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Mending Fences uses horses to help drug addicts overcome addiction



Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 26, 2017 at 4:07 p.m.

MARION COUNTY -- Just on the other side of the Levy County-Marion County line, a residential treatment facility for drug addicts uses horse as a centerpiece of the therapy to help those afflicted individuals overcome their addiction to drugs.

Mending Fences, 15530 W. Marion County Road 326, in Morriston, held an open house on Thursday (May 25). Many organizations and individuals toured the facilities on the 437 acres, including a contingent of representatives from the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office.

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VIDEO CAN BE SEEN THROUGH LINK ON THE MAY PAGE

In this video, Katarina Campagnola speaks about the ‘Trust Walk’ exercise. Here a person is escorted as they put their hand and arm on a horse and walk with their eyes closed as the handler guides the horse. In this video, the horse is named Gator. He is a retired horse who was a family-owned horse. The horse handler is Terry Libera, and the person walking is Karen Woodbury. Campagnola agrees Marilyn Sokolof, a psychologist who specializes in using horses in mental health treatment, in regard to how this is a very effective method of diagnosis and treatment. Mending Fences Chief Executive Officer Scottie Collins said this treatment method has exceptional outcomes. The average stay for a client is 24 to 60 days, Collins said, but the treatment period is customized for each client.

Rob Miller owns the facility, although it is listed as an LLC.

There are 16 horses and 14 clients as of Thursday. Each client is assigned to a horse. This is a residential treatment facility, with separate areas for male and female clients.

This facility is a reformation from its previous function as a place to help horses with treatment in a hyperbaric chamber.

In February of 2012, one woman and one horse were killed and one woman was seriously injured in an explosion in a hyperbaric chamber at this former equine medical facility.

Investigators found that the horse was kicking, when it knocked down part of the protective coating inside the chamber.



The kick of the horse caused the metal horseshoes to create a spark and that is believed to have been the cause of the explosion in the chamber that has a high intensity of oxygen in it – for healing.

Rather than close the facility, Miller revamped it into the rehabilitation unit it is today.

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Mending Fences uses retired horses as part of the psychological treatment to help people learn about themselves, and to seek to overcome addiction problems.

There is not riding of horses during the therapy.

The facility will only accept private insurance and cash-pay clients.

Marilyn Sokolof, a psychologist who specializes in using horses in mental health treatment, works at Mending Fences.

The Mending Fences website notes that “Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) is a powerful part of our treatment process. Utilizing the horse, human bond therapists can help guests let down their emotional walls allowing them to learn more about how they relate to themselves and others.”

Equine therapy is at the core of the Mending Fences program. It is “designed to help the individual build trust, confidence, social skills communication, impulse control, perspective and learn boundaries.”

During the tour Thursday, staff members mentioned that “treatment also needs to address what happens when you leave our doors.”

Upon discharge, the client receives a lock of the mane hair from the horse that he or she was partnered with. There is a photo too, and planning includes help in for clients continuing the vocational training and/or career enhancement programs they began at Mending Fences.

“Our goal is to ensure that your chosen field is a good fit and will support rather than hinder your work towards recovery,” the website notes. “Your stay with us also includes a year of phone monitoring to make sure you are following your treatment plan as we know that the pull off the path to sobriety can be daunting.”