



# The Ranch Hand

A publication of In Balance Ranch Academy

Spring 2007

## Alumni Spotlight

Hunter W.



I have no doubt in my mind that I am where I am today because of the lessons and tools I learned at the Ranch.

It would be impossible for me to tell about all of them at one time, so I will just mention a few.

The first thing that comes to mind is a line from the creed that says "We will shoulder our full responsibility as brothers, sons, grandsons, friends, and citizens." Since my graduation, I have put this line into action and have found a whole new meaning to it.

I am able to be the big older brother I never could be before, one that looks after his

sister and hangs out with her.

I spend time with the family I hid from

*continued inside, see Alumni*

## Youth Substance Abuse Treatment — Predictors of Success

by Patrick Barrasso MSW, LCSW

I believe all of us in this field would like to guarantee our students/clients/patients that they will leave our programs and live well and successful lives for ever more. Yet, we all know there is no silver bullet, no exact formula that guarantees success. However, the research does reflect various predictors of success based on well-crafted studies of adolescent treatment outcomes. In Balance programming, at all levels, the Ranch, the transitional living program, and our intensive outpatient program, all operate under each of the principles cited in the current research.

### Treatment Completion

One study describes youth as twice as likely to reduce alcohol and drug use in the year following treatment completion than the sample that left before completion. (Winters, Stinchfield, Opland, Welling and Latimer, 2000). This finding is absolutely consistent with the Ranch outcomes. You see, most youth in treatment have had years of stopping before finishing anything. They have given up on believing they can successfully complete anything. This feeling of shame and self-loathing fuels the engine of their self-destructive behavior. Not finishing treatment becomes another "almost" in their lives; more evidence that they are not capable of crossing the finish line. Sadly, parents will sometimes line up behind this because they are also afraid their child is not capable. Conversely, when everyone lines up and communicates to the child that he/she is capable, powerful and positive things can and do happen. In Balance had a student that gave a speech that went like this, "I wanted to quit and my parents wouldn't support it and the program wouldn't support it. This gave me the push I needed to finish and now for the rest of my life, I know when things that are important for me to complete get tough, I can push through the tough times and finish what I start. You see, I am now a finisher, not a quitter." This was almost one year ago and he remains clean and successfully taking on college. This is why In Balance goes to such great lengths to assure each student is able to complete the entirety of the program and gets to celebrate Graduation.



### Longer Treatment Stays

Youth that stayed 90+ days were 1.5 times more likely to be drug and alcohol-free one year post-treatment. (DATOS-A). This finding is also easy to understand given the new knowledge of the brain science as it pertains to adolescent development. Dr. Wilkins, M.D., as vice chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, concluded that adolescents are best able to process cognitive and emotional learning. Good news, bad news, depending on who is doing the teaching. Youth involved in deviant subcultures learn a lot of anti-social mechanisms of thinking and behaving. The unlearning of these maladaptive mechanisms of existing take a long time to unlearn and replace with pro-social beliefs and emotional responses.

### 12 Step Meeting Attendance

(Kelly, Myers & Brown, 2000). This finding dovetails perfectly into the post-discharge environment as one of the best predictors of success. Often professionals underestimate the efficacy of

*See Success, continued on inside*

*Success, continued from other side*

12 step work as part of a comprehensive approach to treatment of adolescents. 12 step work alone with teens has not had the success it has with adults. That is why In Balance uses an eclectic approach with a strong emphasis on linking youth to a 12 step community once they leave us. It does no good to recommend a 12 step program to youth unless they truly understand what a 12 step program can offer. At In Balance Ranch, they are mentored on the 12 steps in almost every aspect of their program over the year they are with us. It is also imperative that when youth finish treatment for substance abuse, that they have a strong support community to return to. AA or NA can often provide that, if they really understand what the program is all about and have had positive experiences with it!

