

# CAUSES THAT MATTER



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## Horses Lend a Helpful Hoof for Mental Health

*Rainhorse Equine Assisted Services*

*Gordon & Edna Sykes Fund and S. Wesley & Margaret F. Hyatt Fund*

**W**yomingites know that when you face a problem, sometimes you just have to “cowboy up.” But some problems need a little extra help, even when we don’t want to ask for it. Mental health is one of these issues. Even when help is available, asking for it can feel strange, even daunting.

Maria Eastman believes that there is a way around that stigma. What is at the heart of her approach? “It’s the horses,” she says. Addressing mental health with the help of horses suits many Wyomingites who might not otherwise seek support. Horses “are a common factor to everyone in



A young Rainhorse client bonds with one of the horses. Right: Maria Eastman rehabilitates a former racing Thoroughbred.

Wyoming. Almost everyone has had something to do with a horse in Wyoming, or has wanted to.”

Maria is the executive director of the equine therapy organization Rainhorse. Equine therapy offers the community “a wonderful pathway into bringing [mental health] services to people who might otherwise be a little reticent to do something.”

From Maria’s ranch in the Bighorn Basin, Rainhorse provides these services to a wide range of clients. Maria, her horses, and a small staff provide programs for older people, adults with developmental delays, cancer survivors, and troubled youth.

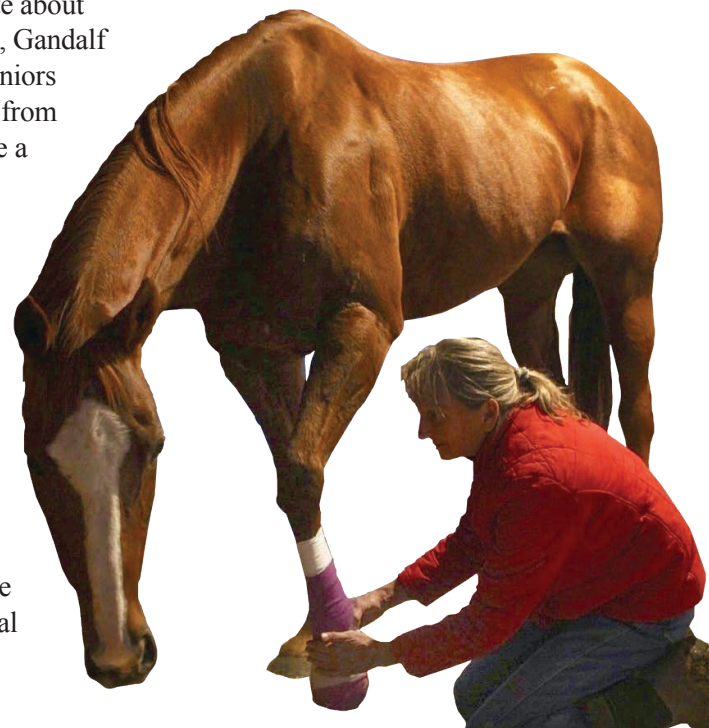
One program, “Horse Tales: Poetry and Ponies for Dementia Care,” invites seniors with dementia to write about Rainhorse’s miniature horses, Gandalf and Gabby. Many of these seniors feel isolated, and these visits from Gandalf and Gabby can make a big difference.

Maria also leads a program called “Graining the Mare,” which helps women develop their leadership skills by exploring emotional intelligence. The emotional bond with horses can be profound, notes Maria. “We’re both creatures that live in communities, and we both are very sensitive to the emotional

states of others in our community, although we humans have often lost some of that sensitivity.” At Rainhorse, clients can work to regain some of this lost connection.

Maria and her team of humans and horses have plans for the future. Maria is especially eager to work more with troubled adolescents. Young people who “may be resistant to the idea of counseling,” she comments, often “really want to build a relationship with a horse.”

Because of WYCF supporters like you, more and more Wyomingites have been able to build these relationships. More of us are learning that sometimes, “cowboy up” just means asking for the right help.



# Learning and Growing through Art Education

*C-V Ranch School: Arts, Culture, Community & Wyoming Special-Needs Youths*

*McCarthy Social Services Fund*

**A**rt can teach us things about ourselves that nothing else can. “Art lets me express my emotions in a safe way,” remarks one student at the C-V Ranch School in Teton County. “It’s easier than using words,” says another. For these young people, art is something special: it’s “a part of me that I’m able to have for myself.”

These lessons can have profound impacts on a young person’s life. When art helps students “develop a more positive self-image, the door opens for other areas of growth as well,” says Tonia Ralston. Tonia is the art instructor and program coordinator at the school. By teaching art, Tonia hopes to give each student a chance to explore their “environment, ethnicity, cultural background, and community.”

The C-V Ranch School hosts young people from across Wyoming with special emotional and intellectual needs. During residential programs lasting at least three months, students have room to grow and learn in a safe space.

While the school offers students a safe haven, the art program lets them build connections with the community in a meaningful way. The young artists learn from local experts and take field trips. Their work is shown around the community. Pieces by the students have even been displayed at the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson.

Tonia is passionate about her program, believing that the students “have the potential to succeed – to live full lives, to experience joy, and to realize accomplishment.” An experienced artist and teacher, Tonia has been at C-V Ranch School since



Above, students learn from expert teachers. Below, examples of students’ artwork.

