



LISA GATTI: 'Horses are highly sensitive animals that can sense and mirror an individual's emotional state and body language, just by being in the presence of a human being.' Courtesy of Pal-O-Mine Equestrian

Unique therapies on Long Island support healing and growth

BY ARLENE GROSS LIBN CONTRIBUTING WRITER//September 4, 2025//

- Pal-O-Mine in Islandia offers [equine therapy](#) for neurodiverse individuals and people with disabilities.
 - CN Guidance provides mobile mental [health](#) and substance abuse treatment, plus a new crisis stabilization center.
 - Paws of War trains service and [therapy dogs](#) to support veterans and first responders.
 - Programs emphasize [trauma-informed care](#), emotional support, and community healing.
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Children and adults with unique needs benefit greatly from unique therapeutic programs that facilitate healing, growth and learning. In response to these positive outcomes, organizations have developed innovative therapies to meet the needs of people with disabilities, individuals with autistic spectrum disorder, survivors of trauma, veterans and first responders.

Here's a snapshot of three located on Long Island:

Horsing around for healing

Founded in 1995, [Pal-O-Mine Equestrian](#) of Islandia began as a therapeutic horseback riding program for individuals with disabilities and other populations, notes Lisa Gatti, founder and CEO.

“Our mission is to provide a comprehensive therapeutic equine program using the horses to facilitate growth, learning and healing,” said Gatti, noting that equine therapy is meant as an adjunct to traditional therapy.

Half of the organization's 450 weekly clients actually ride horses. The other half use ground-based programs, such as grooming, leading and setting up obstacle courses.

“Horses facilitate hippotherapy, by providing consistent rhythmic, three-dimensional movement. And that actually mimics a human walking gate,” said Gatti, adding, “When our patients and [kids](#) sit on the horse, they're able to gain the same input they would while they're actually walking themselves.”

The horse riding movement provides constant neuro-motor movements, stimulating sensory, motor and cognitive systems at the same time.

Speech and/or occupational therapists at Pal-O-Mine facilitate hippotherapy for neurodiverse individuals, ranging in age from 15 months to 60: This includes people on the autism spectrum, with cerebral palsy, ADD or ADHD,

spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, or language and chromosomal disorders.

“It can improve things like attention, concentration, problem solving, language skills, not to mention balance,” Gatti said. “It’s great for their core strength, their endurance, their flexibility.”

Interacting with horses also leads to greater self-confidence, a sense of accomplishment and improved socialization.

In the ground-based program, which is led by licensed mental health professionals and certified equine specialists, the horses provide non-verbal communication which facilitates therapy and healing .

“Horses are highly sensitive animals that can sense and mirror an individual’s emotional state and body language, just by being in the presence of a human being,” Gatti said.

Going beyond the four walls



CN Guidance & Counseling Services offers a Mobile Recovery Unit that can provide mental health and substance abuse treatments within patients' respective communities. Courtesy of CN Guidance & Counseling Services

For the most part, CN Guidance and Counseling Services assists those with significant mental health challenges, including depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and severe anxiety.

"We touch over 30,000 individuals a year through our agency," said CEO Jeffrey Friedman.

Many of their clients have difficulty getting to an office for therapy, so many services are done off site.

"We have a big Mobile Recovery Unit that can actually engage people in mental health and substance abuse treatment right in the community," said Friedman, noting that the RV has three offices within.

As most of the people they treat have experienced trauma, CN Guidance employs healing and compassionate trauma-informed care that fosters their engagement in treatment.

The organization's ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) team comprises a psychiatrist, a social worker and someone with lived experience.

"They're for people who are in and out of the hospital and have trouble staying on their medication. And we can go out in the field and work with those individuals," said Friedman, noting that many of the patients are homeless, unmedicated and lacking benefits. "We can get them benefits, we can secure them a place to live and we can also provide them with the mental health treatment that they need."

This fall, the organization will open a crisis stabilization center at its Hicksville headquarters.

"You can think of it as urgent care for behavioral health," said Friedman, noting that patients will be able to stay at the facility for just under a 24-hour period. "In that time, they can be assessed and treated for their mental health or substance use needs."

When patients leave, they'll be given a referral and an appointment for long-term treatment.



ROBERT MISSERI: 'When a veteran, who has been through so much, is sitting with a dog that they know has been through so much equally, it makes things very, very different for them emotionally.' Courtesy of Paws of War

Dogs helping vets, and helping them help others

Paws of War provides training for dogs that work with veterans and first responders, many of whom are dual purpose dogs: serving as both service and therapy dogs, notes Robert Misseri, who co-founded the organization 11 years ago. The organization also has dogs available for adoption to serve as emotional support companions.

All Paws of War's dogs are rescued, often from abominable conditions, such as puppy mills or neglect.

"When a veteran, who has been through so much, is sitting with a dog that they know has been through so much equally, it makes things very, very different for them emotionally," Misseri said. "And it helps, because they both bond together."

For veterans who can't have a dog of their own, Paws of War encourages them to spend time with the canines at their Nesconset headquarters.

"They come down to Paws of War and they will help socialize, they will help walk, they will just hang out with them," Misseri said.

Service dogs are trained to aid in specific medical tasks; therapy dogs go to VA hospitals or ailing veterans' and first responders' homes.

"This service that we provide gives our veterans a unique purpose because their whole life they've always given back," said Misseri. "And now that they're getting older and they need a service dog to continue with their progress in life, having that dual purpose dog really gives them fulfillment."

Adds Misseri: "We go to nursing homes where there are veterans in their late 90s, 80s, 70s—you name it. They look forward to seeing these dogs."