

Mended Hearts Stable

Helping People Mend Their Relationships and Lives

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Specialist Jeff Sikes and his service dog Wrigley!

Meet Our Local Veteran & Hero!

Jeff Sikes grew up in Green Valley, Illinois. He was an LPN in area nursing homes until the surge in 2007. Then, he joined the army and was with the 82nd airborne second combat team going on over 150 combat missions in Iraq.

He was injured in 2010 and declared a permanent and total disabled veteran with a diagnosis of a Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD, that left him with weakness on his left side due to injury. Him and his service dog, Wrigley, were gifted a home from Habitat for Humanity in 2019, which Sikes described the home as "truly a blessing so that I can organize my life better and have something to build on" and also stated it allows for a "chance to have more structure in my life which is important for TBI."

We are grateful to have him as part of our Mended Hearts family!

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month

"Always remember, if you have been diagnosed with PTSD, it is not a sign of weakness; rather, it is proof of your strength, because you have survived!"

— Michel Templet

There are currently about 8 million people in the United States with PTSD.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health problem. PTSD can develop after you go through or see a life-threatening event.

Even though PTSD treatments work, most people who have PTSD don't get the help they need. June is PTSD Awareness Month. Help us spread the word that effective PTSD treatments are available.

Everyone with PTSD—whether they are Veterans or civilian survivors of sexual assault, serious accidents, natural disasters, or other traumatic events—needs to know that treatments really do work and can lead to a better quality of life.

It's normal to have upsetting memories, feel on edge, or have trouble sleeping after a traumatic event (also called "trauma"). At first, it may be hard to do daily activities you are used to doing, like go to work, go to school, or spend time with people you care about. But most people start to feel better after a few weeks or months. For some people, PTSD symptoms may start later, or they may come and go over time. Talk to a doctor or mental health care provider if your symptoms:

- Last longer than a few months
- Are very upsetting
- Disrupt your daily life

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not appear until months or years later. They also may come and go over many years.

Personal factors—like previous traumatic exposure, age, and gender—can affect whether or not a person will develop PTSD. What happens after the traumatic event is also important. Stress can make PTSD more likely, while social support can make it less likely.

Anyone can develop PTSD at any age. Some factors can increase the chance that someone will have PTSD, many of which are not under that person's control. For example, having a very intense or long-lasting traumatic event or getting injured during the event can make it more likely that a person will develop PTSD. PTSD is also more common after certain types of trauma, like combat and sexual assault.

"Getting better" means different things for different people. There are many different treatment options for PTSD. For many people, these treatments can get rid of symptoms altogether. Others find they have fewer symptoms or feel that their symptoms are less intense. Your symptoms don't have to interfere with your everyday activities, work, and relationships.



Adopt a Horse Program

Each of our therapy horses costs \$500 a month to feed, shelter, and care for. That comes out to \$6,000 a year for each of our 7 therapy horses. Any amount you decide to give to adopt part of a horse would be awesome! We need partners who will help us cover the cost of this care so that we can continue to provide this type of unique and valuable therapy in our area.

What you give towards adopting a horse goes to pay for: Grain, hay, bedding, vet bills, water, salt and other miscellaneous supplies, heating for the stables and arena, stable help, medicine, medical supplies

Any amount that you give to help support the cost of our horses is greatly appreciated, and adds up with others towards adopting all of our horses.

Come visit the horse that you have adopted by scheduling a visit. We would be happy to show you around and help you get to know the horse that you are helping us to care for.

To work out the way to adopt that is most convenient for you, call us at (309) 383-4323 weekdays 8:30 am – 5:30 pm. There is a picture of each of our therapy horses on our website at <https://mended-hearts.org/adopt-a-horse/>



Daffy's Corner: Thoughts from Underfoot

Me and my sister's, Mazie and Gracie, have an amazing superpower to be able to read emotions, provide stress relief, and act as a companion for those struggling, especially those with PTSD.

Us doggos are often referred to as "man's best friend," but for some military veterans, us four-legged fur balls also take on the role of therapist and confidant in the battle against PTSD.

Service dogs are defined as those individually trained to do work or perform specific tasks for people with mental health disabilities, such as PTSD. Some of these tasks include waking a person from nightmares, leading an individual to a building exit during an anxiety attack, grounding an individual through nudging, pawing, or leaning, and bringing medication to a person on command.

While providing a service dog to every individual with PTSD, like Wrigley and Jeff, may seem like the answer to helping individuals with this diagnosis, it's not that simple. It takes years of training to become a service dog like my friend, Wrigley.

Therefore, alternative options should be explored, such as therapy dogs like myself and my sisters. Therapy animals can be incorporated into PTSD treatment in a variety of ways, including the use of equine therapy!

Through horse-human interaction, veterans and others battling with PTSD, can relearn how to recognize their feelings, regulate emotions, and better communicate, as well as build trust and come to trust themselves again. One must build trust with a horse for it to warm to you—all valuable tools to help them succeed with family, work, and social relationships!

The therapy dog after I share all of my problems:



Blessings from Frank:

Is There a Snake on Your Path?



We were on a walk this spring at Pere Marquette State Park. It was a beautiful sunny day with several people walking along the trail. There is a foot bridge on the trail. Everyone we met as we walked towards the bridge mentioned the snake on the bridge. It is a fairly narrow foot bridge and to cross, people had to walk right beside the snake. We saw it as we went by, lying there warming itself in the sunlight.

I am sure the snake was not pleased to have all these humans walking by and making a fuss. While a snake can be dangerous and scary, it can also be just another animal that we enjoy and treat with respect on our walk through the woods.

Is there a snake on your path? Something that looks scary and maybe dangerous? When we face such things that we see ahead on this path we call life, there are some things we can do to make things go the best possible way:

- Be calm, go slowly, don't panic
- Get input, advice from others before you encounter the snake
- Appreciate what is good about the path and the snake
- If something bad happens when you encounter the snake, get help
- Enjoy the journey, it is your path

Check out our weekly blog post for more info on PTSD and other mental health related articles this month at:
<https://mended-hearts.org/blog>

Myths about PTSD:

Myth: PTSD is in your head. It does not exist.

Fact: PTSD does exist. It is a recognized mental health problem that has been studied for many years. You may get PTSD if you have lived through a traumatic event that caused you to fear for your life, see horrible things, and feel helpless. Strong emotions caused by the event create changes in the brain that may result in PTSD.

Myth: Only soldiers or people in war zones get PTSD.

Fact: Anyone who sees or goes through a traumatic event can develop PTSD. A traumatic event is a horrible and scary experience. These events include violent crimes, sexual assaults, childhood neglect or abuse, and natural disasters such as hurricanes or earthquakes.

Myth: You should be able to move on after a traumatic event.

Fact: The strong emotions you may feel during the traumatic event can create changes in your brain that result in PTSD. You may not be able to "move on" because of this. It's important to remember that PTSD is a medical condition. People with other health conditions, such as cancer, deal with the condition as best they can. The same is true for PTSD.

Myth: PTSD always happens right after the traumatic event.

Fact: PTSD symptoms can develop at any time after a traumatic event. Your symptoms may start soon after the event, or you may not have them until months or years later. They may come and go over many years.

Myth: People with PTSD cannot function.

Fact: PTSD can cause severe symptoms, but counselling, medicines, and support all help people adjust. People with PTSD have jobs and relationships. They enjoy life and are active members of their communities.