1993 – long enough to see this impact time and again.

Much of this program’s success comes from the stability it offers to students. “To have consistency in the program is especially important to our population, who definitely does find reassurance when things are predictable,” remarks Tonia. This consistency is possible because of

donors like you. Your support has allowed for real, positive change in the lives of countless young people.

That change gives these kids hope for a brighter future. As one student said, “It’s kept me moving forward in the flow with my life.... I have the idea that maybe if I can go to college, I would continue taking art classes. I’d like to be an art teacher too.”



# Reaching Young People in the Smallest Communities

*The Food Group: Teen Pantries*

*Sheridan-Johnson Community Foundation Endowment Fund*

In small communities like Arvada and Clearmont, there are young people facing unique challenges. Food scarcity and lack of stable housing are worsened by isolation. Making matters worse, many young people don't feel willing or able to ask for the resources they need.

Keri McMeans knew she wanted to do something for these young people. Keri is the executive director of the Food Group, which provides food and other products to young people in Sheridan County. She knew that the Food Group could make a difference in Arvada and Clearmont. But it was proving difficult to figure out how best to overcome these communities' particular challenges.

So Keri reached out to the principal



One of several Teen Pantries in Sheridan County.

and the counselor at Arvada-Clearmont Junior and Senior High School. As the trio spoke, it became clear that the Food Group's Teen Pantries program could be the perfect fit. Teen Pantries already existed in Sheridan, where it provided young people with toiletries and hygiene products alongside food supplies. Students picked up items from a discreet location, maintaining their privacy. School staff made sure the pantries were stocked with what their students needed.

Because the Arvada-Clearmont Teen Pantry could respond so well to students' individual needs, the program quickly became a success. One student needed refrigerated foods like meat and dairy products. To the surprise of Keri and her team, others lacked basic food preparation tools. "We didn't foresee a need for can openers, pots, and pans!" she recalls.

Keri works so hard to meet the needs of students in smaller towns because "it is important to see that we're serving the entire county." And the Teen Pantries program has succeeded in large part because "we really work one-on-one with each site that we serve," Keri notes.

Teen Pantries' ultimate goal is to help students learn. "When we think of nourishing kids, we're thinking, how can we nourish the whole child?" Keri knows that when students look and feel better, they have a better chance at "success in the classroom."

This success can be seen every day in Arvada-Clearmont, where the program is flourishing. Because of donors like you, these young people feel better prepared to learn and thrive.

## STATS & FACTS

Grant amount: \$2,500

>40%

of Sheridan County youth are eligible for free/reduced lunches

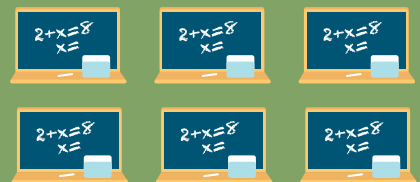
Pantries provide both **food** and **hygiene** items for local teens



7 pantries

250 young people served

Pantries in schools: 6



# Year-round Pride in Casper

Grace Amspoker Fund and Tony Gate Fund

Every June, Casper celebrates its LGBTQ+ population, while its LGBTQ+ citizens celebrate the community they love. People from across the state join the celebration, too. Pride events like this are important times for the community to connect and to support each other. But Casper's pride festivities usually only occur during the summer, and Mallory Pollock knows that more support is needed year-round.

Mallory is the chair of Casper Pride, which recently became a first-time WYCF grantee. Because of your generosity, the Casper Area Local Board has provided Casper Pride with a \$10,000 grant to help them strengthen year-round programs and establish a new resource center.

Creating programs beyond the usual June events is crucial for an

organization like Casper Pride. A recent survey of nearly 300 LGBTQ+ people in the area revealed the urgent issues this community faces. Mental health issues are common, because many of these residents do not feel safe in the communities they love. Many also cannot access the healthcare they need.

Mallory recognizes the importance of creating a resource hub not just for Casper, but for the whole state. "I don't see why Wyoming doesn't have one, and why Casper, being up in the middle, shouldn't be able to provide that for the state," she remarks. "I think this is Casper's responsibility."

Because of your support, Casper Pride's leadership can make a difference for people who need it, all across Wyoming, all year.

## STATS & FACTS

Grant Amount: **\$10,000**  
for year-round operations support 

### Partner organizations:

The Self Help Center, Mercer Family Resource Center, Casper College, Art 321, PFLAG Casper, United Church of Christ, Natrona County Health Department, The Henne Group.

Casper Pride's endowment was created in **2020**

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

## October 21-22

Open Minds, Open Spaces  
Joint Conference

[wyafterschoolalliance.org/convening](http://wyafterschoolalliance.org/convening)

Wyoming Women's Antelope Hunt:  
Bison Hunt Raffle Package  
LIVE NOW!

Visit [wywf.org](http://wywf.org)  
to buy tickets.



SAVE  
THE DATE:  
May 17-18  
2022

Wyoming Nonprofit  
Conference  
[wycf.org/WNC2022](http://wycf.org/WNC2022)



**THANK YOU!** Look inside to see  
the difference you've made.

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