



New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches

# CORRAL

## WINTER 2021

### Emails of Encouragement

## The Ranches Alumni

Advice from an Alumni to a current resident:

**"Embrace every moment there. Listen to the messages and the life lessons they teach you. Put your pride aside and let go of what your life was and accept what your life will become!"**

- Chelsey P.

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Rekindling HOPE for At Risk Youth - Since 1944

By Heath Kull

Being located on 2400 acres near the middle of nowhere is often a blessing and only sometimes a curse. Over the past several months, it has been a bit of both. On the blessing side, we haven't had to take extraordinary measures to limit visitors or to continually disinfect every surface in sight. On the curse side, having severe limitations on being able to get off campus and provide fun and engaging activities for the kids and the staff has felt rather akin to being in time out. While I do not marginalize nor minimize the real risk and potentially deadly effect of the virus related to this pandemic, the mental health side effects are no less real. As "quarantine fatigue" sets in for the kids and staff, I have refocused some of my effort to addressing morale issues and attempting to encourage and emotionally support our staff as they go about caring for kids during this unprecedented time. What started off as "emails of encouragement" quickly turned into a daily email to our staff to help address some of the issues that they faced and to encourage them to stay focused on the job at hand and what they could control instead of focusing on quarantine, restrictions and being just a little bit sick of it all. We've chosen a few examples and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed writing them.

#### Monday - Misunderstandings

Growing up, I wasn't a good communicator and still don't consider myself to be all that great at it. I know that I can form words and sentences that people can understand, but I'm not always sure that my messages get across and hit the right balance of emotional intelligence and helpful information. The

thing is, I have often - at different points in my life - felt like a good communicator. I have also FELT that some onions and just about all avocados should be illegal simply because I FEEL like I shouldn't have to eat them, so feelings can be a little less than reliable.

Those times in my life that I felt like a good communicator were often caused by my tendency to only communicate with a small group of people who knew me well. This made it much easier as they tended to always give me the benefit of the doubt and gently question anything that they didn't quite understand.

But what about communicating with people that are hell bent on taking offense, getting their feelings hurt, refusing to offer even a hint of the benefit of the doubt and generally rejecting the message based solely on who the messenger happens to be? What a challenging group of people they can be.

What helped me the most was the realization that I had to take responsibility for the message. The responsibility to make sure that what was heard and what was meant happened to match was a bit daunting. But you learn and you practice, and you get better at it.

The first step was to start being honest about how I was feeling. "I'm angry" was my go-to, but why was I angry?

So, I started to learn to explain why I was angry or fearful or sad or excited or proud or...whatever fills your heart and soul.

*Continue reading on page 2*



*continued from page 1*

While many of you have the responsibility of communicating effectively with the kids, I started with the administrators and houseparents. The kid part came later and was much easier for me due to the framework being setup by having to communicate with adults.

As I learned, practiced, and grew, "y'all are idiots" became "I struggle with the way you're treating the kids because the kids that aren't your favorites are losing respect for you and, as a result, losing respect for me. Out of the top 5 things that I hate, looking dumb is number one. So, I would greatly appreciate it if you could take a hard look at your biases and favoritism so that the kids can learn to respect you, your fairness, and your ability. Maybe they'll even learn to respect your boss too. Wouldn't that be cool?"

While it can be taxing to have to overexplain your expectations and your emotional reaction to their habit of disappointing you, it is the only way that I have found to get on the right side of the communication issues in a cottage or on a campus.

Some other ones:

"Do your work and don't be stupid" can be rewritten as "I realize that you don't want to deep clean the cottage. Heck, even I don't want to deep clean the cottage, but I agreed to do a job and do it the way that my employer has asked me to. One day, you'll have to do the same for your employer. So, we're going to get this deep clean done and then we're going to be able to relax and be proud of how clean our cottage is. You may not respect that today, but I promise, one day you will. Besides, what else do you have to do except sit around and think of all the ways I'm better at cleaning than you are."

Or "Just go to your room, ya jerk" can become "Ya know, I'm not the one who made choices that led to the removal of my door. My door is awesome, and I can't wait to close it tonight. If you like, you can take it out on me because of your crappy attitude and your poor decisions...or, we can start working on a plan to get your door back. If you're going to keep putting up a blanket in the doorway, I'm going to recommend that you never get your door back. I'll even recommend a door burning at the fire pit for your door. So, which is smarter? Being a jerk to me or working with me to get your door back so you feel less of a need to be a jerk?"

