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WINTER 2015



ACHAIUS RANCH NEWSLETTER

LOVE. HEAL. GROW.

“Pineapple!”

- by Elisha McCulloh

“Why am I doing this? I often found myself asking. I’m weary, and we’ve barely begun. How will I keep going? I’m not even good at this!”

“Pineapple!” I hear one of our session leaders say. It is a code word we used this summer to remind us to change negative talk. I really needed that word, back before those session leaders were part of Achaius Ranch.

What a difference our summer staff made! An immeasurable positive impact on our youth program, the horses, as well as on myself and Nicole Wilson.

For the first two seasons of our youth program, Nicole and I were the only volunteers qualified and available to lead youth sessions. And this may sound odd, but neither of us feel particularly gifted as session leaders. Yes, we are capable, and yes, we have each led dozens of sessions and will continue to do so as needed. But both of us feel our greater strengths lie in different aspects of this work. Her, in horsemanship; and me, in training and supervising staff while building and overseeing the youth program. We believe in this ministry and have committed ourselves to making it happen. But it had become increasingly obvious that having more session leaders would make a big difference to the ministry and to our morale. But we didn’t know how to get them and I had begun feeling discouraged, inadequate, and weary.

Occasionally over the years, people had expressed some interest in helping out with the youth program but none had been able to commit to the many hours necessary to learn and do what it takes to be a session leader. Most people simply do not have that kind of time to volunteer, even if they have the interest! Though I found this reality completely understandable, I had not yet found a realistic way to expand the program.

As I shared in our 2014 newsletter, we had previously looked into the idea of hiring some basic help in order to free us up to lead more sessions. But we had reached the conclusion that this would be too complicated and costly. I had been compelled to put aside that idea and simply remain faithful to the mission and work set before me. I must just do the best I can, I realized. But I felt my best was entirely inadequate. Prayerfully, I struggled internally with this conflict. I confess that in my impatience for answers, I had to work hard to trust God; my mood flagged.

Then in early 2015, a possible source of help arrived in the mail. One envelope in my mailbox: a small thing that was bigger on the inside (yes, I'm a Dr. Who fan, and more so, a CS Lewis fan, who illustrated this concept in the Chronicles of Narnia.) The envelope contained a letter from the Women's Legacy Fund (WLF), part of the Montgomery County Community Foundation (MCCF), inviting the ranch to apply for a grant. Specifically, they wanted to fund a project that would benefit women and girls in Montgomery County. The idea of creating a paid staff position, in which a young woman would be trained and employed as a session leader for our summer season, seemed like it could be an answer to prayer!

Our board of directors voted that we should accept this invitation and seek funding to hire at least one session leader. Immediately we had a specific person in mind for the position: Emily Neal, who had spent the previous summer working at the ranch through Job's for America's Graduates (JAG) and seemed available, interested, and particularly suited for a role as session leader.

So I applied for the grant and everyone prayed.

Then everything went right; then wrong; then amazing!

While we waited for word on our grant application, Rodney got busy revisiting the question of running payroll, obtaining workers' compensation insurance, etc. While proving as difficult and challenging as we expected, he was finally able to find a way to make it all work. I worked on the plans for incorporating employees into our youth program and getting them trained. In addition, the ranch received an unexpected donation. So we decided that no matter whether or not we received the grant, we could manage to hire Emily!

Then we learned that Emily would have to take summer classes and she wouldn't be available after all. This was a huge disappointment, as we knew how great she'd be as a session leader! But it prompted us to spread the word and see if we could find another suitable option. We immediately learned of two excellent possibilities right under our noses! Alice Combs and Jenny Zehner were interested and available. We knew them both well enough to recognize that these would be excellent candidates. But could we afford to hire two if we didn't receive any grant money?

Then we received the great news that the WLF had chosen to partially fund our request with a grant of \$4000!

Then Emily's plans changed again and she was available after all! Suddenly, we had not just one but three awesome young ladies on our team!

Although the WLF grant paid only about half of our total cost for these three session leaders, as Rodney points out, that grant invitation was the nudge from God that prompted us to dig deeper until we found a way to begin having paid staff. Without that nudge, we would not have hired even one person this year, let alone three!

