's anything wrong. It's just it's an up.

And so the body's like, well, you know, so now everything is up. And then there's the down, which is, am I down because I'm depressed or hopeless? Or am I down because I have gratitude and contentment and peace.

And again, sometimes if your body is wired for depression, contentment and peace can feel very similar to the body sometimes. And so now it's like we've got to figure out the lines between the two and determine what what sensations in my body am I having with this depletion sensation? Or I'm feeling down?

Am I down in a good way? You know, as they call it? Am I down because I'm relaxed?

Or am I down because I'm sad? And so then it's now we've got to start peeling that apart. But a lot of times we start with that grid first, because people are like, I don't, you say contentment.

What is contentment? I don't, I can't define, I don't have a sensation marker for that in my body. I don't know what that means.

And so first, it's what, what do I feel? And then let's assign it an emotion, we kind of have to start building those pathways. So the down the road, when they start to feel their body change, and go, okay, this isn't, this is a renewal, this isn't up.

And what's happening right now, we can involve the brain, what's happening in my environment right now, I recognize what's happened in my body. So what's happening in my environment? What's the story I'm telling myself about what's happening in the environment?

And how do the two relate to each other? And so we can start to build those tools so that they can stop it before the limbic hijacking and before full blown PTSD kicks in.

[Tom Faust]

Right?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Because that's the goal is to get ahead of it. Because you can't stop full blown PTSD by thinking your way through it. And people with PTSD know this, right?

There's because the brain is not at that point, it's not participating. It's just all body. But if we can get ahead of it, and say, Oh, something shifted.

What shifted? Why did it shift? And can we work through that before we lose contact with



the brain?

And then breathe, do the heart math and stuff.

[Tom Faust]

So we've talked a bit about the discerning our feelings and trying to identify it in the body. And using this as an introduction to the horses in the first place, so we can get to where they'll come to us. Right?

Yeah. So from there, what are the various steps involved? Are there other things other steps involved to get from that point to where you can actually function in a society without?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Yes, absolutely. Yes, yeah, a lot of our program that is once we start to understand how the biophysiology kind of works, and then we can start to notice it within ourselves. We play with it a little bit with the horses in a controlled environment.

We watch how we can influence the horse's energy, bring the horse's energy up and down, how we can push the horse away or draw them in. So now we're really working in their language in their world and learning how that energy shift happens in our body. And when we move out into society, then we're, you know, we're using the same tools with people, because we're all wired actually pretty similar.

We're all herd animals. So you can raise and lower your energy. You know, there's a difference between assertiveness and anger.

And I know, you know, military people in particular understand that difference. You know, if you talk about the difference between a drill sergeant, right, there's there's an assertiveness to that, depending on what branch, I guess, drill sergeant, RDC, however you want to look at it, there's an assertiveness to that, that person does not anger behind it. It's not angry, right?

So there's a different energy. And so when you work with horses, you have to find that if you're asking a horse to do something, and you need more of that push energy, you're going to pull assertiveness, you're not going to pull anger, we don't ever do anything with horses out of anger, because now we're striking without discernment. So there's, you know, how do we find those fine tune those subtle differences between them, but very important and key differences.

And so that when you're going out into the world, if you have to, you know, a lot of veterans struggle with not falling into anger in situations that are frustrating for them. And that is usually a big barrier for functioning out in the real world, right, as they call it,

kind of back out into society. And is that the, the shorter fuse becomes an issue.

But how can you communicate and get your point across without falling back on that, right? And so we've kind of we've worked through a lot of that with the horses, because if you bring anger to a horse, they are going to shut down, you will have no success, you'll be up against a brick wall, they are 1000 pound animal, there is no way you're going to muscle your way through a horse ever will win every time. And it is very humbling in that regard.

But if you can find assertiveness, where you can get your point across without that anger behind it, then the horses responding, they're like, Yep, you got it, boss, I'm on it. Right. So there's a there's a difference.

And, and, and this is a key tool for a lot of veterans that struggle with that kind of emotional bounce that they go through, where they can flare really fast, right? Is how do I find my ability to go out into society without anxiety without anger, and anger is that anger is not. It's not normal.

It's not boundary crossing anger. It's not kind of the normal anger day to day. This is an anxiety and fear based anger.

This is a I'm overwhelmed, it's too much. And I'm now in fight or flight mode. And I now need to protect myself because I no longer feel safe.

So they lash out. Right. So it's a very different kind of anger.

And so finding a way for them to feel safe again, and regulated again, where they don't feel that that need to lash out. And again, it's not that these are biophysical survival skills. This is not choice.

