

# Equine Assisted Therapy for Survivors of Trauma

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*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

## ***Heart of Horse Sense***

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# Application Form

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## *Question Group*

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Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

[Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP](#)

## **Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds\***

Name of Project.

Equine Assisted Therapy for Survivors of Trauma

## **Amount of Funds Requested\***

\$250,000.00

## **Recovery Fund Eligible Category\***

Please select one:

Enhance behavioral and mental health services

## **Brief Project Description\***

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

Heart of Horse Sense educates, trains, and funds trauma-informed equine assisted psychotherapy and learning for survivors of trauma. Each year, Heart of Horse Sense (HOHS) works with 200+ high-needs individuals utilizing this unique modality for those who have experienced trauma. Services are delivered by

trained, certified and licensed equine mental health therapists in the form of individual and group sessions as well as through multi-day intensives.

HOHS respectfully requests a partnership with Buncombe County to support mental health service delivery to 1,000 individuals over the five-year projected timeline. A partnership with Buncombe County to serve residents with significant mental health needs would allow this growth to continue and ensure that no one seeking services was turned away due to lack of financial resources.

## Project Plan\*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

Our vision is that every survivor of trauma has access to the therapeutic healing that horses offer. This includes under-resourced youth, survivors of domestic and sexual violence as well as human trafficking, active-duty military and veterans, first responders, and those impacted by racial trauma. There are many ways horses support growth and healing, and HOHS ensures these services are offered in a safe and ethical manner by highly trained and qualified professionals (both horses and humans).

What makes HOHS and equine assisted therapy and learning different from other mental health services is the method of delivery. Participants partner with a horse and develop a relationship to build trust and identify any intimacy barriers before riding. Horses, as natural prey animals, are very attuned to their surroundings, and yet they are often capable of being calm and confident through higher-level brain development. This “both/and” of prey and regulated leader can set the tone for their humans as emotionally calm and confident presences. This can create a feedback loop which builds trust in the participant and increases their self-efficacy. This process is engaging, interesting, and does not require participants to be verbal about their thoughts and feelings. Instead, it provides the opportunity to try new behaviors and receive unbiased feedback from the horse. The horse provides an unconditional, non-judgmental, and honest platform that is fundamental to the healing process.

When riding the horses, participants benefit from the rhythmic, patterned, repetitive somatosensory input that characterizes bottom-up regulation that can help develop and/or reorganize the traumatic brain (based on the Neurosequential Model of Therapy and Education). This “living” delivery system does not rely on the traditional relationship between patient and therapist, but instead provides a neutral modality which can build trust faster. Horses can also provide the experience of positive touch and boundaries that lay the foundation for self-control, as well as heal attachment wounds.

The project plan includes delivery of therapeutic services to Buncombe County residents in the aforementioned categories. HOHS will serve an average of 250 trauma survivors annually during the five-year funded period. Programs take place weekly throughout the year for individuals and groups and every other month for weekend intensives. The implementation of this project includes outreach within the community, program delivery, program evaluation, and ongoing staff training. The timeline of this project is from October 2021 through December 2026.

## Statement of Need\*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

Trauma impacts the brain in myriad ways, going far beyond the anxiety and depression that are typically associated with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Those impacted by trauma can experience hyper-vigilance, dissociation, memory suppression, inability to control impulses, and decreased mental functioning. These symptoms can be prevalent in youth who have high ACE scores (Adverse Childhood Experiences), victims of interpersonal trauma, veterans and those in high trauma-jobs such as first responders, and those who have experienced trauma as it relates to racial oppression and inequities.

Buncombe County's 2018-2021 Health Assessment Priorities include general mental health as the second most critical public health need. Exacerbating the mental health crisis has been the COVID-19 pandemic, which studies have shown increased general mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression by over 200% across the country (Jan 2019 11% to Jan 2021 40% - Kaiser Family Foundation 2/2021). Studies abound with evidence that the populations served by HOHS experience more intense mental health service needs than the average individual or someone who has not experienced significant trauma.

The community's need and desire for programming has gone up significantly over the last several years; for 2021, there is a trajectory of a 108% increase in service requests to HOHS. This is a result of targeted outreach in the community and an emphasis on deep relationship building. People healing from trauma are seeking the innovative support model provided by HOHS when so many other options have not worked for them.

### Link to COVID-19\*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

The populations served by HOHS experienced exacerbated impacts from COVID-19 in a variety of ways – youth who rely on school as a place of consistency and with dependable adults were unable to attend in-person and suffered due to isolation and lack of social interactions with peers; survivors of domestic and sexual violence were at an increased risk if cohabitating with their abuser due to mandatory stay-at-home orders; veterans/military/first responders were at a heightened level of alert and hyper-vigilance due to significant uncertainty about safety, health, and access to public spaces; and finally, those impacted by racial trauma experienced unprecedented emotional upheaval due to the violence surrounding our country's racial reckoning.

