

*feature
story*



equine assisted trauma program

THOROUGHBRED & VETERAN WELFARE ALLIANCE

Towards purpose and hope

Many years ago one man had a thought "horses have saved my life, maybe horses can help others with trauma too". In 2016, Scott Brodie, ex-police officer and professional horseman started Thoroughbred & Veteran Welfare Alliance. The results have been significant.



It began as a 5-day program held in Kangaroo Valley with six veterans, the Thoroughbred & Veteran Welfare Alliance (TVWA), has now grown to include weekly sessions in Sydney for both veterans and first responders and 5-day programs at Kangaroo Valley NSW, Aberdeen NSW and Ipswich Queensland.

The focus is to learn about Thoroughbreds, horsemanship and yourself by retraining an ex-racehorse who has also gone through its own struggle of trauma, loss of career and health issues, including both mental and/or physical. By focusing on the horses and the training, the participants put aside their feelings of hopelessness, despair, anger, self-doubt. After the first day, you can feel the difference in yourself as your confidence grows stronger, anxiety disappears, depression eases, hope is regained and each participant sees they have a future.

Finding proactive pathways that help us deal

with trauma as soon as possible is key for both human and horse. In recovery, it is important to embrace various forms of connection. Whether that be speaking to a therapist and specialist, doing in-patient and/or out-patient programs as well as alternative natural therapies that speak into you. There are a range of various natural therapies that can be of help. For example art, movement, writing, photography, nature and animals.

One such program is working with horses. There are a range of equine programs available that cover various therapies including touch, mindfulness, communication and riding. The horse teaches you about things that are going on that you may not even be aware of! To communicate with a horse is essentially emotional and intimate connection. It is different to what humans naturally do with one another. Whilst our communication is 80% body language, it is largely unconscious behaviour. We are not necessarily attuned to what our

bodies are saying, but when we are working with horses, we must be acutely aware of our body language as the horse will pick up every cue. In this process, we can feel quite vulnerable as our words are rooted in our body and movement not through our mouth; as it is with the horse, their bodies transmit and receive information. In turn, we learn more about ourselves by being with this majestic animal, than we would from any other form of communication. Essentially, it is kinaesthetic empathy. Therefore, participants working with horses develop a heightened sense of awareness and in that vulnerability our courage grows. After countless hours of working together, the human and horse attune to each other. TVWA's program is structured and unique, whereby Scott leads the participant through a series of steps in retraining an ex-racehorse.

Phase 1 of the program has five steps that are integrated:

1. Education and learning – skilling, respect, communication between horse and participant;
2. Establishing social connection – use of 5 senses, rhythmic movement, breathing, mindfulness;
3. Being self-aware – body language and emotions;
4. Developing mind skills – focus, self-observation, other-observation in group, self-support, supporting others in group, motivation to bring mind + brain + body into action for both horse and participant; and
5. Strengthening and regaining confidence.

Scott encourages all participants to continue on into phase 2, that is volunteering after the

program with TVWA. This builds further horsemanship skills, which increases self-belief, integrate a new narrative and reconnection with self, others and community.

I've seen people with PTSD, people ready to give up on life and then flourish. They're passionate, got goals, they're not necessarily going to own a horse, but they'll drive an hour to come here and help. They start seeing for themselves how worthwhile it is to volunteer, be outside in nature and with the Thoroughbreds.
– Scott



The need to want to improve your mental health has to be in the participant's main thought process. Increase in mental health and well-being will come regardless of the therapy or alternative natural therapy activity that is best for them. Participants who went on to volunteer in the program excelled. They saw a future and started living it.

The connectedness Scott teaches me with horses is something that goes far beyond simply working with horses. All the steps of Scott's horsemanship program progress onto another level of development physically, mentally and emotionally for both the horse and the rider. Working together with the horse, we develop a bond and trust. As we develop the horse physically, mentally and emotionally, the horse develops confidence in his ability. When done correctly, we avoid vices and issues that may have been faced without correct education. With this method of progressively developing our being, we can start to apply these steps to ourselves. The more time you spend working with a horse, we communicate; the more time you must practise the tools that help to process emotions, thoughts and feelings. - Issac



When suffering from post-traumatic stress, emotions become numb, it is difficult to talk about things, often the words are swirling in the head and it seems impossible to come out. If people know you well, they can learn to read your body language, but more often than not, you become good at being so hardened and closed off from your emotions that no one sees the pain inside. A horse helps you get back in touch with your emotions and indeed yourself. Through connecting with a horse, the self emerges. Without talking about it, a horse helps me feel again and makes me express myself in ways that humans don't even understand. This in turn helps me and others to become more effective and more engaged. - Mel

By applying the systematic skills, we have learned from Scott to retrain a former racehorse, we can systematically un-train ourselves out of the military or emergency services into our new purpose. There was hope for us, there always was, we just needed to be reminded. We couldn't see past our own trauma before the equine program. In working with ex-racehorses, with their own challenges, challenged us to see that we could rise again. Together we strived to make a difference to one another and to communicate across barriers and languages. Scott through the ex-racehorses facilitated a change that would affect our lives forever.



Thoroughbred & Veteran Welfare Alliance Team

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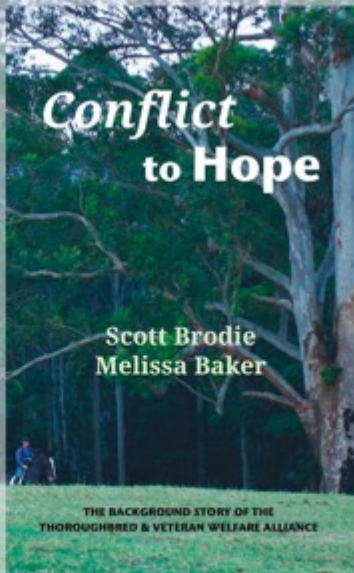
COMING SOON IN 2021

FB & IG: @thehealingdocumentary

This is our story of how TVWA began towards *thoroughbreds helping veterans helping thoroughbreds*. Recently published as a print and eBook. All proceeds go towards TVWA.

Print & eBook: <https://au.blurb.com/b/10584570-conflict-to-hope>

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