### **Avoiding Alcohol is a Predictor of Success After Treatment**

(Brown, Tapert, Tate & Abrantes, 2000). This seems at face value to make perfect sense yet all too often, parents may unintentionally communicate that drugs are not an option but moderate alcohol use may be tolerated. The majority of us in the treatment field understand that if youth could not moderate their drug use, almost certainly the same will occur with alcohol. And those of us with extensive histories in the addiction field have seen addicts time and time again switch substances only to have the same devastating outcome! We must impress upon young people the importance of staying drug and alcohol-free one day at a time while they integrate into their post-discharge environments. The longer they go without using any mind-altering substances, the greater the chance of long term success becomes.

### **Positive Relationships With Treatment Counselors**

(Jainchill, Hawke, DeLeon & Yagelka, 2000). Since approximately 1990, I have been giving trainings both locally and nationally about relationship based efficacy in the work with youth. Youth have to feel valued and understood by the treatment professional. Over the last 20 years, I have seen counselors over-identify with youth and youth, more than other populations, will see right through this approach and it will not be effective. I have also seen counselors under-identify with the clients and this is equally ineffective. There is a middle ground that takes good training and ongoing development and supervision to achieve. It is critical that the treatment professional needs to be able to connect with youth in order for change to occur. I always say in my trainings, "Be friendly, not their friend." I also strongly believe we must role model for our youth the change we expect in them. Youth can see through hypocrisies better than most.

### **Living Outside the Family Home After Discharge**

(Jainchill, et al.) This finding may be confusing for parents. At the heart of this finding is the strong role that the environment played with some youth in the development of their addiction. Triggers come in all forms; the most common being emotional. Therefore, homes often have been the source of high levels of stress and discord contributing to these emotional triggers that can lead to relapse, especially for youth newly in recovery. In Balance Living, a transitional living program in Tucson, was founded for youth leaving treatment with this fact in mind. Also, because of the logistics of implementing a comprehensive aftercare plan, families may not be able to support the aftercare plan. One of our students spoke about this to his community recently: "Both my parents work and put in long hours. Getting me to 90 meetings in 90 days and outpatient as well as school and counseling was not going to be possible. So, I chose transitional living because all that is built into it and that's what I need to make sure I succeed upon leaving treatment."

Also considered in the data here is avoiding deviant peers; (Jainchill, et al.) breaking free from the subculture that used to support the old self-destructive patterns. I have seen over the years youth strong in treatment return home only to find that old subculture too hard to avoid. These are some of the important factors to consider in this finding.

### **No Silver Bullet Exists for Guaranteed Success**

Yet, there are an abundance of factors that can contribute to a successful outcome, many of which I have covered in this article. It has been and continues to be a great honor to serve this population. I am grateful to see successes every day for the work treatment professionals do all over the country to enhance outcomes for our youth who struggle with substance abuse and addiction. My experience is that adolescent treatment professionals are a unique and highly committed bunch. We must continually improve how we stabilize youth but more importantly how we sustain their growth and development after they leave our treatment communities.

### *Alumni, from page 1*

for almost two years. My grandparents passed, but my grandmother got to see "me" before she left.

I am a friend who listens today.

I also have the responsibility to work full time at a greenhouse/nursery.

There are so many gifts in my life and so much to appreciate and be grateful for. I look forward every day to doing the things that I love to do. Life is great.

And I am truly grateful for the tools and the experiences I gained from being at the Ranch.

Hunter W



*And from Hunter's mom...*

*He is doing soooooo well! He continues to grow (mentally, not physically, thankfully!) and has evolved into the most incredible, amazing person. He is in such a great place in his life right now. He's achieved a terrific balance between working full-time at a plant nursery, going to AA meetings at least three times a week, seeing his girlfriend, playing guitar, taking care of his shiny new truck he purchased himself and spending lots of quality time with his family and doggie. He is so mature, responsible and loving. I can't tell you guys how grateful we continue to be for all you and the Ranch did for him.*

# Hurdles overcome and success achieved!

In Balance Ranch Academy honors eighteen with high school diplomas



*Patrick Barrasso, In Balance Ranch founder and Executive Director, speaks during the recent In Balance Ranch Academy high school graduation ceremony. "This has definitely got to be one of the toughest schools in the country to graduate from. Finishing high school while facing the challenges of recovery from substance abuse is no easy task, and these young men can all be proud of their achievement."*

**L**a Mariposa Resort provided the perfect, serene setting for eighteen In Balance Ranch Academy students to participate in a ceremony commemorating their dream of graduating from high school. Two other students also received their diplomas, although they were unable to attend the ceremony. Parents, siblings, extended family members and friends joined in the celebration. A gorgeous Tucson sunset provided the perfect backdrop to this important rite of passage for the new graduates.