The pandemic has caused most clients served through HOHS to be under extreme stress and has brought more individuals into the fold as they look for ways to cope; this work has become more essential than ever. Fortunately, throughout the pandemic, therapists were able to work with clients through HIPAA compliant telehealth platforms and socially distanced in person on the farm. Now that social distancing and gathering rules have relaxed, HOHS, while keeping all COVID-19 safety protocols in place around vaccinations, is able to return to full operation in supporting clients in person and virtually for those who wish to remain remote.

### Population Served\*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

HOHS serves under-resourced youth, survivors of domestic and sexual violence as well as human trafficking, active-duty military and veterans, first responders, and those impacted by racial trauma.

Partnerships with Children First, the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, Asheville Parks and Recreation, YTL, and the YWCA allow us to serve under-resourced youth. HOHS objectives align with the #7 Goal of the North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan (as adopted by Buncombe County) whereby children will express, recognize, and manage their emotions in a healthy way, especially under stress. The number of youth served in the first half of 2021 is twice the number of youth served through HOHS in 2019.

Thanks to the support of two recently awarded federal grants (VOCA and VAWA), HOHS is now able to serve a growing number of those impacted by interpersonal violence; this includes survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. As one of Buncombe County's top eight social determinants of health, interpersonal violence impacts a growing number of individuals and has been exacerbated during COVID 19.

While adding services to additional populations impacted by trauma, HOHS continues to support veterans both individually and in groups. Since inception, HOHS has worked with over 2,100 veterans and continues to deepen this reach to the thousands of veterans living in Western North Carolina.

First responders encounter trauma by bearing witness to tragedies like drug overdose, suicide, and violence. They show up for Buncombe county every day and HOHS is proud to show up for them.

Buncombe County is not immune to the harms caused to communities of color and HOHS is committed to supporting mental health and building the resiliency for BIPOC residents through equine assisted therapy and learning. HOHS works with survivors of racial trauma through organizations who focus on supporting traditionally marginalized communities.

## Results\*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

HOHS is committed to achieving the following results over the five-year grant period and will report progress quarterly, semi-annually, and annually as requested.

1. To provide trauma-informed equine assisted therapy and learning to 1,000 individuals. This goal represents an increase in the baseline number of individuals served as HOHS continues to grow and expand services.

2. To increase participant self-regulation and coping skills as measured when beginning services and establishing a self-reported baseline by an average of 20%.

3. To decrease participant stress and other self-reported PTSD symptoms as measured by several pre/post-tests when beginning services and establishing a self-reported baseline by an average of 20%.

## Evaluation\*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

HOHS, as a requirement of federal funders, gathers a wide variety of data to analyze the impact of service delivery, ensure program effectiveness, and track outcomes for individual participants.

Measurement methods are delivered at the beginning and conclusion of services. The tools utilized to evaluate individual program impact for veterans and first responders are the PCL-5 (a 20-item self-report measure that assesses the 20 DSM-5 symptoms of PTSD) and the PHQ9 (a 3-page questionnaire that can be self-administered which measures depression severity). Tools utilized with other populations served include the DERS (which measures difficulties in emotion regulation) and the NEEDSSAT (a basic need satisfaction in relationship survey).

Results from these evaluations allow HOHS to monitor program efficacy and commit to constant improvement. We welcome continuous feedback from clients and involve both our board of directors and clients in helping to shape programming.

## Equity Impact\*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

HOHS defines equity as unbiased, open access to culturally competent services, regardless of socio-economic status, race, gender orientation, or physical ability. HOHS hires staff that are representative of clients we serve, including a bilingual therapist & a horse professional who identifies as LGBTQ.

Our staff has had diversity training with A Therapist Like Me trainer and local therapist Elizabeth McCorvey in 2019 on issues of race, inclusion and equity, and in 2018 on LGBTQI+ issues. In 2020 Ms. McCorvey also consulted with our staff and educated us regarding missed opportunities for connection and understanding. Further, she facilitated sessions in which we addressed the death of George Floyd with our 4-6th grade youth of color.

HOHS continues to prioritize working with marginalized populations and is aware of the need for culturally specific services to understand specific traumas affecting the BIPOC communities of Western North Carolina. HOHS currently partners with several different agencies who serve primarily individuals of color (list below). Additionally, it is our plan to work with Sherriff Miller in creating specific programming under the County's "Black in Blue" initiative which recognizes the additional trauma officers of color experience working in law enforcement.

