



New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches

# CORRAL

## Spring 2023

### So, Tell Me Again What You Do...?

By Heath Kull

While many careers are universally understood, mine really isn't. I am invariably asked the very adult and ominous question that is the starting point for many relationships that start after the onset of adulthood; "And what do you do?"

My answer, "I work with kids" is usually met with a non-confrontational nod and a feigned look of understanding. Should the interaction be short enough, the answer will suffice. If, however, the conversation doesn't come to a natural end soon after I answer, I am often on the receiving end of a conversational "circle back" and it is usually started by people asking, "So, tell me again what you do!?!"

It is at this point that I get the opportunity to explain both The Ranches and my career choices. And it usually goes a little something like this...

"I work with kids. I work at The New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches and we take care of "at risk young people."

"Ohh... like troubled kids?" Is usually the trepidatious response. "Well, kinda..." is often my only suitable answer. Truthfully though, the actual

answer is much more nuanced and layered.

The Ranches was founded in 1944 and was a response to the number of teen boys left without fathers in the wake of WWII. In those early days, "take 'em out to the country and work 'em" was more the thought process than in the years that came after.

You see, prior to our founding, most "congregate care" and "group care" was relegated to orphanages.

***"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."*** To be honest, we were built in much the same vein and on the same piece of scripture.

Over the years, a number of models for congregate and group care have emerged while the number of true orphans has decreased. During the same timeframe, governmental agencies have ordained themselves as the caregivers and protectors of at risk youth, orphans and any child that is seen by their family or society as a lost cause. In that time, The Ranches has gone from what we once were to

## The Ranches Alumni

*What was something you achieved at The Ranch that you never thought you would before you got there?*

"I look back at my time at the Boys Ranch, and find myself saying; The Boys Ranch provided so many life skills and work skills it is hard to pin point one thing. I got to do Rodeo, 4-H, welding, wood working, construction, etc.... What an amazing place!"

- Jonathon G.

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Rekindling HOPE for At Risk Youth - Since 1944

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# GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT



## Heath Kull

President

### *Greetings all!*

We are currently in the midst of the lull that exists every year between the chaotic pace of Christmas and New Years and the start of Summer. While it is a little less chaotic, there is still a lot going on. Most notable is the annual endeavor that involves the selection and purchase of 4-H animals for the coming season.

In addition, we are preparing to start construction on "The Beaty Cottage" which will be our fifth cottage and will represent an increase in the maximum number of kids that we can serve from 38 to 48.

Additionally, we are working to plan a National Parks Trip in the summer to give the kids a traditional vacation and the experience of seeing one or more of our nation's National Parks. In years past, a good time has been had by all and we see no reason to believe that this year will be any different.

In short, the Lord has blessed us and continues to bless our ministry, our mission and the kids in our care. He's solid and steadfast like that. Interestingly though, it is a bit humbling to feel the desire and call to partner with God and with y'all to serve these kids and sometimes I struggle

to know if I am "getting it right" and humbly serving in a way that is pleasing and seen as good and faithful. I suppose the support you offer and the increases over previous years should serve as proof enough, but I still tend to struggle with knowing if I am getting it right more than I would like to.

And that is the struggle with my job and the responsibilities that come with it. I never quite know with clarity and certainty if I am the right person for the job and if I am doing this work in a way that is pleasing to Him. Stay Humble and Keep Working has become the motto and the call for me.

So, until next time, please know that we are appreciative of your generous support and of the kids that bless our organization by spending a season or two with us. I'll keep doing my best and humbly pursuing better and more effective ways to engage with "the least of these." If you ever get the urge to offer your thoughts, prayers or feedback, you can find me on social media or at [HeathK@theranches.org](mailto:HeathK@theranches.org).

Sincerely,

Heath Kull - President

[heathk@theranches.org](mailto:heathk@theranches.org)

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## For Information or Aggravation

*"It's not personal. It's not even about you!"*

We have a tendency, once we become adults, to attempt to make everything about us. Call it adulting or self absorbed or self-protection, but we tend to focus on how the world impacts us and how others get to us and then we start using "I..." more often than we and "me..." more often than us. And kids notice. They don't ask, but they do tend to start behaving in selfish ways in an attempt to pass along information that they can't quite find the adequate words for.

