

CORRAL

Fall 2023

Dealing With Grief & Loss

By Mikela Kull

Both grief and loss are subjects that we speak about and address often while helping the residents that we serve at The Ranches. Grief is an unavoidable side effect of adolescence and something that all of us face throughout the rest of our lives. For the kids in our care grief, while not an unfamiliar feeling, is not a concept they have learned to understand or navigate. Many of them have never heard the term grief prior to their stay here. While this is something we as a program are well equipped to handle, this situation has proven to be much different. With the loss of Heath, we have, as a community, simultaneously been walking our individual paths with grief. Each path has proven to be vastly different, and knowing how to walk the kids through their grief while also walking through our own has given all of us a new perspective on the topic.

We have had many discussions with the kids about how they are feeling and how we can help them navigate the struggles that they are having. Their feelings are significant, and the first step that we are taking is to ask the residents to express themselves and get their feelings outside of themselves so that we are better able to help them in moving forward. A few of the kids have written their thoughts down, and I would like to share them with you.

“Recently I lost a very important mentor in my life, and it was hard to come to an

understanding that he was actually gone. In the moment I felt a huge hole, a tremendous loss. I was speechless for a long time because I couldn’t understand how it was possible to never be able to talk to my mentor, he meant so much to me. I keep asking myself why this happened, and I can’t think of a reason, and not being able to make sense, makes it hurt more. I have learned that what helps me is to stay strong to help the people that I love the most. This makes me feel like I have a purpose. In my past I learned to grieve by shutting down. This grief was different, as I learned that there are a million things, I can do to help myself and my loved ones keep going strong. It’s not easy, but my mentor would have wanted me to learn the lessons that death teaches us. I’m going to do my best to honor him this way.” -KB

“Grief and loss mean anger to me. Anger is the easiest feeling for me to have and though I do feel sadness it is just hidden. My sadness is kind of in a box in the back of my mind. Unfortunately, the feeling will always be there. Not the feeling of sadness but the feeling that you lost someone important. I guess the only good thing about grief is that you get a better understanding on what life should be like. Making the best out of every moment you have because you never know when it will be gone.” -DN

The Ranches Alumni

His sensitivity and sarcasm are what made Heath who he was in my eyes. He was genuine, and he was always open for a one-on-one. Whether he was busy or not, he always gave an ear and listened to what we felt.

-Alumni, Joe S.

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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT



Mikela Kull

Interim President

There has been quite a lot happening at The Ranches since July 29. As I am sure the majority of you are aware, Heath Kull, our President, and my father passed away on that day. While we have been grieving the loss, we have been working diligently to ensure that we continue to operate and take care of the kids that we are blessed to serve. As a part of the transition to a new normal, our Senior Leadership Team met with our Board of Directors to have a discussion about the best route forward for the organization. The conclusion of that discussion was that the best plan is for me to step into my father's shoes and assume the role that he previously held. I am honored to take this step and lead this organization forward towards the vision that Heath had for where this program could go. Having said that, I am aware that many of you don't know me yet so I would like to take a moment to introduce myself to you and let you know how I got here.

I have had the distinct honor of growing up within this organization. From the time I was born, I have been here at The Ranches with my parents. Whether that was living in the cottages with them while they filled in as Houseparents or tagging along to County Fairs to meet donors and pick up donated livestock. I got more heavily involved here when I was 14 and began working at our Central Office in Albuquerque as an Administrative Assistant. I was lucky enough to have a job here throughout my education journey. After graduating with my Bachelor's in Business Administration, I became much more heavily involved with managing our childcare staff and developing them into the best they could be. While in this role, I was able to complete my Master's in Business Administration and work my way up to being our Vice President for Programs.

For the past several years, I have had the pleasure to work alongside my father to learn everything I can about what goes into running this organization. It was my father's wish that I would take over running things once he got to the point that he could no longer serve in his role. While the timing of this all is incredibly unfortunate, I plan to honor the wishes that he had and operate in this role to honor the confidence that he had in me to do so.

So, as I now follow in both my father and grandfather, Mike Kull's, footsteps I would like to thank all of you for the generosity you have shown us for so many years. My goal is to continue the progress that my father had started towards improving and expanding our program so that we can rekindle hope in as many of today's youth as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mikela Kull".

