

New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches

CORRAL

SPRING 2021

“You Just Don’t Get It!”

I’ll Take My Charity Without Much Reality, Thank You Very Much

By Heath Kull

I spend most of my life navigating between two very different worlds. I have the public relations and public policy and business management and leadership world, and I have the world that the kids live in at The Ranches. Some days I see the similarities and some days, the two worlds could not possibly feel farther apart.

On one hand, I spend a lot of my time writing and engaging the public in - what I hope ends up being - meaningful ways. Often, I am working to tell the kids’ stories to people in hopes of connecting the kids’ tragedies to our donors’ sense of empathy. That is often followed by presenting the needs of our organization in hopes of eliciting the, “hey, I can help with that” response that I’ll probably never hear in person but will hopefully see in the mail.

On the other hand, I spend a lot of time with the kids that we serve. The fears and the tears and the sense of loss that comes with their history can weigh heavy at times. As I said and will further explain, the two worlds could not feel farther apart. For the kids, they often feel like we don’t “get it” and that no one really “gets them.” We work diligently to change that, but won’t be successful in changing anything if we are dedicated to repeating all that others have already tried.

One of the biggest disconnections between these two worlds comes from the fact that the kids often have a limited view of you, our donors. They tend to believe that y’all are all wealthy, overwhelmingly happy and that your life has been filled with everything good and never any of the tragedy that they have endured. They tend to think that you

all say a quiet prayer and that your prayer is answered in almost instantaneous fashion. I’ve tried to explain that everyone has tragedy and everyone lives with unanswered prayers, but they are pretty stubborn in their beliefs and their lack of first-hand knowledge makes challenging their perceptions difficult. Additionally and unfortunately, the kids also tend to believe that their prayers just aren’t as important as yours. Despite our best efforts, they believe what they believe and tend to feel that God may be out there, but that He doesn’t really like them or their families all that much. When you consider that their view of God is often shaped by their father – or lack thereof – it begins to make a whole lot more sense.

“God may be out there somewhere, but He’s obviously not really all that committed to me.”

While I think that they are wrong about donors and about God, I can understand how they got to this thought process based on their experiences and the way that they have been treated both by family and often by their limited experiences with people of faith. While some of you may think of the kids that we work with as a group of beautiful young children who are all thankful and just happy to have someone care, the reality is often far less worthy of a beautiful and inspirational soundtrack playing as the kids rekindle hope. Honestly, the work that we do can often be ugly and filled with anger with more than a few less than nice words hurled in our direction. The kids at The Ranches are often gifted at giving adults the opportunity to feel like they are woefully inadequate as they try to help those kids who’ve just never really felt that they were

The Ranches Alumni

Advice from an Alumni to a current resident:

“Do your best & apply yourself, always BE yourself, but at the same time, respect and honor your peers, as well as the adults there...and through this all the bad in your life, can be erased by all the good The Ranches has to offer you.”
- Jordan R.

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Rekindling HOPE for At Risk Youth - Since 1944

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Trades



Heath Kull

President

We recently made y'all aware of our intentions to start teaching the trades to the kids at The Ranches. I am happy to report that your response has been overwhelmingly positive. I am also happy to report that Angelo Micono will be heading up all of our Vocational Programs going forward. Angelo has already hit the ground running by identifying kids that may excel at the trades and getting them filling out their applications and writing essays for consideration to be accepted into this new program at The Ranches. As the kids work on the application process, Angelo and I have been identifying projects that we can start the kids working on very soon. While Angelo has this big dream of seeing some of the kids help us to build the first new cottage in 40 years, we haven't quite gotten to that place just yet. Maybe that's in the plan from Upstairs, but we have much to do to get there. Until then, Angelo and I will be filling the kid's time with projects that we'd ordinarily find a vendor to handle. I am genuinely excited about this new endeavor and hope that you are as well. We'll keep you posted.

Sincerely,

Heath Kull - President
heathk@theranches.org

“Maybe we just need attention and don't know of healthy ways to get it!”

