



From **Trauma** to **Triumph**

Healing Front-Line Heroes and
Families with Equine Assisted Therapy.

**A CASE FOR
SUPPORTING**





“I did not see this coming. I was one of the many tens of thousands of first responders who naively thought themselves impervious to lasting damage. Now I find myself scrabbling for a foothold and the prospects of better days ahead. I need that badly; not only for myself, but for those near and dear to me who count on me to be at my best, and not some hollowed out shell of the man that went before.”

R. Graham Muir

Assistant Commissioner, RCMP (Rtd),
Former Commissioner, United Nations Police,
U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (2005 to 2006)

Not All Wounds Are Visible.

Though the battles may be over, the fight continues for Veterans and First Responders

Canadian Military Members Are Fighting Invisible Wars

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) includes more than 110,000 Regular and Reserve Force members with approximately 140,000 family dependents (i.e., spouses, children) residing across Canada and around the world ¹. These individuals will join the more than 600,000 CAF Veterans and their families living in Canada via the military-to-civilian transition (MCT) process ², which is often where struggles with mental health become insurmountable for many former members of the military without formal help.



1. Kelly Dean Schwartz, Deborah Norris, Heidi Cramm, Linna Tam-Seto, and Alyson Mahar. "Family members of Veterans with mental health problems: Seeking, finding, and accessing informal and formal supports during the military-to-civilian transition." Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health. January 25, 2021. 2. ibid 3. Pearson C, Zamorski M, Janz T. "Mental health of the Canadian Armed Forces". 4. Kelly Dean Schwartz, Deborah Norris, Heidi Cramm, Linna Tam-Seto, and Alyson Mahar. "Family members of Veterans with mental health problems: Seeking, finding, and accessing informal and formal supports during the military-to-civilian transition." Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health. January 25, 2021. 5. Veterans Affairs Canada 6. "Shifting barriers around posttraumatic stress injuries (PTSI) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)". Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment. 7. Canadian Mental Health Association 8. Statistics Canada. 2016 9. Daphne Doak, Mary Ann McColl, and Alice B. Aiken. "Experiences of military sexual assault, PTSD, and participation in life activities among Canadian women Veterans." June 2, 2025. 10. <https://cimvhr.ca/>

The statistics are staggering ...

- **1 in 6** full-time Regular Force CAF members experiences an array of physical and mental health problems³, many of which are the result of operational stress injuries (OSIs), including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol abuse and dependence⁴.
- **1 in 5** Canadian Veterans experience a diagnosed mental health disorder at some time during their lives⁵.
- Male military Veterans are **1.4 times more likely to die by suicide** than their civilian counterparts.

“Veterans may feel caught between military or RCMP and civilian cultures or even alienated from family, friends and other civilian community members. They may also lose contact with their military or RCMP support network and connections when they initially release. This can contribute to a lack of community belonging.” – Centre for Suicide Prevention

Marriage and family relationships also suffer greatly. Spouses report that they also experience symptoms of PTSD. This is known as secondary PTSD, where families of Veterans (including their children) are often anxious, hyper-vigilant and experience other difficulties as well.

Canadian First Responders Suffering Operational Stress Injuries

Canada's first responders and public service personnel (PSP), such as correctional service workers, fire services personnel, Indigenous emergency managers, operational intelligence personnel, paramedics, police officers, public safety communicators, and search and rescue personnel, are suffering operational stress injuries (OSIs) at enormous rates. A study of Canadian Public Safety Personnel found that approximately 44.5% screened positive for one or more mental health disorders, primarily PTSD (23.2 %) or major depressive disorder (26.4%)⁶. For PTSD, that is **two times the rate of general population**⁷.

Military Sexual Trauma: The unique needs of Canada's Female Veterans

Female Veterans from the Canadian Military face unique challenges while also navigating the mental health challenges shared with their male counter parts. **Close to one in three women are sexually assaulted during their military career** in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)⁸. Sexual assault is strongly linked to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in both military and civilian contexts but was more strongly associated with sexual assault than with other form of trauma, such as combat or physical injury⁹. As a result, **female military Veterans are almost two times more likely to die by suicide** than civilian women, and will attempt and die by suicide more their male military counterparts if they have experienced sexual violence, such as military sexual trauma.

Families across the Veteran and First Responder continuum are suffering and need help. When operational stress injuries have become too much to bear, Can Praxis is here to help individuals and their families rebuild: their mental health, their communication skills, their confidence, and their lives.

