

Before I arrived at Ironwood, I had never worked with horses or even been in a barn. I didn't care about horses definitely didn't want to work with them. I came here and dreaded every day that I was mucking their stall, not knowing if I was even safe around a horse. It shows just how irrational I was because these horses are the sweetest, most caring and kind animals on earth. It may have taken me a while to see it, and I know that once I did, I became in love with horses.

I am most connected with Athena who is my favorite horse here. She has helped me in so many ways; the main way being that it's because of her that I found my passion to be working with horses. That helped motivate me to be sober which helped with the healing process. I always do EAP with her, which strengthens our relationship even further. EAP, which stands for Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, is a program offered here at Ironwood where you and a horse of your choice work together to accomplish a task. Sometimes it's an obstacle course, others it's getting your horse to knock a ball off of a cone. It helps me because I get to learn about how to effectively communicate with horses, which can be extremely similar with humans.

My favorite part of the equine program here is EAP. It really does create a deep bond with whichever horse you use. I believe that the better the relationship you have with the horses, the easier your treatment stay will be. Horses understand us. They can tell when you're upset, and they feel that too. They can tell when you're happy, and that makes them happy.

I can proudly say that the Ironwood equine program has changed my life for the better. If anyone ever comes here thinking the same way about the horses I did, my advice would be to form a relationship with the horses, or just one that you like at first glance. Sign up for EAP, spend time with a horse that really clicks with you. Sometimes a horse may frustrate you. Maybe they won't move when you try to enter a stall, or they fuss about being haltered. Perhaps they ignore you during EAP. It's all part of the process. Stay regulated, be clear about what you're asking of the horse, and they will open up to a connection with you, like they did with me.