



New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches

CORRAL

Summer 2021

Legacies, Lifetimes, and the Latent High Cost of Childcare

By Heath Kull

I am often amazed by the number of people who think that they know everything that they need to know about me simply because they know my parents and they have a history of being involved with The Ranches. Human nature, I suppose, but there is a whole lot more to every story than our quick assessments and casual analysis. I did grow up at The Ranches and I am, indeed, a legacy employee, but I am not my parents and I have often felt the sting of the associated stigma of being a legacy employee in the nonprofit sector. Had I taken over for my father in a for profit business, that stigma would be all but absent as most would assess a second-generation leader as one with a lifetime of corporate knowledge and a lifetime of on-the-job training. In the nonprofit sector though, being a legacy employee tends to be met with a more cynical view. I've been asked if I was unable to get a "real job" and one man even asked if I was angry because my parents, "loved all them other boys more than they loved me!" Insensitive without a doubt, but the sting of any rebuke lies in the truth contained therein. I have struggled with feelings of inadequacy and a fear of being replaced by those with greater needs as a result of my childhood here. We all face challenges and those are a couple of mine. In an effort to give you a better understanding of The Ranches, I would like to offer an honest look from my perspective.

The first rule of being a staff kid is, "It isn't about you". Your parents are heroes and the kids that are at The Ranches are always the focus. I was just standing in the middle and sometimes standing in the way. The second rule of being a staff kid is that you don't talk about being a staff kid. As a result of these two rules, this is very uncomfortable and difficult for me to write. I hope it is received in the spirit that it is written; with humility and self-reflection.

I've spent a lifetime feeling like most everyone knew me, but that no one really knew me at all. I was born at The Ranches and spent my formative years learning about the "risk" in "At Risk Youth". That is not to say that it was awful or negative or an altogether different upbringing than so many others that I know. But my parents were most definitely the stars of the show that I grew up within. I just happened to be the "proof of concept" for their parenting. As such, many people feel that they know me and have told me as much. Unfortunately, reality is never really as beautiful as the visions of those that describe it. I wasn't always easy, and I wasn't always grateful, and I wasn't always thrilled about my involvement in a mission that I did not choose, but that was chosen for me. Fortunately, I later learned that I was able to pass as normal due to my vast experience with seeing what not to do. I knew all the

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The Ranches Alumni

Advice from an Alumnus to a current resident:

"Take advantage of vo-tech, you can get a better job if you have more experience in a variety of jobs."

- Töst Z.

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Rekindling HOPE for At Risk Youth - Since 1944



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Heath Kull

President

If I am being 100% honest, I am not the biggest fan of asking for money. It is, however, a significant portion of my job and I am motivated to work through and get past my discomfort because of the kids that we serve. Truth be told, everyone has a mental picture of the type of kids who end up needing our services. In talking with people, the idea that most people have, and the reality of our work can be anything but aligned. In an effort to realign some misaligned perceptions, I'd like to describe the kids that I work with on a regular basis.

Most every child at The Ranches is living their life in the midst of a large series of trauma responses. While I will commonly refer to them as "good kids" who are quite misunderstood, this is an easy oversimplification that lends itself to public speaking, it does not, however, accurately portray what we do or the kids that we work with. We work with kids who are struggling through the difficult years of adolescence while also carrying the burdens associated with the traumatic events of their childhood. In my experience, there are some trauma responses that we deal with more regularly and that are more accurate descriptors of the kids that we tend to deal with.

Control Issues - Many of the kids come to The Ranches with an intense and insatiable need for control. Their goal is to control as much as they possibly can. They will get up earlier than needed or stay up far past their earned bedtime. They will not eat or overeat. They will ignore all attempts to be engaged by adults. They will take items that they don't even want just to prove that they can. They will change thermostats to suit their tastes regardless of the comfort of others. They will deny their behaviors and will adopt the stance of, "deny 'til you die" when having to face accountability. We work to hold them accountable anyway.

Being overly agreeable - While it commonly gets categorized as girls who will engage in intimacy with a fence post, the truth is that trauma causes many young people to believe that anytime that they say "no" to someone, rejection will ensue. This has played out in their lives leading up to being placed at The Ranches and is a hard habit to break. We work to break it anyway.

Hypervigilance - Trauma is a violation of a person and their personal boundaries. As a response, many kids become hypervigilant and "on guard" all of the time. They don't sleep well and don't have predictable eating patterns. More importantly, they fear anyone getting too close to them emotionally. As a result, they have a plethora of defense mechanisms to keep people at a distance. We work to get past those defense mechanisms anyway.

