

TAILS FROM WINDY ACRES

Animals as Natural Therapy

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721 Van Wyck Rd, Bellingham, WA 98226

Great Love & Great Loss

By: Jaime Arnett

Aging is a privilege denied to many. It is through that lens that we have gently cared for our aging herd, holding weekly “spa days” for staff and volunteers to groom, love, and see to their needs. We care for our animals as colleagues and as family. Our tender care has extended the life of the animals at our farm, which has now served the community for over 20 years. And this year we are experiencing a Season of Grieving.

In August, we said goodbye to our beloved mare Sucia; mother to Rusty, Sundance, Moonshadow, and grandmother to Starlight of Hope. She was the first of this beloved line of horses to walk beside human companions and offer her intuition and wisdom as a source of healing. We honor her life by continuing her work. She was 34 years old.

Likewise in August, we said goodbye to our dear friend, the llama Esquel. Esquel (who was 25) was a compassionate friend to children still too fearful of horses and was a gentle and non-judgmental listener to all who had stories too painful to share with other humans.

And now, we are preparing to say farewell to the courageous and kindhearted Patriot (age 32). We have been told by the vet that we have to put our precious friend down before the winter weather hits. Patriot came to the farm as a rescue; still bearing scars on his legs from years of mistreatment. And, even though he had himself suffered at the hands of humans, he had a knack for gently drawing the pain out of others, caring for them, healing them, and instilling the knowledge that we are not our past. His presence will be greatly missed.

With so many losses so close together, we remember “for everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Including a time to be born and a time to die, for loss and for renewal. With these passings, space is made for new healers to come to the farm, including two beautiful horses that will soon call ANT home. We look forward with hope to a Season of Rebirth.



Esquel & Jaime's son Gavin

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Patriot w/ teen

Sucia

It's All About Trust

By: Sonja Wingard, Director

What makes an animal a good therapy animal? This is a common question I hear. I have taken time to reflect on that, with the passing of our dedicated four legged friends. When Sucia passed suddenly, her daughter Sundance had a serious neurological setback that she is still trying to recover from. In addition, Sucia's granddaughter, Starlight, was sired by an amazing stallion named Joey who was a therapy horse on the Stillaguamish Reservation in Paulsbo and he died the same day as Sucia. And then our sweet elderly llama Esquel died. Finally, dear Patriot, who has offered hope and healing to every heart he's met has outlived his aged body.

I have had the privilege to work beside some really outstanding therapy animals and have witnessed twenty-one years of these amazing creatures inviting all sorts of people to come and be transformed by their loving presence. I have asked myself why each of these animals has been such a great therapist. What makes a great therapy animal? Not all horses who come to ANT work out and stay on and are up to the task of offering therapy.

I have concluded that it is all about trust. The animals have come to trust us to listen to them and their wisdom, to watch their every response, and to take their reactions into account. It is all in the listening. About eight years ago, our instructor and barn manager Susan Lewis posted signs all around the barnyard with the word AGENDA crossed out like the no smoking signs. No agendas! Drop them. Yes, plans are good, we make lesson plans all the time, but the horses have full permission to derail them at any moment, to teach a more important lesson for that individual, one that we may not have been aware of. Go with the flow and pace that the animals set. Listen to their feedback. "Breath slow and deep and get grounded before you ride me," says our horse Rusty. "Sonja, I'm grabbing your coat sleeve with my teeth to tell you this kid is out of their body right now. Pay attention, help me out here!" The horse may tell you it is more important to stop and pause and figure out what was just triggered in this kid or veteran, and you had best do that because they are not moving until you do!

An animal becomes a great therapy animal when humans convince them that we are actually willing to listen. That is when trust takes root and the horses will be increasingly honest with you.

I look at these animal teachers, who we have been so blessed to work besides, and I have the deepest respect for them. I also have immense gratitude for our amazing, humble, vulnerable, insightful, and highly evolved staff who are willing to set egos aside and truly listen and follow the lead of the therapy animals so that, being respected and honored, the animals are willing to say even more.

Like Bernie Thomas said in our Blessing of the Animals video (see the next article), "[We] acknowledge our animal friends as brothers and sisters in spirit and in kind...the things they give back to us make a huge difference."



Sonja & Sucia



Patriot

2020 Blessing of the Animals



Bernie blessing Moonshadow

"The love will continue. Being no stranger to sorrow, I can only express that love is the one thing that does always continue. And these blessings that we've experienced today, symbolically, help us acknowledge the continuation of the love that we share..." - Bernie (Pahalucktun) Thomas of the Lummi Nation

The Blessing is a tradition at ANT, one we normally have a big gathering for. This year it was virtual, and we were incredibly honored to have Bernie Pahalucktun Thomas, the Education Director of the Lummi Nation Education Division and longtime community partner, perform the blessings.

