

# TAILS FROM WINDY ACRES

Animals as Natural Therapy (ANT) a non-profit organization

Spring 2019 Volume XX1 Issue 2

721 Van Wyck Rd., Bellingham, WA 98226-8789

## Allowing Grace By: Sonja Wingard, Director



Despite it being very cold, it was a heartwarming winter.

Some people very close to my heart have come back to Animals as Natural Therapy, to say hello and re-engage with us both four- and two-legged.

**First to visit** was Jesus Lopez, who came to tell us he wants to make a video about how ANT helps foster kids. He shared that he now has a good job, a car, and is creating a family with his fiancé, Lidia. He is proud of himself and rightly so; he came to ANT as a foster teen who had never known family.

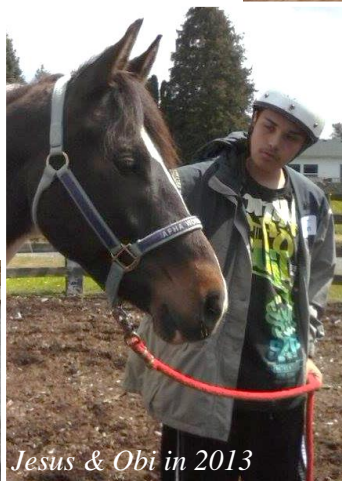
Six years ago, when Jesus first came to ANT, he was sixteen and had lived in & out of 28 foster homes over 12 years. Three or four times a week he was running away from school, as he did not have the skills to handle anxiety and the many things that triggered him. Jesus didn't want to come here, yet his foster agency believed it might help him...and it changed his life.

The week after an incredibly empowering session with Obrigado, his horse, he went to the school principal and asked if he could try a regular class for the first time in his life, because he felt he could now handle his emotions and not run away. And it worked. Jesus took some tech classes and began to see himself as increasingly able to cope. Today is proof of that.

He is here to say that animal therapy works, and he wants the world to know it. Jesus has forgiven his father for abandonment. He sees some of the old foster youth he knew, now living on the streets, and is grateful that he got the help he needed to see himself differently. Jesus has been speaking out on national news about the injustices suffered by foster children. He was an inspiring speaker at the ANT Gala in March.



Jesus & Obi reunited



Jesus & Obi in 2013



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In 2014 I shared an article about Jesus' life-changing session with his horse. To read the full story of Jesus' experience that day with Obi, please visit our website & search "[Winter 2014 Newsletter](#)".

**Another winter visitor** was a beautiful teenage girl who had first come nine years ago at age six, when her mother told us she was suicidal. I had never heard of a six-year-old being suicidal. Lorna, our counselor, and I and therapy horse Thunder worked with this little girl, and together it was discovered that she was carrying her daddy's sadness.

Sadness that was not hers, but her father's, who was a U.S. veteran with PTSD. We had the honor of working with the whole family and all were led on a healing path. These many years later the mother and daughter visited from another state to say hello and express gratitude.



Thunder & a friend

**And then there is** the young person who had come to ANT with their family as a young volunteer. I had the honor of being present at this child's birth. They eventually began working at the farm but left to pursue college and life adventures. Now this person has transitioned genders and came asking for a letter of recommendation to Brown University.

He shares a brave story of life in transition which I was only able to follow from afar. He aspires to be a writer about transgender issues.

What does he say about his time at ANT? He says it helped him find who he was inside.

Thank you, dear supporters, for helping kids find who they are inside by supporting this little farm in its big work!



**ANT at Microsoft! ~ Jessie Pemble**

Thanks to our animals' popularity at previous events, we were invited to Microsoft READY, a tech & networking conference held at the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle. So, with 5 rabbits & our Golden Retriever packed like sardines in Kelsy's Nissan Versa, we braved the February snow and ventured south!

ANT was featured for two days out of a week-long event, strategically positioned at the end of the convention to provide much-needed stress relief for guests & crew.



Nestled in a quiet corner of the expo floor, our therapy animals headlined the "Refresh Lounge" and offered people a chance to relax, get off their feet, cuddle a bunny, or give Gabby a belly rub.