There's never it's not that you're just choosing to show up today and see what kind of havoc you can wreck on the world. This is not that this is absolutely your body is saying, danger, Will Robinson, fix it, I'm not safe, for whatever reason, right. And so we talk a lot about the biology of it, that if you're walking down a path, and one time you walk down a path and a snake comes poisonous snake bites you, every time you walk that path, you're going to be fixated on that spot, you're going to find a different path, you're going to give it a wide berth.

That's biology, your body's wired to survive. So if it doesn't feel that it can survive, and it's not safe, you're going to have a heightened sense of awareness around it. And if you do that, time after time after time, that becomes your set point.

So yeah, it's, it's a, you know, we have the first thing that we have to do is let go of the shame and the blame. Absolutely. We have to understand it's just how our bodies are wired for survival.

[Chris Faust]

So is there like a, so for anyone that goes through this, is there a follow up process to keep on track to?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Yeah, so our session design is, there's three, three session types, and they're each six hours long where you spend the day with me. Of those sessions, there, I got really fancy with the name. So there's session one, two, and three.

So that's pretty, pretty basic. But if you do session one, you can come back to session one as often as you'd like. You can do session two as often as you like.

And session three, it's just we ask that you do at least one of each in chronological order to because they build on each other so that you can get through. But then you can always return if there's something in a session that you really want to dig deeper on or go further into, you're always welcome to come back and do that again. We want to build more sessions as we grow and get busier, we will build more session designs as well.

But the goal really is that as you move through this, and you start to really get a feel for how some of this works, because it's really not rocket science and I don't try to make it too difficult, is that you can come back in a peer support capacity and really mentor and guide. And the more that we have that are really well versed in each session design, then I can take in more participants if I have that kind of peer support in the process of leading those groups. So that really is the goal.

And right now, everything is from the ground. Session three is when we first start introducing mounted work. Eventually we will move to sessions where we're doing more mounted work and we're working on trail obstacle type courses.

So there's more time in the saddle with the horse. But at first it's all from the ground for this, you know, as we talked about with this co-regulation type stuff and the identification of the biophysiology of what's going on. That's why the first few sessions are really from the ground because it's about that connection point and that sensitivity that we're building before we get into the mounted work.

We really want to build that rapport. Just like veterans, horses need to trust, right? They need to know that they can trust you before you sit on their back and ask them to do things.

Sitting on their back, that's where they get attacked by cougars. That is their most vulnerable position. It takes a lot of trust for a horse to allow you to sit there.

So first we build that relationship, right? So that's the first few sessions are built out that

way. We do a lot of stuff just in connecting on the ground and finding that elasticity of our energy and things like that.

But yeah, they can come back as many times as they'd like. And I have a few that like to come and do some one-on-one work and that's fine as well. There's no fee at all for participants.

We're funded through scholarships, or not scholarships, excuse me, through grants and just private donor funds as well. And that's how we run the programs. So there's no limit on how often or amount of money that you need to spend to participate.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. That's good. That's great.

Yeah. And do you do other things in your community to bring awareness to your organization and the things that you do so that people know to come? How do you go about that?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

We do a lot of resource fairs. We do a lot of outreach type things. We just did the Ride for Troops with Randy Couture.

I'm going to be at the VA later this week, next week, excuse me. I was like, what week? I'll be at the VA here soon for their wellness fair.

We just did a wellness fair, resource fair in our Marysville community out here. So we're getting out in the community quite a bit to touch base with people and let them know that we're here and what we do. We're also working on our, we have a 1959 fire truck that has been converted, completely converted to a barbecue in the back.

So we have a big Vulcan, like six burner and a flat top and two ovens in the back. And our goal with that, we've got to do some break work and tires and things, but our goal with that is to get it out on the road to continue to raise awareness and do a lot more give back. So like we'd go to the CBOX, the community-based clinics and cook for the veterans in the community that maybe struggle to get food or whatever, and that we would be providing food to them and, or just barbecue and raise funds out in a public, you know, as a food truck environment, just to raise funds and awareness.

So there's a lot of options that we can do with that. So we're getting that guy up and running too. So yeah, there's a lot of things that we try to get out into the community.

We have a mini, we have a horse that's a miniature. So if you've never seen a mini pony before, there, a lot of people have seen like the Shetland ponies and stuff. These are, these are similar in size and Misty is our mini.

And so she is small enough to travel easily. So she was kind of our, she's going to be our road ambassador to go out and meet the community. Yeah.

Yeah. So she'll get out a little bit more here soon.

[Tom Faust]

You tend to, I mean, you're located in Western Washington, kind of work in that area. For anybody who might be listening or watching this, that is from other parts of the country, are there similar organizations that you know about? Maybe we can put links to it.