Each student composed a speech to share with the attendees. Most of the graduates' speeches focused on the struggles they had endured with drug/alcohol addiction, experiences with school failure and resulting low self-esteem. A prevalent theme of the students' presentations was the difficulties they encountered in a traditional high school setting and their reluctance to believe they could successfully graduate and go on to college. Many expressed their satisfaction at achieving high grades and their excitement for their future plans, which they shared with all in attendance.

The following excerpt from one student's remarks exemplifies the difficulties our

students typically face and the significance of achieving this important milestone.

"If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning."

"This quote by Carl Rogers is the perfect description of my senior year. The educational program at In Balance Ranch Academy is defined by its uniqueness and its difference from regular public schooling. The classes we take from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Independent High School are built around self-initiated learning and self direction. This structure helped me greatly this past year. Coming into the Academy, I had an average G.P.A of about 2.5, which breaks down to about a C+ average; this was not acceptable to me nor to my parents. However, through the uniqueness and self-direction of the In Balance Academic Program, I was able to turn my educational path around and headed in the direction it needed to be."

"A year ago I didn't know what my future

held. I had spent no time looking at colleges; neither my grade point average nor my ACT scores were very promising, and I just had a general lack of motivation to succeed after high school."

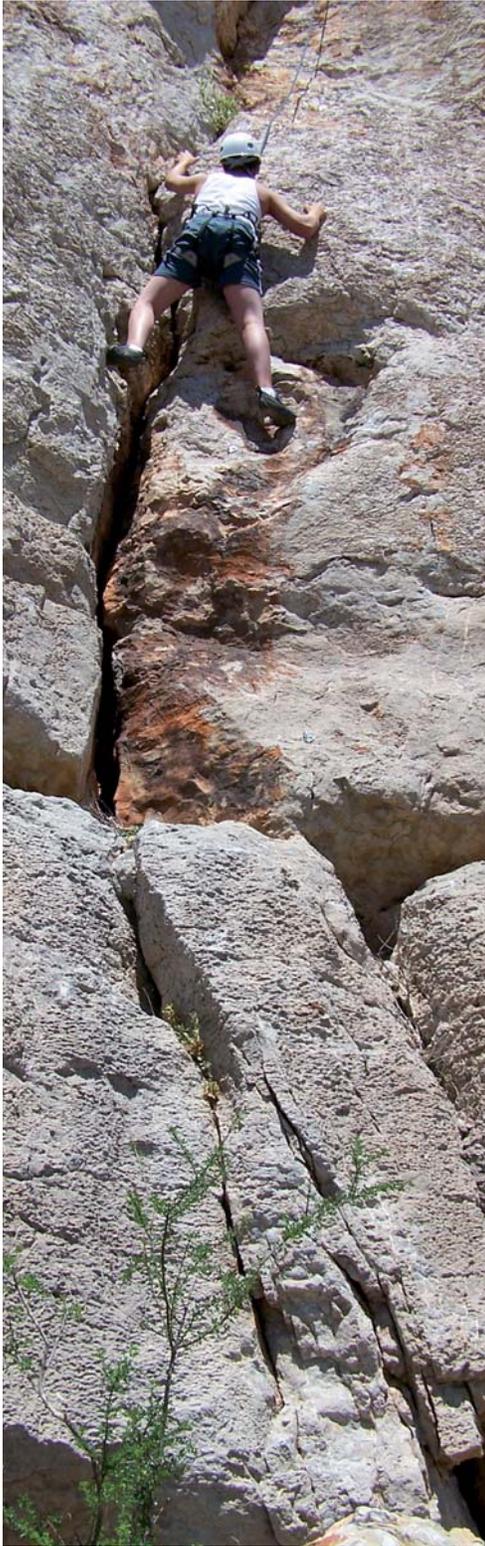
"As I am standing here today my life's direction has changed tremendously. I have graduated from the University of Nebraska's High School program and have been accepted to seven universities around the country and am still waiting to hear from a couple more. I never thought that I would be able to have so many options for college and for my life. I am thankful for the opportunities at In Balance Ranch Academy and look forward to a promising life after high school."