You'll have to come up with your own style and way of communicating, but there's no time like the present to start working on getting better at getting your point across.

## **Tuesday - Trepidation**

Many people, staff and kids alike, grow up in a home where honesty - particularly emotional honesty - only comes when someone gets angry. Not mildly irritated or frustrated, but "lose their ever-loving mind" angry. If you were ever genuinely surprised by a piece of information uttered or blurted out during an argument, you know exactly what I am talking about.

As a result of this, many people start to associate honesty with

people being angry enough to be honest which, in turn, leads to the thought process of, "they're being honest so they must be angry."

When kids are dealing with an angry adult, lying, defensiveness and deflection are normal and natural strategies. Also, when adults are dealing with an angry authority figure, lying, defensiveness and deflection are normal and natural strategies.

But what if the adult or authority figure isn't angry? What if they are just being honest and emotionally honest with you?

Just because you're used to honesty and anger being tied together doesn't mean that every honest person is also angry. That is your baggage that you are projecting, and it is the same for kids.

To be truly successful with other people's children, we have to actively teach kids when we are angry or just being honest. We have to do this with our words, and we have to do it consistently and predictably with words thousands of times. Over and over...and over again.

If you have to get angry to get honest, you have some work to do. If you believe that anyone who is being honest must be angry, you have some work to do.

Emotional honesty must be practiced, but also met with a reasonable response. It won't change if we don't talk about it and practice what we are preaching.

## **Wednesday - Wherewithal**

In generations past, adults were always expected to have the emotional wherewithal to handle just about any situation related to their children that came up. As a result, kids had both a roadmap and an example of what would eventually be expected of them in terms of emotional and overall wherewithal.

Fast forward a few years and we now have safe spaces and cry closets. Most kids don't have the emotional wherewithal to navigate even the most basic and benign levels of conflict. "Bite your tongue and trash 'em on social media" is now a life strategy. How did we fall so far? Is it the kids that have changed or the adults?

Kids definitely have more access to enablers and people who don't dare to hold them accountable and there are a whole lot more adults raising their hands to volunteer to enable kids and avoid holding them accountable, but I don't believe that the kids have changed all that much. Kids act and adults complain is just a new paradigm we're dealing with.

But what if we don't want to be of this world while living smack dab in the middle of it? Then we have to work to build the emotional wherewithal of everyone around us...especially the kids.

How does one go about the task of building emotional wherewithal? You cannot teach what you do not know, so this - like most things with me - starts with the man (or woman) in the mirror.



We have to focus on our own emotional wherewithal in order to get to a place to teach it to kids. The first step is the realization that empowerment is the opposite of entitlement. Empowerment is the application of skills in pursuit of solutions, while entitlement is the belief that solutions will appear without lifting a finger because one's awesomeness outweighs their obligation to not be a worthless drain on those around them.

But how do you start to empower someone who is entitled?

You have to begin with unmitigated honesty with a touch of grace. The best place to practice this honesty is in taking stock of the child in front of you (regardless of their age) and assessing their strengths and weaknesses. We then must teach those around us to navigate towards people and situations that maximize their strengths and away from people and situations that are dependent on their weaknesses. Then, with empowerment in mind, hold them accountable without a whole lot of concern for their reactions. They're going to get defensive and agitated. That is OK and you can go on about your life without responding to every dysfunctional attempt to get your attention. You can then choose - with all of your intention - to put forth energy towards the child(ren) that are developing emotional strength and wherewithal. The dysfunctionals will attempt to re-establish their monopoly on your time and attention, but you can allow them to starve on the vine if you're truly intentional about only directing your emotional energy toward the ones growing and finding their own emotional wherewithal.

#### Thursday - Thickheaded

"Change only occurs when the pain of staying the same exceeds the pain of change"

This quote has been around for a while but seems to fade into the storage in our brain designated for useless information.

Is it really useless though?

If you look at the 30 kids in our care, how many actually believe that they're behaviors, language and thought processes are problematic or even remotely wrong? What, with us spending so much time and energy working to convince them that there's no such thing as a bad kid and that they're definitely not a bad kid, why would they think that there's a problem at all?