We have a choice at that point, aggravation or unconventional communication. When we listen to their actions - even if it requires creative interpretation - we can start an unconventional conversation.

Sitting quietly and listening communicates. Losing our cr\*p communicates. Shunning communicates. Yelling communicates everything but the words being yelled. Your face communicates all that your words don't. And even your breathing changes communicate.

So, if they're picking up all that you're laying down, is it too much to ask to attempt to translate a bit to pick up what their behavior is trying to say to you?





# THE RANCHES



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what we are today; a faith based community group home utilizing an empowerment model to work with the current generation to rekindle hope so that our work will have a lasting impact on the generations to someday come from the children that we serve today. Quite a mouthful, but please allow me to elaborate.

Currently, group care in the United States is a reaction and response to kids who don't do well in their biological, adoptive or foster homes and whose family is seeking help, healing and hope for their biological, adoptive or foster child(ren). Homes like The Ranches, for the most part, fall into 4 models of care.

**Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs)** - A simple internet search related to the number of RTCs in the United States yields close to 30,000 operating and offering treatment to teens and adults. These facilities range from rehabilitation centers to weight loss camps to psych hospitals and all are in the business of helping one group or another. Costs are often billed to insurance and can exceed \$30,000 per month of treatment. While often effective, these facilities are expensive and often hard to access for families in need of help. Another issue with RTCs is that the help often runs out at exactly the same time as the money delegated to the person in treatment.

**Military Model** - "Better straighten up or I'll send you to military school!" There are a number of military boarding schools in New Mexico and across the United States that offer the discipline and structure that they deem as missing from all troubled children's lives. Typically, a high school education followed by enlisting in the military is the main aim of these schools and they are typically run by "General somebody", "Admiral somebody", or "Sarge" and focus on compliance, structure, discipline, honor and living by a code. Tuition for military schools can range from \$20,000 - \$50,000 annually and emotional support is often what you would imagine it to be. While better than it used to be, "suck it up" and "when the going gets tough, the tough get going" and "embrace the suck" are all still hallmarks of the military model.

**Religious Model** - While religious schools have proliferated in the U.S. at a staggering rate in response to parents wanting more choice in how their children are educated, the percentage of religious schools that offer boarding is significantly smaller. In most cases, religious boarding schools focus on college prep in an environment that is controlled and monitored closely. Codes of conduct and morality tend to be major themes in religious models and exiting the program is most often related to with failures of character or transcendence of temptation and repentance. While neither goal is inherently bad, the child had to "buy into" the moral structure of the institution in order to be successful. If the child doesn't care, the system often collapses for lack of a backup plan for success for the child. Tuition for religious boarding schools can range from \$20,000 - \$50,000 annually and this is most often not covered by insurance. The costs tend to be "out of pocket" for the families in crisis and in need.

**Education with Empowerment Model** - What has emerged over my lifetime and career have been places like The Ranches that focus on education and empowerment. Kids who are "at-risk" or troubled or struggling still need a future and that often starts with education. Well, the first barriers to educational success are often self-esteem and self-worth and that is where empowerment comes into play. Most kids who've become emotionally downtrodden feel powerless to influence or change their thoughts, beliefs about themselves, or their situation. As a result, empowering kids is often the first step in educating them. Unfortunately, giving a toddler a sword can cause some unexpected consequences and empowering a struggling teen can make the analogy of a toddler with a sword seem altogether relevant. Tuition for Education and Empowerment schools can range from \$20,000 - \$50,000 annually.

**The Ranches Model** - While most closely aligned with an Education and Empowerment model, The Ranches is, just like everyone else, a product of our environment. In many socioeconomic categories, New Mexico ranks at or near the bottom when compared to other states. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, New Mexico ranks 50th in child welfare.



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As a result of these factors, we have had to adjust and work the problem from the perspective that we have been given. Truthfully, in my younger days, the kids that were in The Ranches' program were frustrated with their parents and their parents were frustrated with their kids and, as a result, placed them with us in hopes of getting behavioral changes that they could not get at home on their own. Due to this, we have spent an obscene amount of time attempting to understand and empathize with the kids in our care and we have often had a mildly adversarial relationship with the parents of kids as we attempt to help the kids. It's a bit oversimplified but aligning with kids sometimes meant that the enemy of my friend is my enemy as well.

