



When **Lousie Viljoen**'s husband was injured at work, it took a team of horses to help him

When I first met my husband 14 years ago he was, and still is, the most kind, gentle, strong, determined, spiritual person I had met. He had a really strong sense of right and wrong and he knew where he was going and what he wanted. Unfortunately, two years later he was injured at work and, unable to exercise, he lost what we later realised was his coping mechanism that kept his post traumatic stress disorder under control. It took many years of being treated under the NHS and private mental health services to get a diagnosis of PTSD. At the time we were told that you can't cure PTSD, you have to learn to live with the symptoms, but no-one explained how to do that.

Following his ill health retirement at the age of only 46 in October 2014, my husband slipped further into himself and his illness, and in utter despair and desperation I looked for help on the internet. That was how I found Sun Tui, a traumatologist, and the Dare 2 Live programme. Thanks to Sun Tui and her specialist team, both human and equine, I am again beginning to see the true man that I married.

Before doing the Dare 2 Live workshop I never realised how much

the horse can teach us. Over the years we have read a lot about PTSD but I have learned even more about why my husband is the way he is in the past few months. None of this learning would have been anywhere near as effective without working with the horses in the programme. The horses respond to slight changes in mood and will only work with the individual when they are in touch with their emotions. This is so important because people suffering from PTSD are constantly influenced by emotions that are beyond their control. If the person can learn to understand their emotions and gain some control, they can learn to manage the symptoms of their PTSD.

By taking part in the workshop alongside my husband we were both able to learn about ourselves, our feelings and how we manage these. Since working with the horses, we have been more in touch with how we are feeling on a day to day basis and how our actions impact on the people around us. We have become more mindful of our needs and how best to help each other. We have learned how to communicate how we are feeling.

Another lesson that the horses were

able to teach us is to live in the moment. Horses are only concerned with what is happening at the time, and they are able to let go of situations once they are resolved. We have both found this incredibly useful as it taught us to look at the here and now. It is not always possible to follow this but when we are aware that stress levels are increasing, we are able to go back to the core principles that we practised around the horses and therefore lower the stress.

The work with the horses gave us a sense of peace, calm and control in our highly emotional lives and this continues long after completing the workshop. The awareness that I have is like discovering a whole new part of myself that I didn't know existed. I have also learned how to look after myself. As a carer you are constantly told that you must look after your own mental health, but until the Dare 2 Live programme I had not been told how to or given the tools to do so.

Thanks to our time with Sun Tui and the horses we are looking forward to a brighter future together.

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