Now, before you go thinking that I'm trashing our program or our approach, go back and read the first sentence.

"Change only occurs when the pain of staying the same exceeds the pain of change"

Do we allow for this? Is there any pain associated with staying the same?

"But...but...but abandonment and stuff!"

Ok, but that pain happened prior to coming to The Ranches. What pain is there today?

Compassion and empathy have been used as an excuse to bludgeon discipline and good parenting almost out of existence. "No child should ever feel pain!", cries the empaths. And we're back to that first line again.

"Change only occurs when the pain of staying the same exceeds the pain of change"

We don't have to physically hurt a child to help them change, but we certainly need to allow circumstances to get uncomfortable if we ever want change. This was the original motivation for the level system...way back when...when it was a challenge to get a Level 4. Interestingly, you had to prove that you could maintain the change before getting "Weekly" or "A-Team". Nowadays, all of the privileges of level 4 have become accessible without much change or even real effort. Just make a minimal effort and "kiss the right butt" and your scores will be nudged up in an effort for adults to get YOUR approval. (That is not a blanket statement and not passively directed at anyone. Just something I have indeed witnessed).

But this is where I get baffled. How much is your approval worth? What is the value of your approval? Is your approval abundant or scarce? Do you throw your approval at the child who is behaving the worst in order to get them to calm down and shut up? Do you offer your approval for a job well done? Or for a child making the loudest commotion and rejecting you so as to put you on the defensive?

When we focus on a child's future, the first thing we do is recognize that they'll need to sit in their pain until they want to do something different...to change.

I don't know how many houseparents, childcare workers, counselors and therapists I've watched rescue and enable a child due to THEIR own discomfort with a child in pain, but I do know that not one of those who did, earned the respect of the child and those children were able to live another day without changing due to the emotional weakness of that adult.

Don't be that adult. Grade firmly but fairly, don't give the answers to make them feel better, allow them to struggle until they start to think of solutions and, for the love of God, allow the pain of remaining the same to set in. Once a child starts to change in healthy and positive ways, you can bring out your compassion and empathy again and apply it liberally but appropriately.

#### Friday - Fatigue

I think it is fair to say that we all experience varying levels of fatigue while doing this job. Physical fatigue is probably most common, followed closely by emotional fatigue. Dealing with problems that one did not create and being treated in a manner not deserved only to receive blame one did not earn, can be taxing, frustrating and tiring. So much so, that fatigue of the soul can set in. I have been there a time or two.

But what can we do about it?



# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



**Heath Kull**  
President

There's not a lot that I can say that hasn't already been said about 2020. It was challenging in most every way. From the physical challenges to the emotional challenges to the political challenges to the logistical challenges, there seemed to be challenges at every turn. Normally, we operate from the standpoint of helping children face their challenges, but in 2020 we were in the unique position of having the kids watch us face ours. What started as a "2 week quarantine" quickly became 8 months of limiting trips and disinfecting everything. While the essential trips for doctor's appointments and other "less than fun" activities continued, the trips to town for fun, adventure and relaxation came to an abrupt halt. Before too long, the emotional challenges began. Birthdays at The Ranch and weekend trips home being cancelled, and holidays missed started to take a toll on everyone. And there didn't seem to be an end in sight at any point.

To make things even more challenging, last year also happened to be an election year. On top of the fundraising dip that tends to occur during election years, the tone of this election was also problematic. While I tend to keep my opinions mostly to myself on such matters, the political divisiveness, vitriol and effects of identity politics made teaching the kids about our democratic process all but impossible.

Instead of focusing on all that was problematic, we instead chose to focus on our blessings. Despite all of the challenges – or maybe due to the challenges facing families thrown into homeschooling – 2020 was a

significant year at The Ranches in terms of the number of families that we were able to help. Our small class size and non-remote learning environment allowed us to offer educational support to a large number of families and the structure necessary to deal with all that was going on in the world which allowed us to offer a greater level of predictability and consistency for the kids in our care. And, despite the politics that served to divide and set neighbor against neighbor, we take comfort in knowing that the God who commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves is still in control; still expecting us to reach across whatever aisle is present to love those neighbors on the other side of political issues as well. Faith is easy in the good years but essential in the challenging years. Our faith was essential to our ability to honor our blessings and learn from our challenges in 2020. We are hopeful that 2021 will bring a few less challenges but equal reminders of our blessings and faith in God, his plan, and our fellow man.