Mikela Kull - Interim President
MikelaKull@theranches.org



THE RANCHES



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"The hard part about death is that you've already found what you've "lost", it's just no longer tangible. Heath's passing is one of the hardest things I've had to go through in my time here. Personally, I have never had anyone that close to me die before, and trying to move on and live normally without that relationship has proven difficult. Heath was a man that I aspire to be, his character was authentic and that's something I truly admired about him. I selfishly wish he were still here to guide me through the process of becoming authentic in my own way and teach me how to deal with the loss and grief that I will feel throughout the rest of my life. Heath was and still is one of my favorite role models I've ever had." -AL

"Dealing with grief, overwhelming sadness took over when I realized I was never going to see that person again. Coming to really understand that I was never going to hear their voice, learn their wisdom or enjoy their company, is the hardest thing to wrap my head around. I look back on the memories that I have, but the memories are never enough. After sadness, I became angry. Anger comes in the form of regret. I regret things that I said and feel sad that there are more things that needed to be said. I realized all the opportunities that I missed. I procrastinated, and now the opportunity will never come again. I have to follow and carry the lessons I've already learned, but no new lessons will come. I hold on to what I have, I guard it closely. It's all I have left of them. That's perhaps my only connection to them that I have left. It confuses me and leaves me feeling hopeless. Somehow, holding on to those lessons feels like a way that I can honor and respect them. I feel as if it lets their memory live on. That also makes me happy. It brings a sense of comfort knowing I'm carrying a part of them with me." -LS

"This year has been the hardest year at The Ranches. Not because I can't do certain things but because so many difficult challenges have just popped up out of the blue. I have learned that I am the one that has to be the one to defeat these giants. But some days are harder than others. I am hypersensitive to certain situations like most of the residents here. That hypersensitivity stems from past experiences in my life that no one should have to go through. The night that Heath passed away I had the time of my life. Myself, a couple of my friends, and our staff that treated us that night, we went to a baseball game. I can still feel the rush when we first got through security and into the ballpark. I can still taste that pickle and popcorn that went so well together. By the time we left it was 10 and we were all wide awake. On the drive back to the Ranch we were laughing and talking. Once I got inside my room I was exhausted. I turned off the lights and crawled into bed, shortly after though I woke up to red and blue lights. In my past experience I've never been relieved to see those

two colors spinning together. Yet, there they were and even worse of all it was in front of the Kull's home. I looked and I knew something terrible happened because my favorite people were crying and running around showing clear signs of distress. I can tell you now that I knew before every child received the news in the conference room. Even though my gut was correct I still had hope that I was wrong. I had never wanted to be more wrong before in my life but there I was right as rain. Everyone that sat in that room was affected. No matter how deep the relationship was everyone felt grief cloud the room. I needed to step out for a bit because I was choking on it. We have a grief class that is taken by everyone that lives at the ranch or is employed by the ranch. No class can prepare you for grief. I can barely process school let alone grief. My best friend and I somehow ended up finding each other outside and I was holding her while she sobbed and asked me "Why is it the good people have to die?" I couldn't give her a sufficient answer because my throat was clogged by tears and because I didn't know why. After hours of crying and some laughing and some more crying we headed back to our cottages. We went to church that day and worship was hitting a little too close to home that day. The pain was felt by every single resident. I saw silent tears, girls holding each other, boys with their heads hanging down. The next day was somehow harder. There is a cycle of grief and I was learning it and trying to "practice" it. Now before you ask let me explain. My mother passed away when I was a year old. While I have 2 loving parents I was still aware something was missing. No one had ever felt safe to talk to about this mysterious pain and anger I felt. Heath was the one that felt safe to talk to. His biggest critic about my process was that I needed to stop trying to perfect the process because grief is messy. Not everyone goes through grief the same and that's okay. Some people are able to get through the day now without a single hiccup in their day. Some people still struggle to get up and go on with their life. Others might have some days that seem good from the outside but inside they're in pain screaming just trying to get to the next day. One of the last things that Heath told me was that I will grieve the rest of my life. I just didn't realize he would become a part of that." -ERS

"Grief is a very touchy subject, especially for someone like me who has lost a lot. Truth is, it never gets easier. I think you just find new ways to deal with it, some of them good, some not helpful. Since Heath's passing,

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I have a mixture of emotions which consist of anger, sadness, and loss of stability. I have been trying to work or to find something productive to do that way I don't truly have to deal with it. When you lose that one person that you thought was going to be there and provided a sense of safety and security, so much is lost when they leave. On the other hand, I'm also grateful that I was able to have a relationship with Heath and the lessons and hardships he provided for me. There were rough times where I was being the jerk, and he helped me to see that I didn't need to act that way. I appreciate all the ways he taught me to deal with my family and to make sure that I have my priorities in place, that way I can make decisions and choices that will benefit my life in the long run. I've only begun my grief process, and this is very hard. I have a lot going on in my head and it's sad but I'm also just so grateful that I was able to be part of his life and the things I have taken away from it. In a way, even though he's gone, he's teaching me another hard, life lesson." -RC

Being able to hear the residents' thoughts allows those of us who work here to know where they are starting and how we can help them navigate the hurt that they face. We will continue to help them through the difficult times that they face and help them to know that they are safe in expressing how they feel, even when it is ugly. As staff, we do not always have the perfect answer to give the residents in the times that they are struggling. However, we are blessed to have had Heath to guide us and we are lucky that many of his teachings were through emails. There was one particular email he wrote recently that specifically addressed grief that has been helpful as we try to navigate these difficult times.