As time has continued to march along ad nauseam, the dynamics have shifted a bit in us and in the kids who are in our care. In many cases, their parents go through the process of placing them with us, but don't want their child to be "mad at" them, blame them, or think that they don't love them. As a result, the parents often align with the kid from a far until the belief is that we are "keeping" the kids from their parents. We then have to again adjust. So, unlike in past years when we were struggling to get kids to see things differently on behalf of their parents and families, we now often struggle to do what is right and teach what is good and righteous to both kids and their families while we attempt to keep children and parents from aligning against us...the people that they originally reached out to for help. If this is starting to make less than perfect sense, you aren't alone. Some days - when we get a child's attention to the point of being frustrated enough to see things differently and change, their parents are upset at us for how we got their attention. Often, they will "rescue" the child from our program rather than allowing us to do the work that they originally asked us to do. It can all be a bit baffling and deflating. Fortunately, I was raised in this and learned to focus on doing what was right regardless of all the people who will try to deviate our path with bitter roots of disagreement on behalf of the child that originally needed help, healing and hope.

And that, when we get down to it, is truly the defining characteristic of The Ranches model; Adaptable...but stable empowerment. We have to live in the world that is, without becoming a product of a world that often isn't what it ought to be.

Truthfully, we are a voluntary program that allows children to access an alternative educational environment, counseling, structure, the ability to earn both an allowance and a paycheck for work around our campus, and hope; All with either little or no cost to the child's family.

And all of that is thanks to an extremely generous and consistent donor base that is willing to give to us in hopes of helping generations of families that aren't their own. If you ever wonder where your donations go, they go to our attempts to help families without burdening the family with financial concerns that overshadow their need for help.

While their child is with The Ranches, the families' financial obligation to us is calculated based on their income and expenses and we work to not be burdensome or stressful in our pursuit of their family reunification. Truthfully, some families make regular payments in support of their child and many never do. We also refuse to take any funds from the state of New Mexico for kids in their custody that come into our program.

If you're still following along, we work hard to make the best use of generous donations on two fronts: The first is with children and families in pursuit of healing and reunification, while the second front is working to give generous folks the opportunity to support families that they may never meet and kids that they will never know simply because it is the right thing to do and so needed in our world today.

I am hopeful that this helps to explain what I do for a living and how I do it. I am also hopeful that it gives someone reading this the motivation to help a family that isn't theirs but that need a little help due to being a little short on hope.







# THEIR JOURNEY







## What Sweet-Hearts!

For many people, Valentine's Day is just a steppingstone to the most notable day of the year; February 15th, when mass amounts of chocolate and oversized stuffed animals are sold at fifty percent off (yum and yay!) But this year, the day most known for celebrating love and affection was made even more memorable by Alpha Delta Kappa members who arrived just in time to deliver sweet treats and the sweeter donation of their company to some very appreciative kids. Members of Alpha Delta Kappa stayed for lunch after providing gifts and spoke to residents about their mission as women in education who advocate for the dispersion of inclusive educational opportunities, including scholarship options and their dedication to facilitating opportunities for networking and professional development. Thank you, Alpha Delta Kappa, for offering your time, conversation, chocolates, and Walmart Gift Cards for our residents!

The kids also celebrated Valentine's Day with a campus-wide game of Bunco with Ranch staff! Many of the residents were new to the game, but it didn't stop the fun (or the sugar buzz) from permeating the afternoon. Shout out to Kensi Yoakum for arranging cupcakes, treats and an afternoon of fun for the kids in our care!



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## Trying To Understand...

*"Understanding some people's behavior is like trying to explain to a blind person what the color 9 smells like."*

Recently, we spent our Spring Break, that the kids spend at home, checking our staff into a cottage for a few days to live by the rules that they have to enforce with the kids while also having a roommate and a single bed and all the other things that kids have to adapt to The Ranches when they enter our program. While it is a bit of a challenging training, it is one of the most effective tools that we have developed to help the adults better understand the kids that they care for and some of their behaviors.