Steep yourself in hope, inspiration, and everything we are grateful for here at ANT. Sit down with the family and a bowl of popcorn this week to watch our 2020 Blessing of the Animals! It's just as long as your favorite sitcom, but we promise it's 10x as heartwarming. **Visit [Animals As Natural Therapy](#) YouTube page to watch!**

~ Help Honor Patriot ~

For every day camp or after school group we end with an appreciation circle. During this time we share how each person, mentor, staff member, or animal has gifted our lives.

When an animal passes, or is about to pass, we do an appreciation circle as well. Dear Patriot's is scheduled for October 26th. Since we cannot invite all of his friends (due to COVID), we are asking that you email any memories or appreciation you'd like us to share. We will be more than happy to read them to him during the upcoming circle. Please send to Katie, our Program Coordinator at:

program@animalsasnaturaltherapy.org

Goodbye Summer, Welcome Fall

By: Haley Didier

As the air gets brisker and the summer comes to a close, I take a moment to reflect on all of the memories and moments shared in the barnyard during the weeks of day camp. This summer was unique, full of its own challenges and hurdles. However, out of these challenges arose many wonderful moments between campers and animals. Through these reflections I am reminded to see the opportunities present in the face of a challenge.

Due to COVID-19, we had to create much smaller groups for day camps and limit each camp to three half-days a week. Instead of the usual 10-12 youth each week, we had 2-5. **The hidden gift in having smaller groups was that this allowed for more intimate conversations and connections between campers.** I noticed that even in just three short days, the campers gained emotional closeness with each other and shared their vulnerabilities while working towards their personal goals alongside their horses. We were able to dig a little deeper in our group discussions, more so than is sometimes possible with larger groups. It warmed my heart hearing the campers encouraging and including each other, giggling with each other, and trying new things with their horses in a supportive space.

During the advanced camp, some of the participants cantered their horses in the round pen. This was such an empowering experience for them. Not only did they gain confidence and horsemanship skills in the process, but the campers also experienced pure joy, which was an absolute honor to witness.

This year, there is more need than ever for youth to be on the farm connecting with animals and with nature. Many of them shared that they have been struggling significantly during the current pandemic and that the support they received from their horses helped them refresh their perspective on life. **“Horses are super patient, especially with beginner riders. They also have taught me happiness. I keep that feeling with me when I go home,”** said one 12-year-old camper.

Another camper shared, “I had a really hard week but coming to camp to see Scotty helped me get through it. Scotty was very patient with me even when I made mistakes. He taught me to have people in my life who will forgive me and be patient with me.” Another camper came for two weeks and developed a deep and nurturing relationship with Sundance. She was able to talk with Sundance and vent about life while Sundance quietly listened without judgement. One day she said, **“I’m grateful that Sundance pushed me to stand up for myself with others. She taught me patience. And this week, she taught me to speak my truth.”**

Although we were unable to serve as many youth as we would have liked, those who were able to attend left the farm with full hearts and many valuable lessons from their equine companions.



2020 Day Campers!



Haley & MaryPoppins



Alfie

To Be Loved

By: Katie Rohwer

This spring and summer I had the pleasure of facilitating private sessions here on the farm. On Thursdays, one of our mental health counselors and I saw a teen girl. Over the weeks prior to this particular Thursday, our participant had bonded in many ways with our twenty-six-year-old Tennessee Walker, Sir.

One day our girl showed up looking a little dejected and down. She had expressed that she felt unlovable that day. We decided to bring Sir out to the round pen and do some grooming with him. Figgy, our adventurous barn cat, decided he wanted to be a part of this as well! As she bent down to stroke Fig, Sir started nuzzling her hair. She reached up to stroke Sir and Figgy immediately jumped onto her shoulders, as if these two were vying for her attention.

In all my years as an instructor here I have never seen two animals fight for one of our participant’s attention in the way they did! It was a mutual admiration society if I’d ever seen one. As this ensued, I commented that she was clearly loved -- based on what I was seeing.

She looked up at me and said, “You have no idea what this means to me today.”

The work that happens out here is the work between life and death, between despair and hope, between feeling unlovable and knowing you are loved.



Katie

Jaime: A Great Blessing

By: Sonja Wingard

For over twenty years we have been searching for someone who could be the Executive Director of ANT. I have always wanted to focus exclusively on programming, as that is where my heart lies. Plus, it is really hard to manage both the business end of this organization and the programs! Before ANT, I was a nurse who accompanied people through difficult life challenges. Suffice it to say; spreadsheets, fundraising, and marketing plans have not been my forte. To receive the Non-Profit of the Year award in 2019, and have the organization grow and thrive for twenty-one years has been a miracle in itself. Now I finally get to focus on offering healing work, continuing to develop amazingly powerful programs, and train others to offer what ANT's been doing for years (we have offered training and support to four other equine-facilitated programs in the area, as well as a team from Japan, and are training another group from Skagit County this fall!).