HOHS understands it is our responsibility to do our own personal work as well as board and volunteer work around creating an inclusive and equitable organization.

## Project Partners\*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:

- 1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;
- 2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

HOHS contracts with Horse Sense of the Carolinas to provide equine assisted therapy and learning programming through licensed mental health providers. Administrative and organizational responsibilities are conducted by HOHS staff. HOHS serves as the nonprofit arm of the organization providing no-cost and low-barrier access to critical mental health services.

HOHS partners with a wide variety of organizations in Buncombe County to ensure programs are reaching individuals most impacted by trauma. While HOHS serves participants across a five-county region, below is a list of current program partners from Buncombe County. HOHS looks forward to growing this list over the coming years.

### Veterans & First Responders

Charles George VA Center (individual/group/immersion participants)  
 Aura Home for Women (individual/group participants)  
 Veterans Healing Farm (individual/group/immersion participants)  
 ABCCM – Veterans Quarters (individual/group/immersion participants)  
 Asheville Police Department (individual participants)  
 Buncombe County Sheriff Department (individual participants)

### Youth

Children First/Communities in Schools (individual/group participants)  
 Asheville Parks & Recreation (group participants)  
 YWCA – Mother Love Program (individual/group participants)  
 YTL (group participants)

### Survivors of Interpersonal Violence

Helpmate (individual participants)  
 Our VOICE (individual participants)  
 On Eagle's Wings (individual participants)

### Survivors of Racial Trauma

YWCA – Getting Ahead & MotherLove (individual/group participants)

GVPP/Changing Together: Gang Violence Prevention Program (individual participants)  
Swannanoa Youth Development Center (individual participants)  
Children First/Communities in Schools (individual/group participants)

## Capacity\*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

HOHS was established as a non-profit in 2014 to offer equine assisted mental health services at no charge to veterans and at-risk youth. After recognizing the incredible impact programs were having on veterans & youth, HOHS decided to expand to serve other survivors of trauma; this included first responders in 2017, survivors of interpersonal violence and victims of crime in 2020, and those impacted by racialized trauma in 2021.

HOHS is on the precipice of tremendous growth and over the past three years has significantly increased the number of clients served. This, in addition to receiving competitive VOCA (Victim of Crime Act) and VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) grant funds, speaks to the administrative strength of the organization and the ability to be good stewards of public dollars. The HOHS Board of Directors is a strong and seasoned group of leaders who are champions of the mission and support the organization both as financial donors and volunteers.

## Budget\*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

HOHS Recovery Funds Budget.xlsx

## Special Considerations\*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

Heart of Horse Sense is excited about the possibility of expanding services and addressing the needs resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic through a partnership with Buncombe County. We welcome you to come tour our facility and see the life-changing work that is taking place every day. Thank you in advance for your consideration and please do not hesitate to follow up if you should have any questions.

# File Attachment Summary

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## *Applicant File Uploads*

- HOHS Recovery Funds Budget.xlsx

## Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Proposed Project Budget

<b>Organization Name:</b>	Heart of Horse Sense
<b>Project Name:</b>	Equine Assisted Therapy for Survivors of Trauma
<b>Amount Requested:</b>	\$250,000 (over five years - budget as provided is annual)

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	\$ 50,000.00	pending	request to support 250 Buncombe residents annually
VOCA - Victim of Crime Act	\$ 258,441.00	confirmed	portion supports survivors of interpersonal violence
VAWA - Violence Against Women Act	\$ 199,256.00	confirmed	portion supports survivors of interpersonal violence
WNC Bridge Foundation	\$ 3,000.00	confirmed	portion supports under-resourced youth
Parelli Foundation	\$ 2,500.00	pending	portion supports veterans
Eaton Foundation	\$ 5,000.00	confirmed	portion supports veterans
Individual donors	\$ 69,000.00	pending	unrestricted, supports general operations of the agency
<b>Total</b>	\$ 587,197.00		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating	Notes
List expenses here			\$ 348,000.00		Personnel (Salary, Taxes, Benefits)
List expenses here			\$ 120,000.00		Contract Support/Professional Services
List expenses here			\$ 65,000.00		Program Expenses (program materials, training, support)
List expenses here			\$ 18,000.00		Occupancy and Related (utilities, office supplies, rent)
List expenses here			\$ 9,900.00		Horse Care Rental and facilities (food, shelter, medical care)
List expenses here			\$ 15,000.00		Insurance
List expenses here			\$ 5,000.00		Volunteer Programming/Training
List expenses here			\$ 6,297.00		Outreach, Marketing, Printing/Publications
List expenses here			\$ -		
<b>Total</b>			\$ 587,197.00		