

using horses as the medium for delivering courses.

Having a military background where he not only trained soldiers but also led expeditions involving horses in countries such as Belize, Canada and the Arctic, his skills, combined with Emma's more formal and traditional equestrian qualifications together with teaching experience and time spent as a jillaroo in Australia, the couple are well equipped to combine horsemanship with equine-assisted learning programmes.

The trend for equine-assisted learning and therapy is a growing one and has been proven to be powerful as a tool for emotional growth and learning, promoting teamwork and leadership skills and, together with nature therapy, is recognised as having a significant and positive effect on those suffering from mental health problems.

It was when Jock, who has retained connections with the military, discovered that there was a real need for help for military personnel returning from war that he made the connection – the seed was sown and the idea for HorseBack UK began to take shape.

After extensive research and talks with serving military personnel and veterans, as well as numerous clinicians, the Hutchisons applied for charitable status, which has subsequently been awarded.

Jock explained: "There is a small minority of military personnel that are physically or mentally troubled. In 2007-2008 24,000 military left the army, about 39,000 in 2006-7 of which only about six per



The tranquility of Royal Deeside makes it the perfect location for nature therapy and equine assisted learning.

cent are unemployed, but when you take that over a number of years it amounts to a lot of people. In London, 85 per cent of homeless people are ex-military. In the marines we used to say: 'we don't leave anybody behind!'"

Having found the perfect location for the project, Jock and Emma embarked on the search for suitable horses and funding from a variety of sources. The horses required for HorseBack UK must be strong, calm and perform every manoeuvre asked of them with minimum aiding and must be trained in Western riding.

An answer to their prayers came when Jock spotted an advert in the Horse and Hound seeking to re-home several American Quarter

Horses. Leanne and Chris Warwick-Drake who are based in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, but who regularly travel back and forth to their ranch in Texas were so sold on the cause that they bequeathed all 12 horses to the charity.

Leanne said: "I think it is absolutely wonderful. I find it very moving that they can bring about such healing. I couldn't have wished for them to go anywhere better. It's fabulous."

Chris added: "The horses love it here. It's a wonderful, calming atmosphere and they are very happy."

The Warwick-Drakes also have an equestrian property in Buckinghamshire, which they are

making available. Chris continued: "Leanne has a stables in Beaconsfield that the army will use as another base that will be an offshoot of HorseBack UK. It will be run by Jamie Forbes who has been a horseman all his life and competed at all sorts of levels, firstly in English disciplines but then he converted to Western riding. He's never looked back and he is already trained dealing with anxiety disorders."

And anxious to help with funding, Leanne and Chris have also gifted two unborn foals to the cause. Two of the 12 horses are in foal to their top class stallion, 'Good Machine', who stands in Texas and is likely to produce progeny sought, for big money, all over the world. The proceeds of the sale of the foals are earmarked for the charity.

Extraordinary

Leanne explained how it all came about: "It was extraordinary – I had about 30 quarter horses and I had to cut down so I looked at putting them out on loan. Jock saw my ad in the Horse and Hound and when he explained everything, it was music to my ears. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. We shipped the horses up for him and it's evolved from there."

One local ex-Falklands war veteran, Rick Anderson, is already experiencing the horse's power to heal. Having had a few sessions on Jock's own horse, Nimrod, he is learning that being an amputee doesn't in any way prevent him

there are a lot of farmers that are connected with the services so they can help do something positive to help put a smile back on the face of people who have been wounded or are suffering from post traumatic stress.

"The locals could contribute a lot – it would be a reward for the community. Society has to change and be more caring about people that come out of the services."

Health and safety issues being what they are, The Farmer asked how HorseBack UK could satisfy insurance requirements by teaching riding without the use of hard hats.

Jock, who is a security consultant and an expert in risk management, responded: "Western riding is so much safer than the English style. Yes, you are still riding a horse, but you are riding fully trained horses that have been doing this kind of work for a long time."

"The message we want to get across is one of freedom and the wonderful lift that it can give you but we are liaising with a company in America that is making Stetsons with hard liners."

HorseBack 42 would be grateful to anyone who could contribute in any way. Agricultural help is always needed in terms of time as well as equipment, hay straw, fencing, implements, tractors, etc. Practical help with fundraising and fundraising ideas would also be welcomed.

For further information, e-mail jock@horseback.org.uk or call 07805 570636.

Robinson is