Maybe some explanation would be helpful. Several weeks ago, I had the opportunity to start teaching a communication class to the kids with our middle daughter. She is pursuing her master's degree in Human Resources at UNM and thought that teaching a communication class would be helpful for the kids and a relevant experience to support both her growth and education. For me, it was an opportunity to work with the third generation of our family here at The Ranches. And so, we began. For Mikela, it was an opportunity to teach some of what made her educational path easier to navigate while for me, it was an opportunity to retrace my own steps, but from the perspective of my parents instead of my own.

As the class began, we made sure that the priority was on getting one's point across and not overly focused on spelling or grammar. As a result, we began to see the emergence of the intellectual and emotional voice of many of the kids in our care. Below are some examples of the voices that emerged.

Sailor – by resident L.W.

“There once was a brave sailor,
He wore a fresh uniform straight from the tailor.

He fought to be free,
For he fought for the land of liberty.
He rushed the enemy in World War 1,
He pushed past a Big Birth Gun.
He pushed back the defenses in world war 2,
He fought even though he lost faith a time or two.
On his way home he was cornered and trapped,
He fought strong and hard until his flag no longer flapped.
He then wrote his last letter.
He told his family that he fought his hardest for America to be better.
This sailor is our savior, So we owe him a favor.
He went to war to keep us safe and free,
for he fought for our land of liberty.
We must keep the freedoms he has won,
We need to honor that sailor's tale as the day is done.”

Love, family or anger – by resident

“I am going to talk about whether I am more motivated by love, family, or anger. I have a struggle between anger and love because I love my family but there are times where I want nothing to do with them due to my anger. The reasons

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anything more than less than good enough for anyone.

At the risk of offending a bit, a lot of the kids have experiences with people “like us” in churches and with people of faith that tend to validate their belief that God just doesn’t like them very much and that many people of faith, “don’t get it.” Because of this, they often feel that they just aren’t worth all that much to Christ...or to Christians. The kids have often been exposed to people who want their charity without too much reality.

Please understand, I know that this isn’t you and it isn’t accurate in general, but it is the perception of many of the kids, and that perception is often based on very real experiences with people we’ll probably never meet face to face. As I’ve been leading our on-campus Bible Study along with one of our houseparents for a good majority of the time that our church has been closed, due to our Governor’s Public Health Order, I’ve been hearing a lot of the kids perceptions on faith and on God and on Christians. Listening isn’t always easy when the message is hard to hear, but the message was one that they needed the opportunity to say. The least that I could do was listen.

For the majority of my time at The Ranches, the intersection of at-risk kids and faith-based donors has been a constant source of interesting and challenging perspective. As I’ve been more involved in the conversations with the kids recently, a few things have become very clear to me. They don’t have a very accurate view of Christ or of Christians, but they have some strongly held beliefs about Christ based on some of the Christians that they’ve known. To sum up what I have learned about the kids perceptions of Christians over the past few months.

1. Judgment is a terrible strategy for evangelism, charity and ministry. While it’s a terrible strategy indeed, it’s an all too oft modeled version of Christianity. There is no shortage of judgments available and no shortage of topics for the kids to feel judged on. While they may struggle with the message of Christianity, most of the kids can quote their defense strategies very quickly...right out of the Good Book. “Judge not lest ye be judged” can often be heard as a retort to simple criticisms and feedback even if it falls far short of the judgment that tainted a child’s view in the first place. Compassion and listening without judgment are far more effective strategies and those are the ones we focus on at The Ranches.

2. Many Christians have taken “turn the other cheek” so far as a strategy to avoid conflict that they’ve ended up with their backside turned to anyone who disagrees with them. When did followers of Christ become so conflict avoidant that they just refuse to engage difficult subjects or difficult people? Before you react too strongly, please know that I am not trying to paint all Christians with the same brush. I am just hoping that we can acknowledge that some avoid difficult people and angry people while saying that they are turning the other cheek. The kids at The Ranches almost all see themselves as difficult and angry. Many of their parents and many from church have silently judged them and refused to engage while also blaming them for the lack of engagement. We work hard to change this perception by engaging just about every angry and difficult conversation. The Bible routinely shows us God’s preference for utilizing imperfect people - many with anger issues - to further the kingdom. We spend a lot more time working with imperfect people than we do on allowing ourselves to get offended by anger or angry words.