We watched the tension on guests' faces melt away as they spotted the bunnies scurrying across the floor, and saw eyes light up when we offered them a rabbit to hold. Some sat and stayed for 10 or 15 minutes at a time, soaking in the soft embrace and enjoying the rabbits' calming energy.

Many attendees came from across the globe and were shocked to find animals at such a prestigious event, but shock quickly turned to adoration as they knelt beside Gabby and felt her soft, warm fur, or held a bunny for the first time and giggled at their wiggling noses. We laughed as a woman from the Netherlands Skyped with her young daughter, showing her the bunnies and exclaiming boisterously that she "wasn't really at work!"

The animals made people feel happy and even excited to be on the job, in spite of the rigorous schedule, long days, and demanding engagement. *Success!*

**Why It Works**

The mere sight of a dog on the expo floor inspired people to show us photos of their own pups back home, and it was clear that the absence of animals was deeply felt.

Pets were obviously important to so many of those we met, and guests traveling from abroad were even more upset to have left their animals at home, lamenting to us how hard it was to be away. Everyone marveled at the "sheer genius" of bringing therapy animals to a corporate event, but we observed a natural and logical relationship between the two.

Therapy animals may have been the least technological aspect of the convention, but that's exactly what made them so valuable. They helped people perform a "system reboot", as Kelsy joked, offering stimulation that was warm and real amidst an environment otherwise quite cold and sterile. Our animals also provided comfort during an event that for many is very uncomfortable. Guests with autism and social anxiety, for example, found a calm, relaxed atmosphere, and low-risk ways to socialize with their peers.

Every single person left with a smile!



**What People are Saying**

We asked visitors to take a short survey about their experience at the "Cuddle Corner":

- 100% said our therapy animals were a valuable feature at the event
- 70% said our animals reduced stress and helped them relax
- 88% said they would be more likely to attend a corporate event that featured therapy animals

*"This is the best idea ever."*

***"Gabby makes me happy!"***

*"Holding a bunny really is relaxing, isn't it?"*

***"I'm so refreshed!"***

*"I really needed this."*





# ANT AT A GLANCE

# 2018

## 355 KIDS

at-risk youth participated in animal-facilitated emotional, behavioral, and mental wellness programs



## COMMUNITY IMPACT 6,275

people engaged with our animals through events and outreach programs



## 88% SCHOLARSHIPS

of after-school participants received ANT scholarships or agency funding due to family need



## SERVICE LEARNING 97+

students participated in community service learning & animal education projects



## 45 TEENS NEW HORIZONS

in drug & alcohol recovery discovered new possibilities and healthy habits



## SNAPSHOT OF OUR PARTICIPANTS

YOUTH STRUGGLING WITH EMOTIONAL STATE AT HOME

59%

26%

YOUTH WITNESSING OR EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

YOUTH STRUGGLING WITH EMOTIONAL STATE AT SCHOOL

68%

44%

YOUTH HAVING DRUG OR ALCOHOL PROBLEMS IN THEIR HOME

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

PARENTS REPORT IMPROVEMENT IN:

TRUST – 96%

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS – 96%

SELF-CONFIDENCE – 92%

RESPECT FOR OTHERS – 92%

CLEAR COMMUNICATION – 78%

SELF-CONTROL – 67%

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE – 59%

DIFFUSING BULLY BEHAVIOR – 59%

FRIENDSHIPS – 51%

AFTER A 10-WEEK SESSION AT ANT:

72% of parents reported improved emotion or behavior management in their child



14% OF YOUTH SERVED WERE NATIVE AMERICAN



## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS SERVED EACH YEAR

DAY CAMP - 95

YOUTH LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS - 30

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM - 88

YOUTH ENGAGED IN OUTREACH - 97

TEENS IN RECOVERY - 45

VETERANS - 7

OUR MOBILE ANT TEAM MADE 44 VISITS TO ELDER CARE FACILITIES

PROVIDING 1240 INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ANT YOUTH, ANIMALS, & ELDERS



## PARENT TESTIMONIAL

"Between the Fall & Winter session, [my daughter] tested an entire grade level higher in both reading and math. Her anger, frustration, and distrust of adults has decreased significantly. She is more centered, in control of her body & breaths, and thinks before acting. She is really at a turning point."