If you have information like that along with this, because obviously it's, you know, somebody's not going to come from New York to Seattle necessarily just to do this.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Yeah. Yeah. I can understand that.

It's a lot of travel. Yes. So I know a few different organizations around the U S that I can recommend and get you links for.

Absolutely. And, and then I can also travel. I mean, there's, there's been organizations.

So this work that I do I also do a lot of this with corporate teams. And so I travel around the U S quite a bit, working with horses and people. And the design is only slightly different in that I'll partner with a equine facility close to the, the client or the customer.

And then I will fly to that location. We will meet at that horse facility and we'll do the work with the horses there. So it's, I bring the program to them.

So I've been looking into taking the program on the road to a few different locations here, locally, such as down, we have a large base in Washington joint base, Lewis McCord. So I've been looking at some potential down there. But since my horses and I are North of Seattle, it's quite a bit to, to pack up the horses and travel through Seattle and Tacoma area.

So it would be, you know, I'd find a facility down there, for example, to run the program out of. So that's also a possibility if there's a large group somewhere that would be interested in something like that. I'm happy to have that conversation.

But yes, if, if they cannot travel to me, I have different organizations that I know of that I trust that are across the U S that we can absolutely make sure that people have access to that, to the information from them.

[Tom Faust]

And so I guess they'd be able to contact you as well and find out where you might be

available to work or what might be coming up if there's already something planned.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Exactly. Yeah.

[Tom Faust]

So we'll, we'll put a link to your site as well. That's great. Do you have anything you want to talk about that we haven't touched on yet?

[Sonia Jorgensen]

No, I think this is great. I'm, I'm just really excited to get the word out, continue to be, you know, part of the bigger picture and the bigger cause. You know, we all need to work together.

There's never enough resources. All of the organizations that I have come across that do similar work all have the same passion and mission. And I love being a part of that.

And we're here to support each other and get the word out and make sure every veteran has access to the care that they need and the services that they need. My organization in particular is not therapy. We don't have any licensed therapists on staff, and we did that by design.

We're huge advocates of therapy. We, we support talk therapy, but we really feel some of these other programs such as ours are great adjuncts and support of therapy so that you can come to these and, and learn some tools. But I'm not going to ask you to spill the beans about your past.

I'm not going to dig into it. I'm a, I'm a today focused forward person. Let's talk about how we, you know, get you back to work.

Let's, let's, let's work on some tools to move forward. If you would like to share and add color to the situation, absolutely not a problem. But I do have people that come out here and sit and talk to the horses, right?

It's so much easier to have that conversation with an unbiased ear. You know, they feel like they can, can unload and get things off their chest in a way that they don't want to burden others. And so a lot of times they'll come out just to talk to the horses and that's great too.

You know, but I always tease them. I'm like, I got thick skin and a strong back. If you feel like there's something you need to unload on me, do not worry about it.

I am here for you. I can take it. So there's, there's been quite a few that have been like,

no, it's just spread.

And I, and I respect that and understand that completely. They don't want to spread the suffering. So they keep it for themselves.

And, and I have all the respect in the world for that. I understand that. But if they feel they need to unburden themselves of something, absolutely can support that as well.

However, I'm not going to start, you know, digging into asking you questions about your relationship with your father when you were growing up and all that, you know, I don't want to ask Chris that question right now anyway, for sure. But I will go. So I, you know, I am not, I'm not going to get into all that with people.

If they don't want to share, they are not required to. So but we do support all different facets and all different ways. It takes a village and it takes multiple different modalities and some things are going to resonate with people different than others.

And so we want to make sure it's all available. And that's why we've designed our program specifically the way we did.

[Tom Faust]

That sounds great. Yeah. All right.

So, well, I really thank you very much for coming on here with us. This has been very informative and fun to do. And I will post information about your site and whatever other links you want to share with us on this.

And we'll get that all on along with the podcast. And just happy to have you here. And thank you.

Thank our listeners. You're quite welcome. And we think, yeah, thank our listeners for taking the time to listen to this to maybe get help if you need it.

And, you know, if you do need help, go out and find it. Don't don't just sit there and stew in it. That's not going to help.

[Chris Faust]

So.

[Tom Faust]

All right. On that note, I think we're done, Chris.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. Just make sure, you know, watch the video, like, subscribe, share, follow, do whatever you need to. But get the word out of get the word out from all these things.

That's what we're that's what we're putting out here for. So that's right. Appreciate everybody's time.

Appreciate your time as well.

[Sonia Jorgensen]

Thank you so much for having me. All right.

[Chris Faust]

Till next time.

[Tom Faust]

Till next time.