3. It isn’t as important to act like a Christian as it is to TALK like a Christian. The Bible is pretty clear on this, but it doesn’t stop some from overreacting to every curse word while underreacting to people who are genuinely hurting and struggling. I can’t really imagine Christ disengaging over a curse word from someone in need of compassion, forgiveness and hope, but I’ve had it done to me and seen it done to the kids at The Ranches. I don’t ever want to be guilty of trying to talk like a Christian so that I don’t have to act like a Christian, so I tend to be as real, vulnerable and honest with the kids as I can...just like Jesus did as he met the broken, the prideful and those in need of hope.

With all of this in mind, our strategy has been to work daily to be the only Bible that many of the kids will ever end up reading. We work to:

1. Be compassionate more often than judgmental. Around here, it is easy to judge. If you take a stroll through the Old Testament to judge others and turn to the New Testament when looking in the mirror, you may struggle with at-risk young people. We instead try to look past the behavior and see the hurt and the need.

2. Engage conflict as if it may be the last conversation we ever get to have with a child. The last word that I would ever use to describe Jesus would be coward. He was anything but and he routinely met imperfect people where they were and helped them see their potential instead of their list of sins. We try to do the same and sometimes that leads to conflict and anger, tears, yelling, a few curse words and a whole lot of forgiveness.

3. Act as though we have a relationship with Christ and that we love others as we love ourselves. It isn’t as important to talk like a Christian as it is to display the love of Christ and the hope that only comes from above. The kids at The Ranches have often reached the point of feeling worthless and defeated. Most adults have thrown up their hands and given up on them and we’re often trying to heal those wounds. We know that hope only comes from our relationships and that eternal hope comes from the promise of eternal life through our relationship with Christ. If the kids can’t ever have a meaningful relationship with someone with “skin on,” having a relationship with Christ can seem like a leap that feels as though it is just a bit too far. As a result, we often build meaningful relationships with kids in hopes of rebuilding their ability to have meaningful relationships in the future. If we get it right, that leap to a belief in Christ, and an invitation for Him to come into their hearts, can feel a whole lot less far.

I write all of this in hopes of again being able to connect you to them in a meaningful way. I have seen first-hand your generosity and know of many of your tragedies. I also understand that our relationship can, at times, be fragile. You have so many options for your charitable contributions and many of them will serve up their story without some of the harsh reality that I tend to inject in the stories of The Ranches. It is a risk to include the reality and that risk is one that I am willing to take as I believe that most, if not all, of you prefer your charity with all of the reality intact. The most significant reality of The Ranches is that every donation and every contribution from a donor is a quiet, but very real, answer to one of the kid’s prayers. On behalf of them, thank you for always being willing to offer to help and to contribute hope to kids you may have never met. As far as I am concerned, the reality of The Ranches is that there is no greater form of charity than providing for children who are often fatherless, often hopeless and always filled with unseen and untapped potential.



#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

4-H

The past year has been challenging for all and one of the things that caused the biggest negative impact for the kids was our decision to not participate in 4-H. I missed heading out to fairs all over the state and seeing all those in the agricultural community who support what we do and what The Ranches stands for. Well, this year is shaping up to be quite different. We have been acquiring animals and waking up early to feed and care for them. We've also been getting boots and gloves and all the requisite supplies for the coming 4-H season. I'll be back on the road for 4-H season this year and I look forward to seeing all of you. I'll have some hats and other items with me and hope you'll tap me on the shoulder and say hello. The agricultural community has been such a gift to The Ranches and we're looking forward to another great 4-H season.



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Lion's Keep on Giving!

