

## EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY

by David Gerber, Director of Counseling and Shelter Services



Since 2014, St. Christopher's Inn has partnered with Topfield Equestrian Center in Cold Spring, NY to provide Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy through a Wounded Warriors veterans grant.

Each week any SCL client who is a veteran of the armed forces has the opportunity to go to Topfield and participate in equine-assisted psychotherapy. They work side by side with horses, while working through their personal challenges. What is incredible and beneficial about working with horses, is that they are not subject to human defense mechanisms. No matter how big or small you are; no matter how tough you may be in life, the horse will not respond unless you can find a way to connect with the horse.

The men have genuinely appreciated the experience, and likewise the staff at Topfield loves working with the men of St. Christopher's Inn. The program has been so successful that both organizations have been looking for ways to expand the program beyond veterans.

Earlier this year, a small grant became available to start researching the effectiveness of Equine Therapy with behavioral health clients. Both Topfield and St. Christopher's Inn matched the grant so that we can pilot a program to measure the effectiveness, while expanding our services.

Specifically, we are looking to measure the effect of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy on our 18-30 year old population to see if we have higher levels of treatment completion and longitudinal success. This population tends to have lower completion rates of treatment, and the hope is that the provision of this unique service experience will result in better treatment retention. We are very excited to announce that the expanded program will begin this month!

While we at St. Christopher's Inn recognize the value of traditional methods of treatment for behavioral health challenges, we are also happy to experiment with alternate treatment methods and expand opportunities for our men to grow in their recovery.



## SUGGESTIONS

*"The only suggestions you pay for are the ones you don't take."*

by Lisa E. Gladwell, Esq  
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Someone shared those wise words with me years ago. Immediately I could identify, as it mirrored the many setbacks I had on my journey to recovery.

First and foremost, I am not an expert on sobriety, recovery, 12-Step or any other program or tool utilized in seeking sobriety or recovery from addiction. What I am qualified to share is my personal experience with active addiction, my climb out of the abyss and my fifteen plus years of sobriety, one day at a time. There is no cure for this disease and there is no one-size-fits all path to recovery. What has worked for me, and millions of others, is a simple 12-Step program, honed to the individual by those with experience, strength and hope.

Easiest for me to understand were the obvious suggestions: don't use; go to meetings; change people, places and things; get a sponsor; one day at a time...

What I would stumble on were those that seemed peripheral or unrelated to sobriety: get a home group; no new relationships for at least a year; KISS...keep it simple stupid and a bunch of others. Those suggestions, seemingly irrelevant, would test my commitment to sobriety.

Those discarded suggestions, that seemed irrelevant to sobriety, led me back to active addiction. Numerous "yes, buts" rejecting others' experience and wisdom were reservations in my commitment to sobriety: a chink in my armor, which was all my disease, needed to lead me to relapse. It was not the logs in my path that tripped me up. No, it was the seemingly small twigs, representing the reservations, which I took my will back on. This disease is cunning, baffling and powerful. My relapse experiences have taught me that I must remain open to the suggestions of others.



Today I remain sober thanks to those "suggestions" which I continue to take. Today, and I hope for the rest of my life, I remain a grateful student; open to the

wisdom of those who have come before me and those who follow behind.