

Program: Equine Experience Program

Organization: Gateway Homes, Inc.

The NEW Equine Experience Program (EEP) proposed by Gateway Homes, Inc., would create a transformational support for many of the individuals the organization serves – adults and adolescents with serious mental illness (SMI) who have been historically neglected, or turned away by other community-based mental healthcare providers. This population struggles to build meaningful social connections – whether due to symptoms associated with their diagnoses, an inability to recognize and respond appropriately to social cues, or due to past experiences (i.e., trauma histories). Both in research and in practice, equine-assisted interventions have proven beneficial for such individuals. Incorporating this powerful therapeutic tool that facilitates recovery will be transformational for the organization, enhance client well-being, and allow expanded prevocational training opportunities to include farmhand care of equines. EEP will also provide a positive, economically feasible use for the flagship Chesterfield campus where a lush field of grass that mostly lies vacant could soon feature grazing horses. An established and well-respected organization, Gateway Homes has the funding necessary to maintain the EEP in the future. However, the funding from Impact 100 Richmond would be pivotal in providing the initial capital investment required for the program's facilities – construction of the barn to stable three horses and the resources needed to recruit and train the staff to begin operations by July 1, 2024. All 340 individuals served throughout the Commonwealth annually (2/3 from historically marginalized minority groups & more than 95% below the Federal Poverty Level) would be eligible to participate/benefit from the program in this location. Additionally, plans are in place to open services to community partners so that this highly specialized and effective treatment modality can be utilized by those individuals who would benefit from it most.