The Can Praxis Story

Can Praxis was founded in 2013 by Warrant Officer (Ret) Steve Critchley - a 28-year member of the Canadian Armed Forces who served as a Basic Training Instructor, as well as an Advanced Leadership Instructor, deployed to Egypt, Cyprus, and Bosnia (where he witnessed human conflict at its worst).

Steve's experiences in conflict, paired with subsequent training and certification in mediation, led him to found what is today the leading Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) recognized Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) provider in the country - Can Praxis.

Can Praxis conducts programs for Veterans, First Responders, both serving and retired, and their families living with Operational Stress Injuries (OSI) such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). **It is the ONLY organization in the world that conducts a multi-day, complete family therapy program** where an entire family attends together for treatment. This approach is so unique, that Can Praxis has been recognized by the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research¹⁰ who invited the organization to present the program's research in a poster presentation, highlighting their findings and their success in treating military and first responder families.



Warrant Officer (Rtd) Steve Critchley

CAN >> Canada

PRAXIS >> Latin

'To take theory and put it into practice.'

Can Praxis is literally Canadians walking the talk in service of those in need.

Our Success

Since 2013, Can Praxis has treated **over 1000 participants** and families with a **93% success rate** (independently verified). Those individuals and families who completed the program reported improved relationships, which they attributed to the combined self-mediation training, meaning-centred counseling, and equine interaction of the Can Praxis program.



Why Horses?

Equine Assisted Learning is a federally recognized equine discipline. Horses are animals of prey; they are naturally skittish (hypervigilant) and instinctively assess whether other animals or people are friend or foe, presenting an opportunity for Veterans and first responders to recognize and understand fear responses.

The horse demonstrates its comfort level through its body language (ear position, nostril flare and overall tension in the body) and provides psychologists, facilitators and participants with instant and immediate feedback. The horse's behavior is an invitation to have a conversation. Horses live in the moment, with no awareness or prejudice of a participant's background or experiences. They react to a person however they show up.

Through Equine Assisted Therapy, Veterans learn (or re-learn) how to build trust and how to be confident in themselves again – imperative tools to build relationships with family, colleagues, and their community. Together with the horses, program attendees increase emotional awareness and the ability to regulate their emotions.



Our Team

What differentiates our model from other equine-oriented programs is that Can Praxis program facilitators are top line trauma-informed and supported by registered psychologists (this is not a peer-support model). They include:

- Dr Benda Abbey, Registered Psychologist, Breaking the Cycle
- Vicki Juneau, Registered Psychologist, Three Sisters Camp
- Kelly MacIsaac (Veteran) Registered Psychologist, Three Sisters Camp and Phase I Program
- Steve Critchley (Veteran) Breaking the Cycle and Phase I Program
- Rachel Dzivers (Veteran) Three Sisters Camp
- John Senior (Veteran) Phase I Program
- Donna Cross, Civilian Edmonton Police Member, Phase I Program
- Sarah Knight Horse Handler/Facilitator Breaking the Cycle and Phase I Program
- Dr Brad Hagan (Retired) Psychologist, Can Praxis Psychologist Advisor
- Dr Melanie Noel Registered Psychologist, Breaking the Cycle Family Psychologist Advisor



The Can Praxis Program

A World-First Approach to Equine Assisted Therapy

The unique Can Praxis approach begins with a core program, broken into three phases of clinically sound, three-day programs. These programs are hosted in a rural setting, away from triggers and crowds. Program phases include the following:

Phase 1: Is attended by up to 6 couples: Veterans and spouses/partner/family member (or close associate) and has two main foci:

1. **A mediation practice** facilitated by a trained Veteran or first responder, designed to promote the resolution of conflict between couples.
2. **Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT).** Participants walk alongside the horses in an equine arena (with psychologists present) who demonstrate their comfort level through body language, providing participants with instant and accurate feedback about themselves. The horse's behaviour is an invitation to have a conversation, refresh practical learnings and develop a deeper understanding of the participants progress.

Phase 2: Is attended by up to 10 Veterans or 10 spouses who have attended Phase I, where participants spend three days in a relaxed ranch setting to recall/reinforce lessons learned on Phase 1 and to discuss with peers, how to continue using accumulated knowledge and experience. This Phase an opportunity to understand, and be understood by, peers from all over Canada. Horses in this Phase are used to create the calm necessary for a therapeutic and partnering environment. The ability for horses to create such an environment is proven through neuroscience.