Hyper Independence - While it seems like a good quality and one that everyone should work to attain, hyper independence is a trauma response. Kids and adults alike who have suffered trauma often loathe the idea of ever being in a position to rely on anyone ever again. This is most common in kids whose trauma involved their parent's failure to protect them from the traumatic events. These kids tend to reject nurturing and being cared for by pushing the nurturers and caregivers away. "You can't be hurt by someone if you don't rely on them or need them, right?" We work to nurture and care for them anyway.

While there are many more trauma responses, these are a few of the most common. We work to address these issues while kids are in our care, but the effects of trauma often last a lifetime. As a result, we are, at times, in a position to support kids from The Ranches well into their 20s and 30s. Your donations to The Ranches go towards addressing the kids that come to us with their trauma responses on full display and often extend to kids who are quite a bit older than you may imagine when you first think of The Ranches.

Sincerely,

 Heath Kull - President
heathk@theranches.org

#RaiseThemUp

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(facebook.com/TheNewMexico-BoysandGirlsRanch)
Twitter & Instagram:
@TheRanchesNM
or my
personal Twitter: @HeathKull
#HeathKull



THE RANCHES

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hymns and knew all of the verses and knew most of the sermons, but I never knew life before The Ranches. For me, that never existed. I didn't have a whole lot to compare The Ranches to; and still don't. I grew up knowing that families break apart, kids get angry and hurting inside is as good an excuse as any to hurt others. As a result, I wanted to get as far away as possible. I didn't want to have kids and I didn't want to get married and I certainly didn't want to work here. The legacy of The Ranches belongs to my parents and not to me... or so I believed. In His usual way. God had other plans. I met a little girl that I couldn't quite quit comparing to all the children of my younger days and that meeting started my streak of blessings disguised as a run of promises being broken that I had made only to myself. I married that girl's mother and her mother thought that The Ranches felt a lot like the way her family treated kids in the great state of Hawaii, where she came from. And so, a door was opened just a bit.

Before long, we were awaiting the birth of a daughter and the never-ending need for someone to take care of the kids became an urgently pressing need. And the door opened a bit wider and the young women whom I fell in love with fell in love with the opportunity to change the lives of kids at the Ranches.

Like many things, the draw of The Ranches lies in the never-ending needs and the never-ending stream of lives altered and changed for the better. Lani got hooked and I worked to keep just a bit of distance from it all. And, in His usual way, God had other plans. What started out as a project to get The Ranches ready for Y2K and make sure that we didn't lose a lifetime of donor data and kid files, soon turned into a softening of my stance on getting involved. As is usually the case, there came another opportunity due to another need to cover one of our cottages. We answered that call. Another step closer to what I was meant for started with another broken promise to myself. I was now married, with kids and working at The Ranches...temporarily, of course.

Y2K soon turned into the birth of another daughter in 2002 and a lot of time spent reflecting on how I grew up and what I had learned in all of those angry and anxious years between running from God's plan and staring down my future through the eyes of my younger self. It was time to get serious about the serious work of raising other people's children. What I found was that all the events of my childhood were just a brutal education and preparation for what I was being called to do. And so, I started to look deeply at our program and our training and the incredibly rewarding task of helping caring adults learn to care for kids that are anything but. "It's not about you!" and "It isn't personal!" were soon joined by teaching the power of grief and the effects of loss on kids. Then boundaries and then positive discipline. Before I knew it,

I was inching closer and closer to being a part of the legacy that I had always run from. It didn't hurt that my beautiful wife seemed born to nurture and be to so many kids what they had been so desperately missing. I soon learned that my discomfort with God's plan had little to no influence on Him. I was going in the direction that He was leading me with only a bit of kicking and screaming.

One of my first major goals in working with the staff was to increase their empathy for the kids in our care. While training and talking about empathy for the kids can take you to a slightly better place and a slightly deeper understanding, to really jumpstart empathy you must take a more radical approach. So, we used a cottage that was temporarily empty and checked a group of our staff into our program...for seven whole days. While I was deeply prepared to live as one of the kids for a week, I was needed as the houseparent for this group of somewhat willing adults. And "Cottage Training" was born. Now a staple of our training process, the first time was part cathartic and part revolutionary and part chaos. But it changed all of those who had the courage to participate and the changes were for the better. Greater empathy and greater understanding led to more forgiveness and additional grace for the kids. While I was very proud of our determination in making the idea a reality, God was still patiently waiting on me to get to where He had always wanted me to be.

