



## Friday Standing Ovation by Ovation Riding

May 8, 2015

**This week we applaud Center for Hope of the Sierras and Nevada Equine Assisted Therapy.**

Each Friday, Horse Nation teams up with Ovation Riding to spotlight an individual or organization that is doing good work in the horse world. This time we're doubling up!

**Presented by:**



**This week's honorees:**



*center for hope*  
OF THE SIERRAS



The Center for Hope of the Sierras (CHS) and Nevada Equine Assisted Therapy (NEAT) have been working closely in partnership for five years to provide healing with horses. Katie Stout, Executive Director of the Center for Hope of the Sierras, and Bambi Spahr, co-founder of Nevada Equine Assisted Therapy, kindly answered our questions about their combined efforts.

**How do your organizations work together to help clients?**

NEAT has offered individual/group equine therapy for various disorders (anxiety, OCD, mood, etc.) for years. CHS wanted to include equine therapy in its programming, so we partnered with NEAT to create a closed group for our clients, providing a safe space for holistic healing with horses. The weekly group consists of CHS clients. NEAT and CHS collaborate by mentally meeting clients where they are at in treatment and offering activities that require clients to use a specific skill, such as assertion, verbal and non-verbal communication, problem solving, creative thinking, leadership, maintaining a positive attitude, relationship building, confidence and teamwork.



*Photo provided by NEAT*

**What do you do in your sessions with the horses?**

Eating disorders are often complex, involving physical as well as emotional/mental health components. Based on this fact, we worked with CHS to establish the following goals:

1. Establish stronger personal boundaries
2. Develop greater self- confidence
3. Improve self-esteem
4. Improve communication
5. Practice being ‘present in the moment’

These goals are the focus of each session.

Participants engage in a wide variety of activities, from herd observation to actual mounted work. They learn about horse and herd behaviors and are encouraged to build a mutually respectful and trusting relationship with “their” horse. Some of the activities that we facilitate, such as “Life’s Little Obstacles,” are group/team activities, where participants are asked to work together and think outside of the box. Other activities, such as mounted work, may have the participant working more independently and on their own specific challenges (balance, posture, ability to communicate clearly with the horse.)



*Photo provided by NEAT*

### **How do these sessions work for the clients?**

We often see participants start out closed down and resistant. They may be working through their feelings about being in treatment. Or, perhaps they are afraid of horses. They may be uncomfortable being a leader or with being firm and following through when they ask for something. They slowly learn how to be safe around horses and how to think like a horse — empathy. They discover that being firm and “meaning what you say” is not the same as being “mean.” They discover that in reality, it is the basis of trust. As their confidence grows, they begin to see that they can be kind and gentle while still setting reasonable personal boundaries.



*Photo provided by NEAT*

**Are there any general success stories you can share?**

Several “aha moments” from our work come to mind. The rider who nearly runs into an upright pole discovers that if you are too focused on what is down the road, you may run into something right in front of you (long term thinking vs. short term thinking) and of course the opposite is true as well! The rider who starts to slide off their horse as they trot through a corner learns that if you get going too fast you can lose control (we need to be sure we are prepared for turning life’s corners.) The team working together in the arena discovers that even someone on your team can get in your way (well-meaning people may not know what we need.) And maybe most important of all, when all participants discover that they can do something they never thought they could.

We have had many, many participants tell us how much they have learned, especially about themselves, through their work with the horses. Our work with the participants from the Center for Hope is also very rewarding for us at NEAT, as we are able to see such incredible growth and healing in the participants we work with.



*Photo provided by NEAT*

Many thanks thanks to [Ovation Riding](#) for their support of both Horse Nation and individuals and organizations that are doing good work in the horse world. If you know someone who deserves a Standing Ovation, we would love to recognize them in a future post. Email the name of the person or organization along with a message about the good work they do to [kristen@nationmediallc.com](mailto:kristen@nationmediallc.com). Photos/videos are always welcome, and include a link to their website if applicable.