"We all have our own separate and unique journey with grief and loss. Some of us have minimal experience so each loss feels monumental while others have lost someone so close and special that all others pale in comparison. While this is easily processed and understood on an intellectual level, our emotions aren't always as cooperative...and we tend to be as

(if not more) judgemental towards ourselves as we are towards others.

The truth is, loss that hurts, hurts. And loss that doesn't shake our emotional Richter Scale gets processed and compartmentalized differently than loss that hurts intensely.

But...and it is a big BUT...loss is cumulative and must be balanced by something bigger, greater, more powerful.

"Many, when dealing with loss, find comfort in those still close by. Still others find comfort in God and Faith. Some throw themselves into work and some flippantly fall into fun and positivity." – Heath Kull

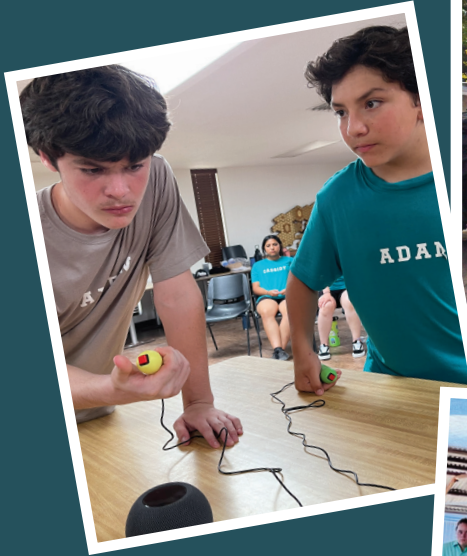
This has served as an important reminder that the struggles that we are facing are different for each of us and expecting the kids, or the staff, to be able to deal with this situation in the same way is both unrealistic and unfair. So, while we all work to navigate our own path with our grief, we will walk together and find what works for each of us. The goal remains to raise these kids into healthy adults who are able to navigate the difficulties that they will inevitably face in their lives, and this is one of those heartbreakingly difficult situations along the way.

Thank you to each of you who has been supportive of this mission. Whether it has been for a month or several years, your support of what we do has been paramount in our ability to work with these kids through the most difficult times of their young lives. Additionally, thank you all for reading the Corrals that Heath had written and being willing to support him based on what he shared with us. I am personally aware that the support from all of you meant the world to him and that he was deeply thankful to those who believed in what he was working diligently to accomplish.





THEIR JOURNEY





A 4H Season for the Record Books

As we ventured into the 4H season, we wanted to give every resident an authentic 4H experience as if The Ranches wasn't a part of their existence and reality. Jackpots are opportunities for kids to show their animal throughout the season and get immediate feedback from the judge about where their animal is succeeding and lacking. Now logistically hauling 42 animals and 30 kids across the state for a chance to show becomes a daunting task to undertake. One that could cause more chaos and dysfunction for our residents.

Therefore, the first annual The New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches Jackpot was created. We invited a livestock judge who was able to volunteer his time and knowledge and give our residents a realistic judging experience. We divided our 42 animals into classes and allowed the residents to compete against each other with their animals. We worked with a local silversmith who made 3 belt buckles for lamb, goat, and pig showmanship.

The jackpot was a huge success for our residents as they learned new techniques, experienced handling an animal in the show ring, and experienced both success and failure. This experience prepared our residents for the show and auction at the Socorro County Fair. The residents exceeded our expectations and some of their own.

We had 11 kids make the sale auction and raise almost \$35,000 that will go back to the residents to give them a head start toward adulthood. One of our residents said it best when he wrote, "I had the opportunity to care for a living thing, which taught me empathy and care for others that I hadn't experienced until arriving at The Ranches." All of this can be summed up in a Thank You to our supporters, vendors, and volunteers who helped us use the animals in an effort to raise the residents.



Belt buckles provided by Rowdy Silver from Las Cruces, NM



THE RANCHES

Another Year of Challenges

The Challenges were back on at The Ranches this year, and we once again saw residents split up into teams marked by their colored shirts. The Purple, Black, Teal, and Grey teams took on tasks over 4 days where they would have to learn about each other's strengths and weaknesses to overcome those challenges.

The first day was the kickoff, where the residents would find out which teams they would be split into, and they came together for a challenge at the Pool House.

The second day was the classic Stations challenge, where each team would go around campus to participate in challenges in different locations.

The third day was an Escape Room challenge in Albuquerque where the teams would have to make their way through a set of puzzles to make it out of a room.

The fourth and final day was marked by the Music Video challenge, where each team was assigned a song and had to come up with a dance routine that would be filmed for the rest of the teams to watch.

The winners of the whole event ended up being the Teal Team! While The Challenges were hard and the days were long, each resident learned something about each other and grew immensely through this process.



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

THANK YOU

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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

or call us direct at 505-881-3363 or 800-660-0289

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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