Fast forward a few years and my parents had retired and The Ranches was facing a significant and very real financial crisis. As is their duty and responsibility, our board of directors decided that a change was needed. So, I entered a board meeting as the person in charge of managing and training the staff and emerged as a legacy kid facing the possible demise of the legacy that he had come from, but with a fancy new title. I was now in a position that very few had held and was facing some financial challenges that very few were truly aware of. I started to think that I wasn't the right person and that it wasn't about me and that I should most definitely be replaced by someone with a "better" story and a more complicated history...and definitely without the same last name as the person that came before. But God seemed to again have other plans. By this time, I was beginning to understand the futility associated with fighting the plan of the Man Upstairs.

While I had been a part of budget preparations and board meetings and all of the operational aspects of The Ranches, I had never truly felt the weight of being responsible for ensuring the legacy of The Ranches, the kids, the donors and the staff. Had I been less stubborn, I would have most certainly allowed the overwhelming feelings of obligation and responsibility to cause me to "cut and run" for greener pastures. Yeah, the Man Upstairs had other plans.

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#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES



Ranch Worx

Our Ranch Worx trades program continues to grow and build momentum. From OSHA 10 certification for kids in the program to repairing a rather unfortunate dent in the bumper of a ranch truck, the kids are learning a wide range of skills to supplement their traditional education here at The Ranches. And the support we've received from our donors and the community has been overwhelmingly positive. Over the coming months, we have some pretty awesome plans for the Ranch Worx students. Renovating a conference room and fixing all of the stuff that breaks around here are now not only going to be vehicles for teaching these kids new life skills, but also serve as the tools for building self-worth and self-esteem. To those of you who have chosen to specifically support the Ranch Worx program, we'd like to thank you on behalf of the kids who have benefited so greatly from this opportunity. And to those of you who'd like to support this program, please reach out or designate your gift on our website.



#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

Vacation

If the past year has been for you anything like it has been for us, you probably need a vacation. Thanks to y'all's generous support, we were able to do just that. Despite a small hiccup caused by repeated searches for the same rental house causing the price to go up significantly, we were eventually able to get the original price per night for a cabin in Angel Fire, New Mexico that accommodated sleeping arrangements for 42 kids and staff. Once there and settled in, several days of relaxation combined with white water rafting and fishing at Eagle Nest Lake State Park made for a great time and lots of great memories for both kids and staff. We cannot thank you enough for this brief getaway for the kids.





THEIR JOURNEY





Communication and Cooperation or Complaints and Control

I am often in a position where it is necessary to help someone understand their failures while we are in the midst of their current failure. In most cases, houseparents and/or teachers tend to struggle with the behaviors of the kids in our program. While I do not excuse or justify many of the most negative responses from kids, I do work to understand those responses. In most, if not all, cases there is a breakdown in the communication between an adult and a child. Since we first heard the words, "Honor thy father and mother...", many of us have assumed that we are deserving of being honored whenever we assume any role that has more than a passing likeness to authority. "You have to make them respect me!" is a line that I have heard far too often from our staff. Oddly enough, I've heard it from many a child as well...especially when they've been at The Ranches much longer than their latest "new staff" and that new staff is commanding and complaining rather than communicating and offering the opportunity for cooperation.

The truth is, the kids at The Ranches are inherently loveable...as long as you can get past their attempt to prove that you are no different than anyone else who offered help but in the end only hurt them by trying to control them. All kids push boundaries and limits, but some never see a pathway out of that behavior because there aren't many adults in their life who will calmly and rationally explain the concept in the midst of a rebellious streak of behaviors.

This may seem like a bleak picture, but the concept is on display at any given grocery store on any given day of the week. Kids pushing boundaries and limits often are met with a parent who criticizes and attempts to control but refuses to communicate and offer the opportunity for cooperation. When those kids from the grocery store get to be a little older and are still responding impatiently to the criticisms and their parent's need for control, we often get a call asking for help. When we repeat the same parental behaviors, we often see the same behaviors in the child. But, when we slow down and clearly

communicate our expectations and clearly lay out the benefits for cooperation, we often find that the child described in the application file and the child standing before us show little to no resemblance to each other.