Phase 3: Is attended by up to 6 couples, Veterans and spouses/partner/family member who are sufficiently stable in their relationship to achieve three days in the wilderness without disruptive conflict. These are 3-day programs that are conducted outdoors and are all on horseback including riding to a high mountain meadow camp where couples recall/reinforce lessons learned in Phase 1 (and enhanced through Phase II), with critical debriefing each evening, by the campfire. Facilitators reinforce supports, and identify ways to move forward with additional skills, coping methods and lessons.

The Can Praxis Program (continued)

“Breaking The Cycle” Program: This program is available for participants that have completed Phase I and return with their children aged 8-24. Can Praxis facilitators teach youth mindfulness, including states of mind and emotion, distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and how to communicate effectively within the family to validate emotions and have healthy conversations throughout the family. The program helps children understand when their injured parent is experiencing difficulties and that it is not their fault.

Learning in the classroom is augmented by exercises with horses which reinforce the taught skills of mindfulness, problem solving and communication. Caring for the horses also provides a calming environment which allows lessons to be more thoroughly processed and absorbed. This is particularly true for neurodivergent youth, of which there are increasing numbers attending the Breaking The Cycle Program. This is the only program in North America where an entire family attends at the same time, with approaches and outcomes rooted in neuroscience and peer-reviewed research.

Three Sisters Women’s Veteran Camp: This specialized program is specifically designed for female Veterans, recognizing the unique challenges women face in a military environment with some having experienced military sexual trauma. This three-day program of 10 participants is a combination of indoor and outdoor work; mornings are spent in group therapy activities, and afternoons are spent in the company of horses which, based on neuroscience, creates a therapeutic environment for calm socialization activities and prevents participants from entering into a crisis mode. The calming effect of horses can be experienced within 30-minutes.

All facilitators, camp and support staff for the Three Sisters Program are women, so as to provide a safe environment for participants.



The ‘Breaking the Cycle’ Program is currently the subject of a Veterans’ Affairs Canada funded program evaluation, analyzing and examining the effectiveness of the program in improving the well-being of all Veteran family members.



"In 2009, I was diagnosed with PTSD, and in 2012, I was released from the Canadian Armed Forces. By 2015, I was done. I was done fighting, I was done hoping, I was done caring. My marriage was in serious trouble, and **I was in a dark place, thinking about turning off what light was left.**

I had never heard of Can Praxis. I had no idea what equine assisted learning or therapy was. Thankfully, my wife applied and when we were accepted, she told me we were going. I had to grab that lifeline. That's what this program is. That's what this program does. The facilitators push their way through our barricades, and whether we want it or not, hit us with what we need to hear.

Can Praxis teaches us not just how to 'talk' to our spouses, but how to communicate, how to listen and how to be heard. They link us with others dealing with the same issues and give us an extended family to show us we are not alone. This program gave me an exceptionally painful reality check, and showed me the damage I was doing to myself, and to others. For that, **I will be forever grateful.**

Today, things are different. Things are better. My wife and I talk. We face things as a team. We lean on each other again. We have taken the lessons we learned, and apply them for ourselves and with people we deal with on a daily basis. I found the courage to take ownership of my injury. I started taking those next "small steps". I live with PTSD. I live with depression. **But most importantly, I live.**

I am so grateful, for a wife that wouldn't give up, a program that forces us to open our eyes, and an extended family of Veterans, first responders, and their partners. Together with Can Praxis, you saved me. **Thank you."**



Will Wells
Master Corporal (Ret)
Canadian Armed Forces

Your Investment in Can Praxis Will Save Lives.

Start making an impact for those in need **today**.

The statistics speak for themselves – **Canada's veterans and first responders are in a mental health crisis**. The demand for Can Praxis services and programs has far outpaced what we can currently deliver as an organization.

To date, Can Praxis turns away more deserving Veterans and first responders candidates and their families than we can support. No family in life-threatening need should have to face another day, another month, or another year, navigating the painful effects of PTSD and other mental health issues without support.

We need philanthropic support to change lives.

Over the last 10 years in Canada, funding for Veterans' support organizations has been drastically consolidated, with fewer funding options available for programming that directly supports Veterans, first responders, and their families.

Can Praxis needs the support of generous donors and philanthropic investors to ensure we can continue to deliver the life-altering program depended on by Veterans, first responders, and families. Our commitment to donors is to leverage their generous gifts to make the biggest impact for those in need, ensuring that over 80¢ of every dollar donated goes directly to help participants through program delivery.