## ANT wins Great Nonprofit Giveaway!

Thanks to your many votes, ANT received a generous \$1,000 donation from local insurance agency, Bob Wallin Insurance!

The Bob Wallin team is proud to secure the way people live in Whatcom County, and now thanks to their generosity, they will be securing hope & healing for so many youth & veterans in need!

This donation will be used to provide therapeutic equine programs for a local family in crisis, whose children recently lost their father and are still recovering from a year of homelessness.

See back page for a letter from one of the youth.

***Thank you, Bob Wallin Insurance,  
for helping to break cycles of pain & violence by  
supporting ANT's work!***



Thrivent is a not-for-profit finance organization that encourages their members to be financially wise and to live generously. **As a Thrivent member, you can support ANT in many ways:**

### Action Teams -

- Host a volunteer work party and receive \$250 in Visa gift cards to use towards your project. Connect with ANT to put this free money to work, and we will plan the work party!

### Thrivent Choice® -

- Eligible members can recommend that Thrivent distributes your Choice Dollars® to Animals as Natural Therapy!

### Personal Donations -

- Thrivent helps members make online donations to enrolled organizations, like ANT. Thrivent will cover all the online processing fees so 100% of your donation goes to our youth, veterans & animals.

**Over the years, Thrivent has contributed over \$15,000 to ANT's youth, veterans, & animals!**

*Please visit  
<https://connect.thrivent.com/directory/US>  
to connect with your local  
Thrivent Financial Associate!*

## ***Welcome our new Instructor, Dianna Miller!***

Dianna brings 23 years of horsemanship experience to the farm! She grew up riding horses in Bellingham and graduated from WWU with a B.A. in Recreation. She became a professional Cowgirl and guided all over the United States for the past 12 years on private ranches and in national parks, including Grand Canyon National Park, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, and on cattle and wild horse ranches in the Dakotas. She then moved home to Bellingham where she owned and operated a local trail riding business and provided lessons and trail rides along the Nooksack River.

Dianna is passionate about helping people explore recreation and leisure through equestrian experiences. Whether observing a wild horse herd in their natural environment, or riding across the badlands on a good saddle horse, she finds that horses and nature promote emotional healing and wellbeing, and she wants to share the joy with others.

The most important thing she has done in life was include her little brother, David Benjamin, in her horse adventures. It was the highlight of their friendship before his passing. She comes to ANT to continue to uplift others through the presence of horses.



## ***Jessie Pemble becomes new Assistant Executive Director!***

For the past two years Jessie has been our Office Manager & Mobile ANT Coordinator, and we are excited to announce her new position as Assistant Executive Director. Jessie's passion for ANT is only matched by her desire to serve others, so it's natural that her leadership finds a place here.



She brings a background in Recreation Therapy, program facilitation, and digital marketing, as well as a true understanding of our animals' impact, having been a summer camp participant herself.

Jessie continues to run our Mobile ANT program so you may see her around town ~ make sure to wave hello!



## A Moment of Grace

By: Katie Rohwer



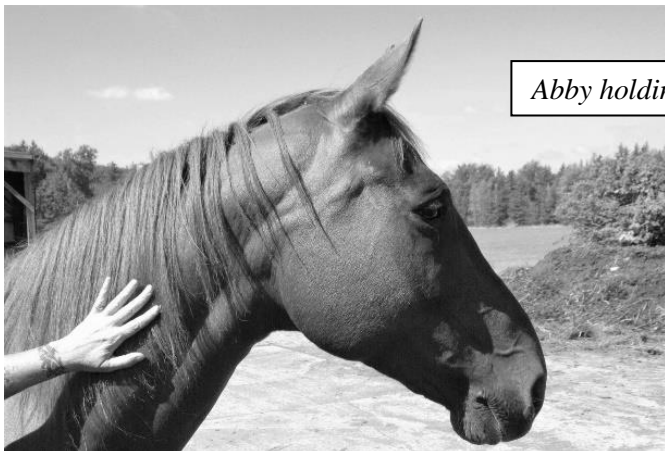
It was pouring down rain. We had hoped to pull out our horses and do an activity in the arena, but the weather wouldn't allow it.

