

HoPE – Horse Passion for Everyone - 4

Compassionate Witnesses at Heaven Can Wait

“Having a place to go where you are welcomed no matter how sick you feel, where you are supported and loved no matter how little you can give back, soaking up the peace and calm of the natural surroundings and the love of horses and their focus and ability to tune into our illness, hopes and fears... it all works in unison for me when I am there, so strongly that my pain goes away and my identity as a cancer survivor goes away – for that hour or so [when I work with the horses], I feel like a healthy, happy individual who has never been touched by such a devastating illness...”

Beverly Hausner, Inspiration for HoPE Passion for Everyone



Horses exist in a body-based awareness of here and now. They are in harmony with their instincts, emotions and logic. They have a powerful energy they want to share.

At Heaven Can Wait Equine Sanctuary cancer patients/survivors and caregivers can experience a session of therapeutic activities with the grounding, affectionate assistance of our rescued horses. Volunteers trained by Leigh Shambo (H.E.A.L., www.humanequinealliance.org), a noted psychotherapist with thirty years of experience, serve as the Compassionate Witnesses for participants of any age.

A typical HoPE session starts with comforting grounding exercises and visualization of the calm connectedness to come. Horse behavior is described and how it mirrors our own now-based actions. Participants are taught about their right to be respected by the horses, and their responsibility to provide boundaries for their equine companions to respect. Participants then meet the horses, have the opportunity to communicate on a wordless level that allows them to feel the acceptance and strength of these animals. Activities such as grooming, haltering, leading can be chosen. A Compassionate Witness is always there to help the participant create a baseline awareness, visualize the action, then simply do it with as much or as little support as the participant wants.

After activities, participants can spend quiet time with their horse if they wish, and can sit in comfort to “journal,” distilling their feelings into words and memories for the time between visits (HoPE provides the journals). There is a final end ceremony where a chance to share is offered and where we repeat grounding and breathing exercises to align emotions with body. Both participants and Compassionate Witnesses honor the horses for their presence.

Sessions are given on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 AM to approximately noon. Participants are in charge of the activity level at all times. Relaxation, renewal and comfort are paramount. There is no charge to participants or observers. Everyone should wear closed shoes and bring a hat. Bag lunch is optional – the Sanctuary has many shady spots with awesome views for picnics.

HCW is located at 6275 Cerros Pioneros Wy, San Miguel CA 93451. Call 805/368-5702 or 805/712-3109 to attend a session.

This is a non-denominational community outreach program. No previous experience with horses needed!

Heaven Can Wait, Inc.
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