And those three worked (and played) hard! Guided and helped by Parelli instructor and friend of the ranch, Tiffany Rowe, Nicole started in early May and spent more than a month training them daily in natural horsemanship until they were all working in level three of the Parelli system. I also worked with them on "people skills." By early June, they were ready for the kids.

And wow! Did we welcome a lot of kids this year! We went from the two of us working as session leaders with just 15 kids per season in the previous years, to more than 120 this year, with the help of our three new session leaders, as well as an amazing, committed young volunteer, Hannah Clarke, who worked and played and learned right alongside our paid staff.

We also had one JAG intern this year, Frances Dunaway, who pitched in throughout the summer to help make it possible to serve so many children and their families. And we cannot over-emphasize how thankful we are to Tina Wilson for providing childcare for Nicole's kids so that she could train workers, horses, and help with sessions!

Yes, the number of youth and families served this year is great evidence of growth in our youth program. But the impact goes way beyond mere numbers. The WLF grant was intended to help women and girls in our community. It happens that the majority of children participating in our program tend to be girls, and the grant made it possible for us to serve more of them. (The quotes scattered throughout this newsletter attest to the positive impact participation in sessions had on some of those girls.)

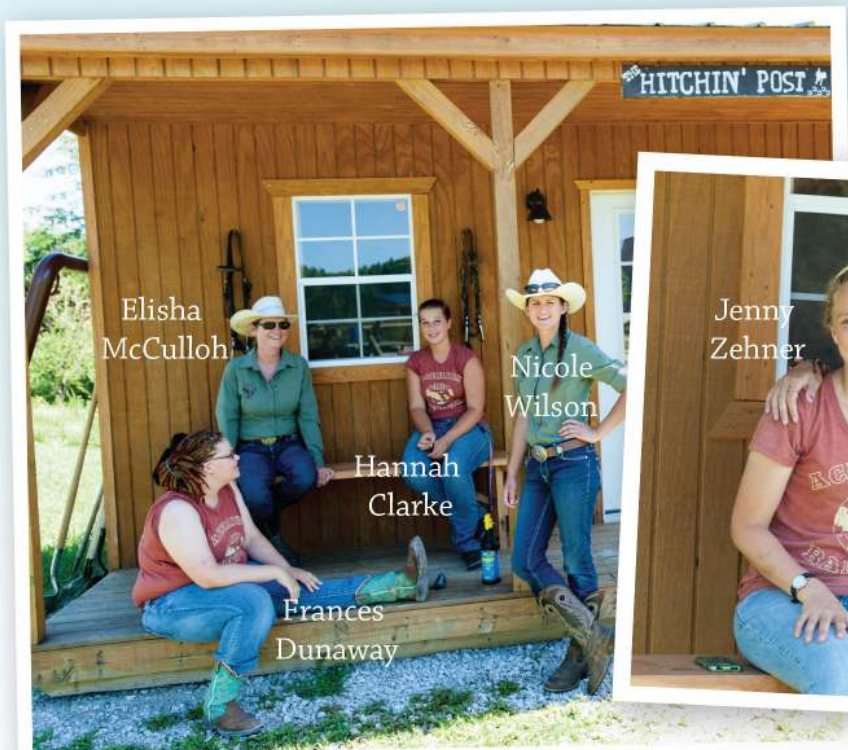
It worked out that the majority of sessions were lead by the three new leaders. This meant that I was free to oversee and supervise, which made everything run more smoothly, and Nicole was able to focus most of her efforts on training the workers and the horses, which is where she excels!

Spunky, affectionate, talented Alice; passionate, creative, soft-hearted Emily; and gentle, inquisitive Jenny with her sparkling laugh. They each made a unique, positive mark on the children they led, their horse partners, and on visitors they greeted. Over and over, I observed how these talented, energetic young women were able to connect with the youth in powerful ways, which is exactly the intention of this program. The children clearly benefited!

But we mustn't overlook the benefits to the session leaders, themselves. They grew in so many ways! Not just those three but also Hannah and Frances. Through the relationships we all built with each other, in addition to the many challenges of working with the youth, we often found ourselves outside of our comfort zones, which is where change occurs. It was one of my greatest joys this summer to watch that personal growth take shape in my young friends, even as we all watched it occur in the youth we served.