One morning each week our therapist, Joaquin, and I see a veteran for an hour-long session. We do our best to create a learning plan for the day but nine times out of ten the horses determine the lesson. This day was no different.

We brought the veteran's horse, Abby, in from the rain to do some grooming and chatting. Our veteran was overcome with anger. She had been hitting walls everywhere she turned for help in her life. She kept saying that she had given up on finding goodness and help in the world and that she was so frustrated and angry. As she groomed Abby, the mare continued to shake her head and body as if to say, "Shake it off, let it go." But our veteran didn't want to let it go, the anger was too overwhelming.

The hour came to a close and we walked Abby back to the pen she shares with Obi, Starlight and Moonshadow. The veteran took Abby's halter off and all four horses turned towards her, quiet, still and present. The moment was not lost on her. She looked taken aback and surprised. She asked Joaquin and me to keep an eye out for her as she closed her eyes and absorbed the energy of the horses.

The moment she closed her eyes, Moonshadow turned around to keep an eye out in the barnyard. I silently said a prayer of thanks and soaked in the grace-filled moment. Our veteran opened her eyes and Moonshadow turned back to look at her. All four horses continued to hold space with her as she said, "They're telling me there are still beings looking out for me and that there is good in this world." Who knew that there would be a moment hiding in the putting away of horses?



Abby holding space

## Testimonials

*"I think ANT is wonderful. I am grateful for ANT. I absolutely believe in the horse therapy. Horses have an uncanny sense of who needs what. My granddaughter feels safe at ANT."*

**Grandmother of 12-year-old participant**

*"Thank you for providing a nurturing and challenging environment at the farm during some of the most difficult years of my life. The lessons I learned there still manifest in new ways for me all the time, and I still reach for the ANT philosophies when I come up against a problem."*

**Former Participant, age 24**

*"The girl I have on probation...has had a tough go of it in life. In & out of foster care, unable to form attachments. Her response to being rejected has been to reject the care that others have offered. **Since connecting with your program, I have observed a new empathy in this youth.** She demonstrates that she is connecting the horse's behaviors of expressing fear, dislike or nervousness, with her own. She was able to articulate to me that she noticed these things about herself because she was noticing them in the horse & seeing how she could help the horse through it. Her responses in the past have usually focused on blaming others. Now her focus seems to be on identifying how she feels, why she feels that way & how to self-soothe herself. It's impressive that she articulates these things & that she sees the benefit of letting down her guard & accepting help."*

**Probation Officer for 16-year-old Lummi Youth**

*"This is like paradise with all these animals! It's nice of you to do this because it's fun for people like me. It makes me happy!"*

**Assisted Living Resident during Mobile ANT Visit**

***Would you like to be part of these success stories?***

*88% of our participants cannot afford services.*

*Become a Program Sponsor and help a youth, veteran, or elder discover their possibilities!*



# 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala & Benefit Auction!



Beautiful "Hope" sign by our decorating team!



Guests play "Heads & Tails"

Nearly 200 people came together on March 9<sup>th</sup> to celebrate ANT's stars and raise critical funds for our youth, veterans, and animals. We were thrilled to see so many familiar faces and excited to introduce a number of new friends to our work!

Auctioneer-extraordinaire Manca Valum & sidekick Paul Orlowski, MC Mary Kay Robinson, and ring man Terry Bronkema enthusiastically led our live auction to its greatest success yet, with best-sellers "Bring OUR Animals to Work Day" (a Mobile ANT visit to your business), and "Trail Ride with Sonja" offered **twice** due to demand!

With excitement & passion for ANT's mission, our community raised a record \$60,000 this year and completely surpassed our fundraising goal! This success will allow new families in need to access the healing & hope that our animals offer, and support the continued care of these amazing creatures who walk beside our hardest-to-reach participants.