It is indeed rewarding to be able to help these fine young men rediscover their innate talents and encourage them to follow their hearts and dreams to find their passion in life. While parents and students are thankful for the gift of healing and academic success realized at the Ranch, the staff is equally thankful for the gift of working with the students and their families.

*Lynda Hendricks, MS Ed.  
Academic Director*

# Rock Climbing at the Ranch

By Matt Walker



Each evening from the porch of my office at the Ranch, the General Store, I can catch the last rays of sunlight as they light up the rocky crags of Cochise Stronghold. The Stronghold lies 25 miles east of the Ranch on the slopes of the Dragoon Mountains. This landscape is a maze of granite domes – perfect for rock climbing and one hundred years ago it was perfect for Chief Cochise and his Apaches to hide from the surrounding U.S. Calvary. The terrain is awe-inspiring and mysterious.

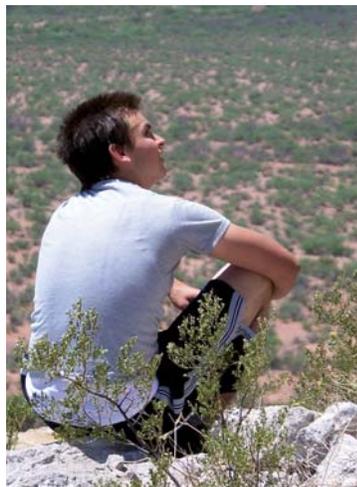
Each Wednesday I take a milieu to the Stronghold. Our time is spent learning the craft of rock climbing, entrusting our safety to each other, and pushing our own self-imposed limitations and boundaries. Rock climbing is a rich metaphor for the challenges and successes in life. It condenses the human experience into a singular focused activity that demands attention and focus from each member of the group, self-discipline, clear communication, listening, observation of the subtle, and the ability to separate actual risk from perceived risk. Not to mention the physical demands of coordinated movement, balance, and strength.

We begin this process by teaching the boys how each piece of equipment works and how to use and care for it properly. From this point the learning takes on an experiential tone – very little direction is given to the climber, so as to give him the opportunity to learn and

receive feedback from his own body and mind – simultaneously, the other students are taught how to belay (safely manage the ropes) and coach the climber they are working with. It is at once a collaborative and individual learning experience.

Beginning climbers have a tendency to want to climb with their arms and do pull-ups up the wall – while that may work in Hollywood movies, the reality is quite different. Climbing is a movement that comes from the core of the body and the largest muscle group – the legs. As students learn this, they adapt their style and work with the rock to ascend – examining the rock for small divots and ledges, feeling the granite on their fingertips for indentations as hand holds. Progress is measured in inches and not feet.

The metaphor of movement and successes in small increments is quickly embraced by the students. They share the parallel experiences they have had in their own recovery – if they look too far ahead they are unable to manage their daily recovery – much like an inability to move on the rock if they do not look at what is directly in front of them at the moment. The process of climbing involves individual challenges accompanied by the support of the belayer – as in the recovery process, all forms of support are invaluable to the continued sobriety of the addict. The rope is a lifeline, both literal and metaphoric, connecting the climber and belayer.