Sincerely,

Heath Kull - President  
heathk@theranches.org



# #RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

## Thank You Seems Hardly Enough



This has been such an unusual year. All of our normal Christmas activities at The Ranch were modified and the many groups that normally visit the residents at this time of year had to have virtual visits or modified activities. After a long year of very limited activities for our residents the generosity and kindness of so many infused The Ranch residents and staff with the confidence that they had not been forgotten. Many groups including: Faith Baptist Church, Monte Vista Christian Church, the Sojourners, Albuquerque Breakfast Lion's Club, Albuquerque NE Lion's Club, Rio Grande Lion's Club, Edgewood Leo's Club, the Theia Foundation, Buffett's Candies, all of the NMBGR Board members, the Stoll Family & Friends Group, and many other individuals reached out to provide wonderful gifts, fantastic candies, and selfless acts of kindness bringing the warmth of the season into our midst. We salute you all and say Thank You So Very Much!



# THEIR JOURNEY



Photos by Lani Kull and Kensi Yoakum



*Continued from page 3*

Everyone deals with stress and fatigue in their own way...but do you know and honor yours? Does your spouse?

For some, a little time alone may be the best prescription. While others may find comfort and rejuvenation by being around others. Some may need to do things with their hands while others need to engage their minds. There aren't too many wrong answers this side of healthy behavior, but a startling number of people do not know, or feel comfortable with being open about, their stress reducing strategies. Now, I don't need you to tell me, but I hope that you at least identify them for your own sake and the sake of your spouse. If you're the spouse of someone who is identifying these stress reducing strategies, I encourage you to be supportive and accepting of what is a strategy that may not be yours...but may also be instrumental in helping someone you care about handle stress before it becomes fatigue.

This week has been a stressful one for me. We have an entire campus closed down to the normal activity that I am used to. Kids have tested positive and some are scared while others are angry and ramped up at the restrictions that they don't feel that they deserve. On top of all of that, we have been consolidating the office in Albuquerque from two floors of a building to one, while also attempting to change accounting software using a company whose main representatives don't seem to yet love my direct and blunt style. In short, we're dealing with a lot right now.

But I would much rather deal with those things than deal with grief or loss for someone I care about or being restricted to 14 acres for any longer than necessary. With all that is happening, stress has come along and didn't bother knocking as it came rolling in with its old buddy fatigue.

For me, writing these has been very helpful as I have to put my crappy attitude in check each morning before I begin and think through empathizing with the reader before I start a message that will be a part of someone's day. It is centering and an introspective endeavor that has made our current situation more tolerable while also reminding me that I have a job to do each day that includes dealing with problems that I did not create while being treated in a manner I don't always deserve while receiving blame that I don't think that I have earned.

The thing is, it's the only job I want to do and it's a job I am eternally grateful for. I've met so many great people...while learning to deal with such a wide range of behaviors in people...while also getting to help kids...while also getting to work with my wife and kids...while also seeing kids change in ways that will bless the rest of their lives...while knowing that the kids of the kids in our care will get a different life than their parents...all while not having to fight traffic to feel like just another cog in a great big profit machine. Even on the worst day here, I am blessed beyond measure and have received intangible gifts that I don't deserve from people I never thought would offer them while often giving me more credit than I feel that I've earned. Keeping all of this in mind while keeping the negatives in perspective is my single most effective stress reducing scenario.

My worst days here often surpass my best days before my wife, three daughters, and The Ranches.

### **Saturday - So you think you might want a change...**

We are often quite comfortable with demands for others to change. In most cases, we feel justified and just a little morally superior in dictating the change that we feel should take place in other people's lives. From politics to church pews, there are always people sitting in judgement of all the "less enlightened" or "not right with the lord" or "testing the Jesus in me" kind of people. Heck, this email is basically a big call out of me and my job description. I am constantly pushing for change...but I try to temper it by living on the premise of "being the change that I want to see in the world."

One thing that I also try to keep in the back of my mind, but the forefront of my behavior, is the cost I'm willing for others to pay for the change that I desire.

In my most noble times, the change that I am after will - I wholeheartedly believe - make the other person's life or life process significantly better or easier. The cost of the change is simply the discomfort of getting used to new habits of thought and behavior, but the benefit is a better life.