The Albuquerque Breakfast Club Lions (ABC Lions) continued their decades-long annual support of children of The Ranches. This year, since their Christmas Shoe Day couldn't include a meal together with the residents the Lions decided to invest their excess funds from that project into another kind gesture for The Ranches. They asked what the kids would like that they could all share and the conclusion was: softballs, bats and gloves, nerf footballs, basketballs, volley balls, and a whole lot of fun, as noted by the smiling faces. Thanks ABC Lions for your continued support of The Ranches.



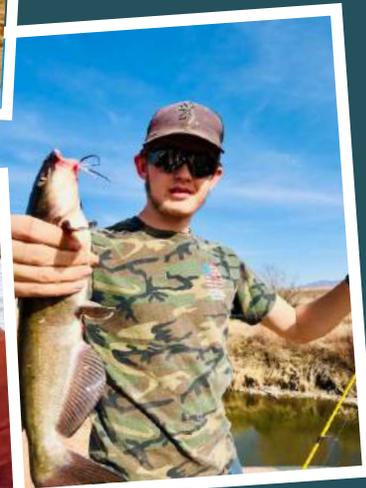
Alpha Delta Kappa

With the restrictions we have still been blessed by different organizations for different holidays. Alpha Delta Kappa International Honorary Organization for Women Educators provided Valentine's Gifts for the youth at The Ranches. Being thought of during these times that we can't have guests on campus has made the residents feel the love from those that support us.





THEIR JOURNEY



Photos by Lani Kull, Kensi & Travis Yoakum, Judy Truitt and Gary Trujillo



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I was angry at my family was because I did not like my stepdad or my stepmom because they were constantly yelling at me for stupid reasons that weren't a big deal. I was also angry due to the fact that I did not get what I wanted. Anger screwed up my life for the future because it ruined my relationship with my friends and family. The way this screwed up my life was because, the stupid things I did burned bridges with my family and friends. I minimized this anger by going to the ranch and dealing with my conflict with my parents, and by working on my attitude."

Letter to me – by resident EN

"To me in the near distant future,

On November 5, 2020 I wrote this page to you to look back at if I ever found this. In 2020 I was in 10th grade at the New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranch and wrote this because I could not submit another much more stupid story. I hope that when I read this in 4 or 5 years, I am in college getting a degree in architecture, living life and supporting myself and having a better relationship with all of my family. I hope that when I read this in 4 or 5 years, I am smarter than I was when I wrote this paper. In my future, I don't know what will happen, but I can hope that I can reach all of my goals to get me through my future. When I was age 13-15 I was being a major hard-head. I was a thief that would steal anything of value to others. I would steal stupid stuff like saw blades, money, friendships of my sisters' and just about anything else. I would like to break people apart that were friends. When I was very little, my mom and step-mom would be the nicest people in my life until I pushed them away because I wanted to be like everybody else; with freedom to do what I wanted to do. I was selfish, cruel, and hateful and hurt when I was younger. I want you to remember when I got expelled from 8th grade and only my parents stood with me and I still pushed them away (I was being expelled for saying I would kill a teacher and shoot up a school). I want you to remember when I stole the money from the school cash register that only my parents stood for me and I continued to push them away. I want you to know if you found this paper somewhere, I hope that I stopped pushing away those who care about me. I remember meeting all my friends that I got close to after 3 years and left them all. There was a lot of them and 5 meant the most to me because we lived like brothers and sisters. When I am older I hope that I have changed my ways and I am a better individual for both myself and society. I always wanted to change the world through architecture and my intelligence for good. I didn't always want to provide for others until I saw that my situation wasn't as bad as others situation. When I was turning 15yrs old

