

Anchor ME Harbor: Let us be your harbor

“Anchor ME Harbor offers a respite to those who need a break from the noise inside and outside of our heads. The animals, the goat yoga, and the peaceful atmosphere are a much needed service to those in need.”

(Claudia Mills, participant)

I. Introduction and Mission

Anchor ME Harbor is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit in Windsor, Maine, as of September 2023. Since 2022 Anchor ME Harbor, formally known as Anchor ME Farm. Anchor ME Harbor provides a safe space for humans and animals. Anchor ME Harbor is a non clinical mental health recovery center that integrates unconventional animals into animal assisted services and peer support.

Organization’s Mission:

Anchor ME Harbor provides a safe, inclusive space where people and animals heal together through non-clinical mental health support, peer connection, and innovative animal assisted programs.

II. History and Problem Statement:

What happens if you can’t find the help you need? What happens if you can’t afford the help you need? - Cara’s Story

A little over seven years ago I was contemplating how to leave this life after suffering from a traumatic incident. I spent every moment reliving the incident that forever changed the life I had known. Nothing would be the same and I wanted to escape that feeling. I tried looking for professional help, but the barriers were significant. It then occurred to me, I can’t be alone. There has to be an alternative way out there that can help. Sadly after extensive research, there really wasn’t, so it became my reason to live essentially. I needed to create a place where people like me can go and forget about their troubles for a short period of time while hanging out with nonjudgmental animals. It is a misconception that only veterans get PTSD. Although they are more vulnerable to it dealing with war and death, civilians can also suffer when encountered with trauma. Children are also susceptible to developing PTSD. Not every case is recorded since a lot of people go undiagnosed due to unobtainable treatment resources. I was never diagnosed by a mental professional, it was my first hand surgeon that put it in my medical records.

The world is hard. Perhaps I went through my hand trauma for a reason, so I could create Anchor ME Harbor. I started Anchor ME Harbor with no savings, no trust fund, literally no money in the bank. I have worked my day job, which is being a gluten free baker in my own business,

which destroys my hand more and more each day I work. Being a baker with a serious hand injury that will never improve has its limitations and frustrations, but I keep going because this nonprofit means the world to me. It has proven to work for me, even on my worst days, spending time with these animals has lifted my spirits and the only hope is that it will do the same for other people.

III. What is Anchor ME Harbor Doing Right Now:

Animal therapy programs have traditionally involved dogs or equines which can be intimidating and/or expensive for many people. Anchor ME Harbor utilizes unconventional animals that we have found to be quite successful. Goats are very much misunderstood, but are the most loving and have such big hearts for everyone. The ducks and chickens are hysterical and so much fun to watch. The hope is to build more programs around them. It almost doesn't matter that you can't quite cuddle with the birds, just watching their antics lends to a lot of therapeutic energy. We recently got pigs, who have really stolen the show. Anyone who has met them has fallen in love with them. I have shown them to be very social and not be afraid of anyone and to enjoy all pets no matter from who. They have enjoyed all the attention and are very affectionate toward those who embrace them. Pigs are one of the smartest animals and I'm so overjoyed we are able to include them in our animal assisted services.

Currently Anchor ME Harbor provides opportunities for humans and animals to interact. Since our beginning over 800 people have participated in at least one of our activities, with a lot of returning people. Cara has graduated from Kennebec Valley Community College with her MHRT/C and obtained her Intentional Peer Support Certification. Anchor ME Harbor's programs and activities encourage creativity and provide peer support and a safe atmosphere for its participants. The following quotes characterize participants' experiences.

- *I'm a caregiver to the elderly which takes up a majority of my time leaving me feeling stressed and lonely. I visit the farm when I become too overwhelmed so that I can relax by petting, interacting and feeding the goats. In all my caregiver training they emphasize practicing mindfulness and what better way to stay in the moment by surrounding myself with animals. (Dawn Steeves, board member, volunteer and participant).*
- *I have been a supporter of Anchor ME Harbor since I first met them at the Farmer's Market. Their programming, like coloring with goats, is a perfect way to destress and take a break, even though most of the goats would rather you pet them instead of focusing on coloring! I appreciate having a local space that I can rely on. Anchor ME Harbor is a special place with open doors and a big heart. (Marissa Coulehan, participant).*
- *Anchor ME Harbor provides a safe and welcoming sanctuary, for humans and animals alike, to find calm in a peaceful environment away from the busyness of life. (Jessica Loman, yoga instructor and participant).*

Examples of Current and Soon To Come Programs:

- Coloring with Goats
- Journal Workshops
- Painting with the animals
- Teach an animal how to read (a literacy program for adults and children)
- Lego Therapy
- Putting the ME in woMEEn- a support group for women
- Coffee with the Animals for Seniors

All events are listed on our Facebook Events Page and through Eventbrite- even if it's free. We hope they will also be listed on the website soon, as well.

IV. Future Dreams and Plans for 2026/2027

- Building a community healing center to host day services for people with mental and/or physical disabilities
- Additional communication and outreach to surrounding communities to welcome and encourage people to participate
- Increase our fences, so we can bring in trail hikes and more nature to our programming. This will also help the animal residents to be more healthy and active.
- To make the land more wheelchair accessible

For more information please contact: Cara Cribb, Executive Director/Founder at 207-445-8192 or info@anchormeharbor.org. Also check out our Instagram and Facebook page for pictures of the animals and the latest news. All activities and events will be posted on Facebook Events and Eventbrite.