*Rock climbing can be viewed as a metaphor for recovery. Movement and success in small increments is parallel to the what happens making the journey to a healthy and sober lifestyle.*

*Rock climbing involves individual challenges with support from those around you — much like the recovery from substance abuse. The view from the top after a successful climb can truly take one's breath away and give one time to pause and contemplate the next challenge.*

# Catching Up with the Equine Program

In Balance Ranch Academy Equine Program is truly multi-faceted

So much has been going on in the Equine Program it is difficult to capsule it in an article. On a daily basis students are finding wisdom, fun, and insights from their interactions with their horses. Our family Weekend Workshops offer often powerful experiences and insights about how we interact with each other and our world, as seen and fed back to us through the horses. The Equine Four-Day Wilderness trips have offered a greater depth to this journey. The involvement in our larger community through being an integral part of the Equine Voices fundraiser was a heart-warming and very gratifying experience. And our cattle drives and monthly Equine Fun Days at the Ranch are providing the students with a taste of how to have good clean, sober fun.

The daily aspect of our equine program includes the therapeutic exercises as well as the therapeutic moments that spontaneously happen when people interact with horses. A student spends his first equine session in the round pen with his horse. He is invited to relax and then interact with his horse from the ground. Eventually he will ride bareback, moving the horse around the round pen through developing his own communication with the horse. Beginning a student's interactions with horses in this way, I've found, is so much more interesting and internally opening than the typical teaching of riding skills. When they ask how to make the horse do this or that I'll invite them to develop their own relationship and communication with their horse. Through this exercise students have disclosed to me many deeper issues including; fears born of other events in their lives; difficulty developing relationships with anyone due to having been taken advantage of as a child (an event that had not previously been disclosed); trouble maintaining motivation in school and other areas of life; tending to start things and quit when something becomes challenging.

Shannon Dexter LISAC, LCSW  
IBRA Equestrian Director

## A Student's Perspective

In his Level Four presentation, Peter D. shared the many relationship issues that his horses have helped him resolve. The following are some excerpts:

"I have ridden three different horses while I have been at the Ranch. I have also made a lot of changes and growth while I have been here. Each horse can represent a phase in my recovery."

"I first rode Ricochet. I was struggling a lot with self-esteem and depression; Ricochet had none of that. He was confident and happy and this definitely rubbed off. Being able to learn to ride well and be picked for things like cattle drives helped me with both of those problems. Even more than just that was being with Ricochet and doing the relationship building. I overcame these problems and I don't think that it's just a coincidence that I was with Rico. I believe he had a large part in helping me with those things."

"Next I rode Zena. I always was amazed at Zena and how big and pretty she is. I remember how nervous and intimidated I was when I first handled her and got her out of her pasture. Riding Zena was a lot of fun, but even more fun was just hanging out with her. I would just

groom her and walk around and talk with her. At this time I was really emotionally detached from people and didn't really know how to love anyone. This all changed when I hung out with Zena. I fell in love with her from day one. She was very loving and taught me what it was to truly care for someone else."

"Finally there was Lucas. Luke is small but he's got a lot of heart. I remember at first how sad he seemed all the time. I figured he just needed to have a friend and build a relationship with someone. I took care of him and rode him on a lot of trail rides to give him confidence, have fun, and give him a feeling of purpose. On the equine camping trip we really had a good time and became closer. Luke taught me how to be a friend, and pass on the things that I have learned."



Peter D. and Luke — "Luke taught me how to be a friend, and pass on to others the things that I have learned."

"This is what this last part of my stay has been about; trying to help people who are in a place that I used to be. I have grown a lot and these horses have touched my life and helped me with this process. I would have never guessed that sometimes the best therapist can be a horse."

## Family Weekends

During the Family Weekend, families will participate with their sons in Equine Assisted Psychotherapy. Some of the profound insights families have received include:

- a divorced mother and father realizing that, under stress, they fall back into not communicating with each other and their son ends up in the middle of their tension feeling very frustrated, confused, and overwhelmed;
- a student realizes that when with his parents, he regresses into not expressing his thoughts, and needs, and in his passivity, neglects taking care of himself;
- a family realizes that they can now trust their son and begin to let go of their anxieties and

control, as his maturity, assertiveness, and commitment to taking care of himself is evident in everything he says and does;

- a family realizes they need to make a plan, listen to each other, pay attention to the emotions of each family member, as well as thinking through the problem-solving aspects of a challenge in order to succeed in recovery.