I wanted to create homes for the homeless, give to those in need, and give others another chance. For the longest time I never understood I had a chance not many others got and when I did find out I wanted to give others the same type of chance I had. In Florida I was tired of seeing the homeless without a place to sleep because there was very few shelters. It struck me when my mom decided to give them food by driving around. I was 10yrs old and did not see the point until we began to give them food and I saw everything (we gave them chips, gatorade, water, and pudding). When we gave them the food, they were so happy it started to make me happy and cry. I realized I can be one of the people to help them, so I set my mind to work. I thought of things I could do and building was one of them. My parents told me about architecture and that it would be a good job field for me, so I started to learn about it. As I was writing this, I had a book on carpentry and building construction in my binder backpack. I've had setbacks but I will keep trying to move forwards. If anything were to happen to mom or my siblings, I will always be there. If on my graduation day any of my family has to be in the hospital and I get that call, I will stop and go to the hospital. I will put family before me. My family matters more to me than a graduation certificate or a degree or what-ever-else. If I find this page, let it remind me of what I was and compare it to the older me to see how I have changed. May this letter to the future me teach me that my parents were not always against me; they were with me.

Signed, The 15-year-old me"

We progressed from essays to speeches and heard the quiver in the kids voices as they struggled with the fear and adrenaline that often come with public speaking. It was hard not to empathize and also hard not to have a sense of pride that their voices were being heard as their stories were told.

As the class started coming to its natural conclusion, we started to struggle with the knowledge that so many kids today are unfamiliar with the concept of voicing an opinion in disagreement of someone else. While all of the kids have some familiarity with the loudest voice being the winner and the one deemed "right" due to the intimidation of other thoughts and beliefs, most hadn't had much experience with structured, civil and organized debate. With a bit of trepidation and Mikela's guarded optimism, we embarked on 4 weeks of debate prep culminating in a debate between teams of kids.

The first week was dedicated to practicing with a clock and a set of rules. Since all of the kids at The Ranches are familiar with how we do things, we decided to let them debate a few "Ranchisms" to get the process started and to practice their



form and approach without needing to do a whole lot of research. And that leads us back to the beginning of this story. One of the "Ranchisms" that was selected for debate was, "At risk kids are just spoiled brats in need of structure and discipline!" While I disagree with the statement, I've heard it more than a few times in my career.

To Mikela's and my amazement, one of our "gentle giants" chose to make his point on the subject. "Maybe we just need attention and don't know of healthy ways to get it. Maybe that's why we're at risk."

I'm not saying that you could have heard a pin drop, but you could definitely see the respect of his peers grow as he made a case, not only for the debate topic, but for every kid in that room that day.

The next two weeks were dedicated to researching topics related to a host of social issues that most of the kids didn't know much about. Kids were excited and eager to learn more and formulate their debate points in hopes of being responsible for changing someone's mind about an issue simply because they took the time to make their voice heard in pursuit of getting their point across. All were respectful and all were able to disagree without any animosity or personal attacks. We couldn't help but think that more people in the world could use a little bit of what we were able to be a part of in this class; kids finding their voice in respectful ways for meaningful conversations. As the president of The Ranches, I was proud of the kids and their efforts, but as a dad, I am proud and thankful that Mikela was willing to teach a little of what she's learned to kids who had little exposure or investment from others in finding their voices until she decided we shouldn't be satisfied with the status quo.



Thank you to all the businesses, organizations and churches that made monetary gifts in excess of \$150 during the period of January 1, 2021 - March 30, 2021. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

THANK YOU

Albuquerque Breakfast Club Lion's	Albuquerque	NM	Hillsboro Union Church	Hillsboro	NM
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Have you ever wondered what it meant to be a Partner of The Ranches? Our Partners commit to a monthly gift which allows us to provide hope for the kids in our care. The financial needs of an organization which is dedicated to providing HOPE for "the least of these" can be daunting. By making an affordable automatic gift, each month, you can help bring HOPE to the children who, through no fault of their own, have been hurt and lost hope.

We want to make becoming a partner as easy as possible.

You can go directly to our website at

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We appreciate your continued support of The New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches.

Help Us Share Our Story

Representatives of New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches are available to meet with clubs, civic organizations and fellowship groups to share our story of bringing hope to hurting youth, either in person or via the web.

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