While it is an easy enough issue to identify and define, it is rather difficult to change. Like most of you, I was raised by parents who instilled in me the need to be respectful of adults and other authority figures. As a result, I tend to expect the same from others. Unfortunately, many of the kids at The Ranches have been mistreated, abused and hurt by authority figures and this makes them less inclined to believe that cooperation is the end goal of communication. They have been criticized in pursuit of control to the point that they have a very damaged sense of respect and very little desire to form yet another relationship with yet another authority figure.

We don't let their response affect or deter our actions though. We start our process with a temporary but deliberate lack of criticism and a very intentional overabundance of communication. We help kids understand that the outcome of all of that communication is their cooperation with us and our cooperation with them. We also assist them in understanding how to process – and in some cases ignore – the plethora of criticism they've received from adults who were in pursuit of control. It takes time. It takes patience. It takes understanding and grace. And it is so worth it when a child starts to see themselves as a valuable part of their relationships with others rather than a burden and inconvenience standing tall in the face of criticism in pursuit of control.

Your generous support helps us offer communication in pursuit of cooperation and also allows us to continue to provide care, healing, help and hope to kids. It also helps us to teach that same concept to those that work with the kids.



THE RANCHES

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Most people associate the work at The Ranches with a household and believe that the budget should be a magnified version of a family budget. Oh, how I wish that were true. Unfortunately, offering a family style setting and a nurturing environment comes with some significant and, at times, outrageous costs.

In order to comply with the significant regulations necessary to offer the opportunity to Rekindle Hope in At-Risk Youth, we have to offer jobs to a host of people who all have their own financial needs and salary requirements. We require a married couple to act as Houseparents for each of our 4 cottages and another married couple to act as Associate Houseparents so that we can offer time off to the previously mentioned Houseparents. We also need people to manage those that care for kids and ensure quality in all that we do. We need accounting personnel and a marketing person and IT support and someone to manage our agricultural endeavors. On top of the salary for those that join our mission, we also provide health insurance and other benefits in an effort to attract quality people to hopefully raise quality kids. Then there is the housing for those that work with the kids that we provide which is over and above the cost of feeding so many hungry souls. Then there is the liability insurance and vehicle insurance and the insurance necessary to retain the ability to put kids on horses and teach the healing that Equine Gestalt Coaching provides. There are also legal fees and the cost of our annual audit and the vehicles and requisite fuel, registration and insurance costs. We pay for our rather costly but governmentally mandated water system so that we can provide water to employees and kids that is free of a few parts per billion of less than ideal material that could potentially be dangerous should someone consume 50 gallons a day for several years. We need tractors to tend to the land and mowers for the grass and all of those computers that allow us to allow kids to work at their own pace and catch up in school. And please don't forget about all the vacuum cleaners and cleaning supplies and maintenance on buildings, vehicles, equipment and infrastructure at The Ranches.

When I started, it was just about offering what I knew in pursuit of helping hurting children to heal and move on towards the future of their choosing. As I've embraced my legacy and my lifetime of understanding and experience related to the kids that we serve, I have also had to embrace the incredible costs, many of which are the hidden costs, that aren't readily acknowledged, associated with our mission of Rekindling Hope in At Risk Youth.

While I despise being pitied and loathe feeling overwhelmed or as if I am not brave enough for the task at hand, The Ranches is a simple concept with a complicated history that is intertwined with my own and has a heavy load of expenses that can be overwhelming and daunting. But, I have a lifetime of reminders that God has other plans and that His Legacy in the lives of those associated with The Ranches will forever be associated with His willingness to provide us with donors who meet the needs of the organization. He has also nudged more than a few people into a lifetime of service to His legacy in the lives of kids who have often been the absolute, "...least of these."

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

THANK YOU

Alamo Ranch Company	Thermal	CA	JSCO, Inc.	Albuquerque	NM
Albuquerque Community Foundation	Albuquerque	NM	Ken Brudos Insurance	Albuquerque	NM
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Forrest Community Church	McAlister	NM	Reynolds Enterprises	Aurora	CO
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Are you ready to play golf?

Richardson and Richardson is hosting the 24th annual Pete Leyva Memorial Golf Tournament on September 13, 2021. Richardson and Richardson has been supporting the New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches for over 20 years through this event. You can register by going to our website or go to <https://app.eventcaddy.com/events/2021-pete-leyva-memorial-golf>



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.

If you are interested in arranging a speaking engagement for your organization, simply give us a call at (505) 881-3363 or (800) 660-0289.

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If you would like to make a Donation by credit card please visit us at

www.theranches.org/invest-in-our-youth/

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- Please contact me at the number listed above to set up monthly payments by Credit Card or Electronic Funds Transfer.

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