As for me? I feel encouraged, energized, and excited! Instead of finding myself feeling like I must carry on with this mission, I now feel like I get to keep doing this wonderful work! Yes, I know well enough that there will be many moments ahead when weariness and discouragement threaten, but now I have the memory of this successful season to encourage me, and the exciting challenge of building upon it next year. As we often remind ourselves here, God knows what we need and when we need it and once again he showed us he is faithful to provide.

And I have "Pineapple!" In the future, when I start to think negatively, my pineapple moments will include this truth: Yes, I'm inadequate, but God most definitely is not!



Elisha
McCulloh

Nicole
Wilson

Hannah
Clarke

Frances
Dunaway



Jenny
Zehner

Emily
Neal

Alice
Combs

Tiffany

It is not an overstatement to say that every good thing that happened in our youth program this year would not have been possible without help and guidance from our new friend, Parelli Professional Tiffany Rowe. We first met Tiffany in 2013 at a similar ministry, Stormhaven Youth Ranch in Kentucky, and were quite impressed (and entertained) by her skills and teaching style. We met her there again in 2014 and I approached her to see whether she might be willing to come to Achaius Ranch to help Nicole and me with a few issues we were having with our horses (and our own horsemanship). She traveled 360 miles round trip several times to work with us on our many issues. We learned that she is both professionally and personally committed to helping people succeed in ministries such as ours. She clearly has a heart for it, as well as the skills!



Therefore, when we found ourselves with new session leaders to train, we naturally sought Tiffany's help. Not only did she provide multiple days of workshops for our entire staff, but she also helped us to shape the way we run our sessions to set everyone up for a safe, positive experience. With her guidance, we matched session leaders with horses to bring out the best in the horses as well as the people. Her influence had a positive impact on every facet of our program and on each of us at the ranch. In fact, our staff has a favorite question to ask ourselves when we're uncertain how to handle a situation: "What would Tiffany do?" This is in no way to make light of the famous "WWJD," but indeed reminds us that we can see Christ in and can learn so much from each other, if we allow him to work through us. Tiffany models that kind of leadership and servant's heart. She has been very generous and supportive, doing so much for the ranch, beyond the professional services she provides. After learning so much from Tiffany this year, Nicole is now more equipped to train future session leaders in natural horsemanship.

Our program has taken on a new and manageable shape with her help. We will continue to seek her guidance and leadership as needed and she will return in 2016 for more workshops (yet to be scheduled). You can read more about how, through the grace of God, Tiffany has impacted us, personally, and by extension, the ranch, on our blog.

As an added blessing, we were very fortunate and thankful to receive an unexpected \$1000 Community Engagement grant (thanks to Sheridan Hadley and the MCCF) to help defray the cost for Tiffany to help train our staff.



Horses

We have been making some important changes to our herd. With our interns and youth working/playing daily with them, our session horses have gained confidence and maturity, making them ever safer for riders. With such intense work, though, some of our older horses began showing signs of fatigue. We have realized the importance of bringing in suitable horses to replace retirees. Merlyn, a Haflinger pony, came to us mid-summer, and we're excited to see how the kids will enjoy him next season.



You might also notice Ronin, a young buckskin Quarter Horse gelding, at the ranch. He is Nicole's personal horse, here to help her advance her horsemanship through Parelli level four.



Another wonderful addition is Iago, a big, handsome, fun-loving Pinto gelding!



With mixed emotions, we said good-bye to Storm in October. He was showing signs of discomfort in his knees, which often comes with age, and we felt it wasn't fair to ask too much from him. We are quite sad to see him go, but very happy to have found a great home with a wonderful family that loves and will care for and enjoy him for years to come!

You can learn more about our herd at achaiusranch.org.





Property improvements

How fun it is to see projects completed at the ranch each year! In 2015, major improvements included a Welcome Center, picnic shelter, play area, and ranch sign. The place is shaping up nicely!

And what is in the works for 2016? We plan to add onto and improve our pole barn so that we have the option to work and play with horses under shelter! No more session cancellations due to rain! This project will also provide much-needed storage space and two large horse stalls, which would serve many purposes including providing a quarantine area for rescued horses. A generous \$17,000 grant from the Montgomery County Community Foundation will help to make this project possible. Thank you, MCCF!