In this "cottage training" and in my quest to do this work well, I often fall onto the proverbial mental hamster wheel that is summarized as trying to understand the behaviors of others...both staff and kids. It can be challenging at best. While we often start by looking at individual behaviors, truthfully, there are a number of behavioral categories that these observed individual behaviors can get dumped into for convenience and to start the process of understanding. For me, the following categories represent the majority of behaviors that I see at The Ranches and, therefore, work to teach the staff to look for in themselves and to deal with in kids.

**Altruistic...but Self-Centered** - Once you understand that survival looks a lot like narcissism, you start to understand the gravity of this work and the challenges that we face in turning hurting kids into somewhat healthy adults. For some people, both staff and kids, everything that they do for others is meant to reflect back on them as proof of their goodness. No good deed gets wasted and every good deed serves as proof of the work you have done on your path of overcoming your past. Unfortunately, kids (and staff) in this behavioral pattern often want to project a lack of need for any real accountability as their answer to accountability is often, "but i've done so much for you..."

**Self-Centered...and bordering on a Little Narcissistic** - Some people, on the other hand, own their narcissistic tendencies with a little bit more clarity. Their behavior, as a result, tends to be more blatantly selfish and there are less attempts to paint themselves as noble. When a kid is in "survival mode", this is a bit more understandable. In adults though, it can be more challenging to deal with.

**Selfish...but Silent** - Some that we serve are just selfish and that is simply how it is. These folks are nice enough and easy enough to understand, but they are not exactly trying to do a whole lot that doesn't benefit them in some way. As a result, we utilize the adults that are like this and try to steer the kids like this towards a bit more humility than they came with. Truthfully though, we don't usually trust them all that much.



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**Noble** - Some folks - a very few - are actually noble. They live and act nobly and place the interests of others above their own. Many claim this, but very few attain this. We are literally always looking to hire these folks.

**Altruistic** - There are people who are genuinely altruistic and feel good when helping others. Some of them work here and some donate here, but truly altruistic people are rare and hard to come by. Their behavior is often categorized as anything but altruistic as their genuine kindness and niceness can be seen by the less altruistic as fake or even manipulative. "No good deed goes unpunished."

**Selfless** - A few people - a very few - are selfless. All that they do is for others and all they have to do is forgo the adulation of others in pursuit of their selfless endeavors. Sadly, selfless is often foreign to the kids we serve as they often see these folks as tough to trust. Given enough time, the trust issues can be overcome, but it takes time and consistency.

**Individualistic** - Lastly, we have the most prolific - at least at The Ranches - behavioral category. The individualist. Individualistic folks have a hard time with the idea of behaving in a way that follows the expectations of others. They tend to hate being told what to do and they also tend to struggle with the idea of being "just like" anyone else. As a result, everything that they do has to be done in their own way and that way has to be, for the most part, unique and unlike how anyone else may have done it.

Easy to love but a bit hard to manage or raise. So, in my attempt to get my head around the idea that *"Understanding some people's behavior is like trying to explain to a blind person what the color 9 smells like."* I have come to lean on first categorizing people's behavior into these categories and then further analyzing from there. Unfortunately, trust and faith in people tend to get lost in translation.

What we see as altogether better is if we as the adults are able to own our own behavior and explain ourselves to the children that we serve. In essence, we attempt to get good at letting those in our care and those around us know where they stand with us all of the time.

My hope for cottage training has always been a greater level of behavioral understanding for the adults in our program as it relates to the behavior of the kids in our program. Hopefully, after the experience, staff will be more prone to let kids know where they stand with them without them even having to ask. Hopefully, those who participated will have a better understanding of why it is important to empathize with the kids based on the week's experiences.

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Thank you to all the businesses, organizations, and churches that made monetary gifts in excess of \$150 during the period of January 1, 2023 - March 31, 2023. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

## THANK YOU

Alamo Ranch Company	Deming	NM	Slayton Foundation	Roswell	NM
CS Cattle Company	Cimarron	NM	Standerwick Real Estate	Rio Rancho	NM
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# Become a Partner

## Become a Partner

Have you ever wondered what it means 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 have lost hope.

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

You can go directly to our website at

[www.theranches.org/partners](http://www.theranches.org/partners)

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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, either in person or via the web, to share our story of bringing hope to hurting youth.

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/](http://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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