- learning to work as a team, communicate with each other more effectively, and to pull

in community resources to accomplish anything successfully.

## Four-Day Wilderness Adventures

Our Equine Four-Day Wilderness adventures have been a great example of how we work hard and we play hard. The experience is designed to be a time away from the busy schedule of the Ranch to be with your milieu,

*continued on back, see Equine*

*Equine, continued from other side*

your horse, and the equine staff and myself, for a fun, relaxing, and very therapeutic adventure. Students engage in groups, solo time, and beautiful trail rides high into the foothills of the Santa Rita Mountains near the town of Sonoita. During the solos, students reflected on their guiding principles, their relationship with a Higher Power, and other activities designed to help them do their internal work. During the groups, students established closer ties with their group members, and continued to deepen trust and a sense of caring about each others' recovery.

### Equine Fun Days

Sober fun is a main theme at the Ranch and our Equine Fun Days are just that. We take a half day off our usual schedule and whoop it up at the equine arena! The activities range from bareback riding, to a polo match, to a donut relay race, traditional barrel races, and even a cross-country event. In this, the students who are learning to jump, navigated the ten sets of straw-bale jumps in the back field and were judged on their equitation skills. The students take turns announcing the events and results through the PA system which is side-splittingly entertaining in and of itself! The

competition is fierce yet good-natured, with milieus awards going to the high point winner. The milieus award is an ice cream outing to Sierra Vista for the entire milieus.

### On the Trail

We continue to feel very grateful for our relationship with our neighbors, the Brosnans, for including us in their cattle drives. They have hundreds of cattle on thousands of acres, and need to round them up every few weeks to check on them and give vaccines and other treatments. The students need to show high

level riding skills as well as a commitment to their overall work at the Ranch in order to be considered. Over the past two years, dozens of students have participated and every one of them returned to the Ranch exhilarated and with many stories to tell.

Overall, the Equine Program at In Balance Ranch Academy continues to thrive and excel in its diversity of activities and many ways in which we effect change through the companionship of horses.



*In Balance Ranch Academy horses perform a variety of functions. Roger and Troy are pictured above facilitating a group during a recent Family Weekend.*



### In Touch...

*Patrick-*

*When you said Steven had been taken out of his comfort zone to attend the Ranch, I finally realized my feelings — sending Steven to In Balance Ranch Academy had taken me completely out of my comfort zone. There were many times during his stay when I wanted to jump in my car and go pick him up. This was mostly until the second family workshop. I had the courage to leave him there because of two things you said at the first Family Weekend: completing the Ranch program may be one of the few successes of these boys and I had been protecting Steven from the possibility of failure. I had protected him in school and from sporting events and I was even afraid to let him ride at the Ranch because I thought he might fail.*

*Well, Steven has now tried a lot of things — snow-*

*boarding, rock climbing and riding. There really is no failure involved, it's just experiencing events and we all do that on our own terms. Where Steven has really succeeded though is at life — he has now taken the risk to live life without the masking of drugs and alcohol.*

*With this new understanding and love, I hope I can now stay out of Steven's way and continue to live with the risk of failure, success, sadness and happiness; a full life.*

*I am forever grateful.*

*With love to all,*

*Marti (In Balance parent)*

### In Service...

Equine Voices is a rescue organization near Green Valley which we have been helping in many ways for the past three years. We have adopted eight horses from Equine Voices and brought three of them and twelve students to the Equine Voices fundraiser in Tucson in March. Three students and the three horses and I held the spotlight for a twenty minute talk on our collaboration entitled, *Reciprocal Recovery;*

*Horses and Humans Helping Each Other.*

The horses and students performed their myriad of ground and riding skills in front of blaring speakers, and hundreds of people. They all did beautifully and felt very good about being part of such an amazing day. The event raised tens of thousands of dollars for the organization and Karen Pomroy said she received a mountain of positive feedback on our part in the event.

