



Report on Equine-Experiential Mental Health Therapy for First Responders

Fiscal Year: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Total Project Budget: \$200,000

Program Overview

This program provides equine-experiential mental health therapy to first responders, including law enforcement officers and firefighters, through structured, trauma-informed sessions facilitated by licensed mental health professionals and certified equine specialists. The model integrates clinical therapeutic practices with experiential work alongside horses, creating a non-traditional, stigma-reducing environment that is particularly effective for first responders who may be hesitant to engage in conventional therapy settings.

The program serves first responders from departments across Minnesota through individual therapy sessions, wellness checks, and department-based partnerships. Services are designed to support emotional regulation, stress management, trauma processing, peer connection, and long-term occupational wellness, with the overarching goal of keeping first responders healthy, active, and supported throughout their careers.

Program Budget Overview

Total Budget: \$200,000 for FY July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

The budget supports the operational, clinical, equine care, and administrative components necessary to deliver consistent, high-quality mental health services in a safe, compliant, and sustainable manner.

Detailed Explanation of Program Expenditures

Equine Care, Feed, and Boarding – \$3,750/month

Covers daily care, nutrition, boarding, and overall wellbeing of the horses integral to the therapeutic model. Proper equine care is essential to ensuring safe, effective, and ethical programming.

Veterinary Expenses – \$500/month

Supports routine veterinary care, preventative health measures, and any necessary medical treatment to maintain horse health and safety.



Liability and Workers' Compensation Insurance – \$1,000/month

Provides coverage for participants, staff, and contractors, ensuring compliance with legal and risk-management requirements.

Mental Health Director – \$5,250/month

Responsible for clinical oversight, program design, therapist supervision, compliance, and quality assurance across all services provided.

Equine Specialist / Session Facilitator – \$5,000/month

Facilitates all equine-experiential sessions, ensuring safe horse handling, effective experiential exercises, and integration with therapeutic goals. Salary includes payroll taxes.

HIPAA-Compliant Therapy Notes & Client Software – \$500/month

Supports secure documentation, scheduling, and client records management in compliance with federal privacy regulations.

Contracted Therapist – approximately \$1,200/month

Provides direct therapeutic services to program participants, supporting individual mental health needs within the equine-experiential framework.

Administrative Support – \$1,000/month

Covers scheduling, coordination with partner departments, reporting, billing support, and general program administration.

Number of First Responders Served

Since July 1, 2025:

- **36 unique first responders** have participated in ongoing weekly or bi-weekly sessions
- **7 additional unique individuals** received wellness checks (not included in the 36)

Through the partnership with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED):

- **Over 130 individual first responders** have been supported since program inception
- **All but four participants have remained on active duty**
 - Three retired due to reaching retirement age
 - Two retired officers have since rejoined the force



The program currently partners with **17 police and fire departments across Minnesota**, which actively refer officers and firefighters for services.

Services Provided

Program participants receive:

- Individual equine-experiential clinical mental health therapy sessions (weekly, bi-weekly, or as needed)
- Mental health wellness checks
- Trauma-informed therapeutic interventions
- Stress management and emotional regulation skill-building
- Support for occupational stress, burnout, and cumulative trauma
- A non-traditional, experiential environment that reduces stigma and increases engagement
- Department-based outreach and on-site services when appropriate

Upcoming and expanding services include:

- A scheduled meeting with **Lakeville Fire Department** to expand services to an additional **20–30 individuals**
- An on-site visit with **Rogers Police Department on May 8**, bringing horses directly to the department
- Ongoing development of partnerships with **Savage Police Department** and departments in northern Minnesota, including mobile/off-site programming utilizing the program truck

Benefits to Program Participants

Participants report:

- 100% report Improved emotional wellbeing and resilience



- 100% report positive movement toward their self-determined therapy goals and an Increased trust in mental health support
- Reduced stigma around seeking help
- Improved ability to remain on active duty
- A sense of being genuinely cared for and supported

Participant feedback highlights the program's impact:

"If I didn't have you all, I probably wouldn't still be a cop."

"I never thought in a million years horses could help me."

"Coming here is what has kept me healthy."

"I seriously feel so cared for."

"I have never really trusted therapists, but you all are different."

"I've heard so many good things about Abijah's, I figured I'd try it myself."

Please reach out to Dani Palmer (dani@abijahsonthebackside.com) with further questions.