This year's Gala also honored ANT's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of serving our community, and we were proud to feature former participant Jesus Lopez as our speaker, who is now fighting for the rights of foster youth after learning to face his fears beside his horse, Obrigado.

We are grateful to all those who made this event possible, including our sponsors, donors, staff, and volunteers. Your contributions of time, talent, and financial gifts continue to make our mission a reality!



Sonja & ANT Bookkeeper, Sue



Jesus speaks



Terry & Manca



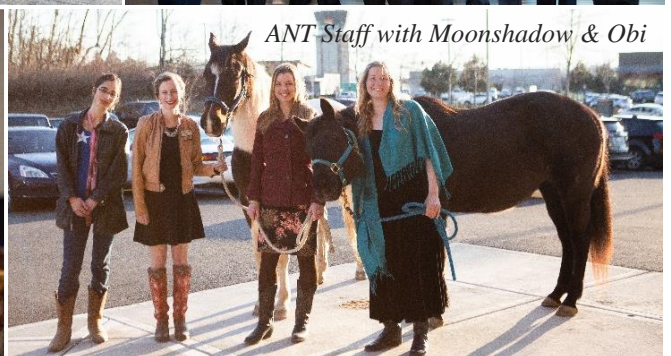
Guests meeting the horses



WECU Volunteers!



Antler Baking Co.



ANT Staff with Moonshadow & Obi





### Animals as Natural Therapy

721 Van Wyck Road  
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## **ANT Barnyard Bash!**

Saturday, July 13<sup>th</sup>  
1-3pm ~ Windy Acres Farm

*Get to know our animals  
and what they do!*

*\$10 Suggested Donation*

*Thanks to Bob Wallin Insurance, a deserving teen will be attending ANT programs on scholarship. Read her story below:*

*“My name is \*Taylor and I’ve been through a really hard year of getting kicked out of school, being homeless, almost getting sent to foster care, and just recently my dad passed away, and him and I were very close. I miss him so much. I’m one of those people who really likes animals and I was hoping this program will help me not be so down all the time. I also have a single mother with 5 kids and it hurts how hard it is for all of us to keep a routine because everything is so crazy. I get in trouble at school a lot, but I try my hardest not to, and they have tried to give me medicine but I don’t want that, it makes me feel like a bad kid. So I’m really hoping this will help me succeed in life.”*



*Rusty and a friend*

**“Horses lend us the wings we lack.”**

*Pam Brown*

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*Thank you for helping  
us break cycles of pain  
& violence in our  
community*



## 30 Years on the Farm – By Sonja



Two men who are fondly remembered for volunteering time and talents to help make Windy Acres Farm, home to Animals as Natural Therapy, what it is today; both have recently passed on to greener pastures:

**Matt Benedict** first came to ANT when working for Strider Construction, who very generously made our Conditional Use Permit a reality with the widened road and parking area. Matt was a big equipment operator who had a big heart to match, and for six years after the Conditional Use work was completed he continued to volunteer with big equipment to put in multiple drainage areas, arena footing and also mentored youth on barn repairs. *(Matt and young friend pictured on the John Deere above)*

**Tavis Gann** enthusiastically helped out in 2006 when we needed a civil engineer to plan out our road and parking for the conditional use permit. He graciously donated his time and talents for many meetings and to get us through all the details of the process.



*Grandpa Paul James and grandson Paul rebuilding the chicken pen, 1989*



In 1989, upon first moving here, Sonja's family took on the project of rebuilding the then 100 year old barn. New stringers were added, plus new studs, new walls inside and out, and a new roof. We salvaged this old barn even though it had been recommended to be used for a practice Fire Department burn. We had hope and saw possibilities for the barn, just like ANT offers hope and possibilities for the kids, veterans and animals who come to the farm.



*Removing what was left of the old barn roof, removing rotten walls and the milking parlor, making multiple loads to the dump including the 65 tires we dug out around the property.*



Our barn today, at 128 years old, with the old silo base serving as the rabbit play pen (canopy for shade). The barn houses our goats, llama, chickens & turkey, rabbits, three miniature horses, two large horses, and the craft room.