In my less noble times, the change that I am after will create tension, strife and struggle for the other person. The cost that I deem acceptable is a cost that I don't even have to pay, as it's the cost I'm willing for the person who's doing the changing to pay. And sometimes, they cannot really afford the cost of that change.

This can create more than a little resentment. And the reason is that we, as human beings, crave homeostasis or stable equilibrium. So, while change is something that needs to occur in most scenarios, we all resist the change that we didn't initiate.

I can't tell you the number of times that someone has asked me to help them be better at standing up for themselves. I oblige and, invariably, those people decide to stand up for themselves toward someone who does not, in any way, shape or form, respond well to the challenge of someone that had previously accepted being emotionally steamrolled. What happens next, also invariably, is the blame being directed back at me for the cost of changing the dynamics of a relationship that usually doesn't even involve me.

So, as you go about being the mildly condescending and oft morally superior (yes, another call out of myself) instigator of change in the lives of the kids you have relationship with, I ask that you consider the cost that you're comfortable with and willing for them to pay. You may be making their life easier and better, while you may also be instigating a change that may cost them time, relationships, and support. If you keep this in the back of your mind, but the forefront of your behavior, you will have significantly greater discernment in determining the change you want to see in others.



**Sunday - Say What You Mean, But Mean What You Say**

I've had a lifetime filled with one simple statement: "I don't trust them!"

Kids say it about staff and staff say it about kids. When you break it down, it's kind of a victim statement on both sides. Why is trust even that important here? It's not like we can do a lot to them (the kids) and it's not like they can do a lot to us (the staff), but trust is thrown around as if it's this irrefutable entity that matters in our grand scheme. The list of people that I do not inherently trust is very close to the entire population of the planet. It has so little impact on my day-to-day life that it has almost no bearing at all... except for the people that are close to me and have the ability to hurt, disappoint, become deeply saddened or leave me. I do not need to trust politicians or public figures or people in power. Most of them are one election away from never having mattered. But the fragile among us place massive value on being able to trust people that can't really impact their life in any realistic way. Other than changing how I vote, it isn't really all that important, nor should it be.

Now, if I were more honest, I'd tell you about the people I don't LIKE. Some because they remind me of myself and some because they remind me of who I used to be and still others who remind me of who I never want to be. I, like all of you, don't typically like people...until I do.

I tend to really like people that say what they mean and mean what they say. None of the wishy washy, passive aggressive, "I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings because I am incredibly fragile and don't really want anyone to ever know what I really think about anyone or anything because deep down I am a coward who hates myself" kind of people as they almost never mean what they say

nor say what they mean. The cool part (sarcasm) is that they usually blame me for their lack of honesty and forthrightness. "Yeah...it's my fault that you're a coward." This is, again, the story of my life.

But, there are those people that say what they mean and mean what they say. These people are the ones that really matter to me. The ones that I look up to, try to be like and work to emulate.

In our reality, isn't this what you want from the kids? To look up to you, try to be like you, and work to emulate you?

If you don't, there's a much deeper issue at play. But if you do, saying what you mean and meaning what you say is the absolutely most critical first step.

Most people cannot go 24 hours being completely honest with a spouse, much less children that aren't theirs. Yet, these are the same people who complain the loudest about not being able to trust the kids...or their spouse.

Maybe - and I say this with nothing but love and respect in my heart - the problem isn't really the kids. Maybe we need to focus on saying what we mean and meaning what we say for a period of time. We just might find that we feel better about ourselves and that the kids start looking up to us, trying to emulate us, and working to be more like us.

**Conclusion**

While I have no certainty that these daily emails have been helpful to our staff or helped to keep "Quarantine Fatigue" at bay for a little while, they did elicit much conversation and it was thoroughly enjoyable to write them each day. So much so that I may continue to write them for a while...at least until this pandemic is over.

Thank you to all the businesses, organizations and churches that made monetary gifts in excess of \$250 during the period of September 16, 2020 - December 31, 2020. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

**THANK YOU**

AAA Pumping Service, Inc.	Albuquerque	NM	JSCO, Inc.	Albuquerque	NM
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# Become a Partner

## Become a Partner

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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or fill out the form below, return it, and we will call you.

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.

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

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