Sponsor A Session

Since the WLF grant was a one-time benefit and only paid about half of what it cost us to pay our three new session leaders in 2015, in order to continue and build our youth program, we need to bring more financial partners on board. Therefore, we are launching a Session Sponsorship Program. One 90-minute youth session costs the ranch approximately \$30, which includes paying the trained worker to lead the session, prep the horse, perform duties after the session, advance their horsemanship and people skills, etc. This \$30 does not include other costs to the ranch for our youth program, such as insurance, equipment, or horse care. Nor does it include any compensation for the Program Director or Ranch Manager (who are both volunteers), nor for the use, improvement, or maintenance of the property. Our aim with the Session Sponsorship Program is simply to make it possible for us to offer as many sessions (which are always free to participants) as we can, providing



"It was a delight to watch [my son's] growth...over the summer, and to know that he was under patient, gentle guidance throughout the process."

– Rachel Hassler



Sponsor a Horse

For each horse at Achaius Ranch, it costs approximately \$150 per month to pay for food, farrier, vet, and other basic needs. (Miniatures cost around half as much.) We are launching an exciting new sponsorship program to help with these costs. For complete info on how you can participate, and what you can gain from this program, please visit achaiusranch.org, or contact elisha@achaiusranch.org for details.

"I like how they have you do some horse chores so...you realize it's hard work to have a horse....their horses are the best horses you could ride when you're a starter because they are so so so so calm. Starting with a prayer makes me happy because not many places do. Everyone is so kind. I always feel welcomed there."

– Haley (session participant)

Other ways to help

- As always, in addition to (or instead of) participating in one of our new sponsorship programs, general donations to the ranch are vital to this ministry and greatly appreciated! If you would like to help financially, please send a check, payable to Achaius Ranch, to 4592 E 750 S, Ladoga, IN 47954. You can also make one-time or repeating donations via PayPal. (See achaiusranch.org for details.)
- If you are interested in being a part of the work we do at Achaius Ranch, please check out the volunteer info on our website.
- We hope you will keep the ranch in your prayers!
- Please remember us when shopping on Amazon through their Amazon Smile program!



"Our experience here has been wonderful. I have never seen Haley respond to anything like she has this. She has formed a special bond with Jenny [her session leader]. I am very impressed with the training of the [session leaders] and all the small details Haley has learned."

– Krista Webb



"The Ranch has been invaluable for my daughter. She...displays a confidence in herself at the Ranch that is rarely viewed in other venues. She is happy and calm no matter what she is participating in....It is difficult to put into words what I see in my daughter's face and in her disposition when she is at the Ranch...it is as if she is truly at home. We love you all and what you are doing for so many wounded hearts and souls in this community."

– Kalay Colley





Mission Statement

Achaius Ranch exists to nurture healing and growth through the interaction of people with horses in a Christ-centered environment.

Contact Us

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"Elisha and Nicole are very professional in their work with the children and the animals. They are totally concerned with the well being of the horses and the safety, education, confidence, and enjoyment of the kids. They have employed first rate staff members who show they understand the mission of Achaius as they treat the horses and children with respect and care. It is a pleasure to see the work that goes on at Achaius Ranch."

– Sheridan Hadley



"I have seen my daughter, as a leader, learn understanding, empathy, and self-confidence in working with both horses and children. The safety, cleanliness, and welcoming nature of the ranch as a whole makes it a wonderful place to be. The horses are loved and well cared for."

– Damaris Zehner (mother of Jenny, a session leader)

"I brought the Jobs for American Graduates to tour your facility as a field trip last spring. As is always the case, some students, just for whatever reason, do not engage in most (sometime 'all') class activities. No matter what is suggested, there are always a few that raise a lip with disdain. Last spring, when we toured your facility, was the first time the entire group was on the same page and engaged in being there....all were interested and willing to participate. I am not sure if it was the terrible conditions which some of the horses had endured, or what, but all the students were kind and compassionate. It brought out a side of some that I really didn't know existed....Your facility is such an asset to this area."

– Ken Dieruf