Our Immediate Programming Needs

To deliver our full annual program, Can Praxis needs \$200,000 to cover our program expenses which include:

- Travel/air fare for participants and families (current program based exclusively in Alberta)
- Facility rental
- Program staff/facilitator fees (includes: registered psychologists and EAT facilitators)
- Meals and accommodations
- Program materials



Impact Milestones

- **\$4,000** would send one family/couple to our Phase 1 Program
- **\$12,000** would send one family/couple to all three Program phases
- **\$25,000** would send six families/couples to our Phase 1 Program
- **\$75,000** would send six families/couples to all three Program phases

Without this critical investment in our program, Can Praxis will be forced to reduce the numbers of participants per program, and/or cancel some programs in their entirety. In the face of such overwhelming need, this cannot be a reality. Our Veterans, first responders, and their families, need your help to get help.

Our Long-Term Expansion for Veterans and First-Responders Across Canada

The current Can Praxis program is delivered exclusively in facilities in Alberta. Those attendees from outside the immediate area must travel, sometimes significantly, to access our program. In some cases, that barrier makes access unattainable. But Can Praxis programs require specific, high quality facilities that meet or exceed our rigorous safety and confidentiality standards, along with a team of highly skilled professional facilitators.

Through philanthropic investment, Can Praxis can ensure our high-standards are maintained, and expand into Ontario at a location in proximity to a major urban centre, in order to better meet the needs of prospective participants from central Canada. This expansion would require operational support like that listed previously, while also securing additional Ontario-certified clinical psychologists to add depth to the Can Praxis team of clinical psychologists and EAT facilitators.

Your generous support would ensure those in need, and their families, have access to life-changing, critically required services in Ontario (2026 target).

Building awareness of Can Praxis and our unique approach to equine assisted therapy.

While over 1000 Veterans and first responders (and their families), have accessed and benefited from the Can Praxis program, our organization and world-first approach to equine assisted learning and therapy remains virtually unknown to the wider military and first responder community.

Philanthropic support would enable our team to build presence in defence, security, and Veterans' affairs communities (through forums and conferences), as well as build brand awareness in Canada for those in need and not connected to formal military or first responder support organizations. Additionally, your support would enable Can Praxis to continue to drive peer-reviewed research studies and publications about our unique model and approach to the treatment of PTSD and OSIs with individuals and families.

Without a light shining on these available supports, those suffering with PTSD or Operational Stress Injuries will continue to struggle with no end in sight.

We cannot let that happen.

In 2024, Can Praxis was recognized with a Veterans Ombud Commendation from the Government of Canada for "exceptional contribution to the well-being of Veterans and their families".

Your Impact in Action

Together, we will change the trajectory for military and first responder families in crisis.

Your strategic philanthropic investment will ensure Veterans, first responders, and their families have the opportunity to:

- Overcome struggles with impulse control and emotional regulation
- Treat the depression, suicidal tendencies, hyper-vigilance, crisis and conflict synonymous with PTSD in service members and their families.
- Learn to identify supports and ways to move forward with additional skills, coping methods and lessons (as individuals, couples, and families).
- Help children understand when their injured parent is experiencing difficulties and that it is not their fault.
- Build feelings of safety and grounding, particularly with female veterans, through experiential learning, leading to self-discovery and a renewal of hope.

Every dollar donated to Can Praxis has direct impact for those who need it most.

Recognizing Your Support

Just like the Can Praxis Program, we cannot achieve success alone. We need dedicated donors and philanthropic investors to join us in our vision of renewing hope, and restoring lives, for those Veterans and first responders, and their families, who served their communities and their countries, and now need our help.

Your donation will make a lasting impact, enabling the delivery life-changing programs for individuals and families in need. Your generosity would also help fund world-first research and publication about our unique models and approaches to care.

As a donor and/or philanthropic investor, we will work with you to find meaningful recognition of your support, in alignment with the Can Praxis Recognition Policy. You will also receive regular updates on the impact your donation is having for Veterans and first responders.

Can Praxis is one of the most unique organizations in Canada, helping to treat Veterans and first responders, and their families, so they can once again approach life with hope, optimism, and the ability to connect. Join us as we care for those who put their lives on the line for others.



“Can Praxis means everything to me. When I first connected with Steve in 2015, he talked me through a very dark, life-threatening situation. From there, my daughter and I attended Can Praxis programming and it brought me hope, discovery, and an exquisite understanding of pressure and release in my relationships. I live the communication and conflict resolution and self-mediation lessons learned every single day, and will continue to refine my understanding of them for the rest of my life. For these things, and more, I am grateful and give my thanks.”



Rob Martin
Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret)
Canadian Armed Forces

Your generosity can change lives for Veterans, first responders, and their families, across Canada.

Contact us today to make your impact on those in need.

Rick Bowes, LCol (Ret) CD, MA, MBA
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