With this said, **I am so very happy to welcome Jaime Arnett, who has been a vital part of ANT for five years. She will be starting as our new Executive Director on November 1st.** Jaime comes with a heart for this work as she has had her own life journey supporting those struggling with mental health and wellness. We know she will do amazing things here at ANT, and we can't wait to see what they are.



Jaime & Obrigado

Meet Jaime Arnett

Jaime Arnett is a Whatcom County native that graduated from Blaine High School and Western Washington University. She has extensive experience in the nonprofit, private, and public sectors. Her nonprofit career began a decade ago with Habitat for Humanity, where she held every position from Volunteer Coordinator to Assistant Director, working in both Washington and Oregon State. In the private sector, Jaime was the Executive Administrator for the Boundary Fish Company in Blaine. She is passionate about governance and politics and is also a former Blaine City Council Member!

In 2015, Jaime began grant writing for ANT as a way to stay meaningfully connected to her community. She was drawn to ANT for our natural approach to mental and behavioral health services and, being an avid animal lover, was especially curious about the benefits of human-animal interactions.

Jaime has spent the last year as our Director of Operations and Development, and has been mentored by Sonja for the ED role. She has a deep appreciation for ANT's culture of compassion, the spirit of our animals, and the brilliance of our staff.

Ever the fisherwoman she says, *"I am really excited for the future of ANT and honored to be at the helm as we navigate all of the difficulties ahead of us... together."*

Welcome Diana Meeks

We have another staff announcement! Help us welcome Diana Meeks, our new Director of Outreach. We are so excited to have her as she brings years of communication, outreach, and event planning experience and a passion for animal assisted therapy.

She has been a youth mentor for many years at ANT and has seen firsthand the incredible moments of magic that happen out here on the farm. She hopes to one day become a mental health counselor and practice equine therapy herself. A PNW native; she's an avid rider, outdoorswoman, and bookworm.

She has hit the ground running, helping us plan the upcoming Healing Hearts Breakfast. Woo hoo! We are so happy to have her.



Courage in COVID

By: Sonja Wingard

Since March we have had to flex. *Blessed are the flexible for they shall survive* has been a mantra at ANT for many years. With a multitude of both two legged and four legged personalities we have always had to flex, especially because we are committed to following the lead of the animals. It's also been the case in the administration of ANT, as resources ebb and flow.

This year, we had to immediately adjust with our March 14th gala, a vital fundraiser for ANT. Our auction team, led by Manca Valum, was nothing short of valiant. How we pivoted in a few-days time to produce a virtual live auction and paddle raise, that gave people hope in the start of a pandemic while providing critical funding for our programs, was nothing short of a miracle. Staff scrambled to find a template, but no one had ever done a virtual gala. We stepped forth in courage with a team of seven volunteers and two staff to make it happen. The mother of a teen inspired gala participants to give as she bravely shared how our horse Artemis had saved her son from suicide when he was twelve. I was also told just last week that due to our courage in the face of uncertainty, Drs. Richard Tran and Michelle Hsu decided to move their Color Chiropractic office to their dream space during COVID chaos... courage inspires more courage!



Veteran & family
w/ Patriot

AND YOU, OUR WONDERFUL COMMUNITY, CAME THROUGH with great enthusiasm and dollars! Our online silent auction followed in June and it was highly successful. And best of all, every one of our wonderful 150 guests who had planned to attend the gala and paid their ticket price for a special evening and dinner graciously gifted all of the money. Our incredible business sponsors had contributed substantially this year and they too were supportive of our pivot. We were still able to get shout-outs about their support in multiple ways, and are still so appreciative of their help. Ultimately, our gala netted more than ever. We so needed this money as our programs had nearly shut down.

As you probably guessed, we also had to quickly adapt programming. But the good news continued: Animals as Natural Therapy was considered an essential service in our community and the Whatcom County Health Department worked with us to safely provide services. We had to stop groups, but we didn't have to shut down all together. We could still see struggling veterans, teens, and young adults



Mobile ANT visits elders!

This hasn't been so cost efficient, but we have been able to provide vital hope in a really tough time! In addition, Christa Shaw, past ANT board president and a current school counselor, had a great idea to expand our service to those who needed it most. She asked that we start having families, stuck in isolation, come to the farm for a safe place outside of their homes. We started this in May, seeing one family at a time for COVID relief with our animals. The animals did their best work, literally lowering the anxiety in these people's faces. One mother, being safely away from the home, was able to confidentially share the domestic violence she was experiencing and get help through Christa.

We also transitioned Mobile ANT to start visiting elder care facilities outdoors. It has been so amazing visit elders through their windows, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Challenging times have encouraged us to be creative in finding connection, especially with our elders, who are experiencing the physical and emotional distress of this pandemic more than most. All in all, we feel like "miracles abound here," as Bernie Thomas said during our Blessing of the Animals video in August (if you have not given yourself this treat, visit Animals as Natural Therapy's You Tube page).

The staff have also had to be flexible. Thanks to fast work by Jaime and Sue, our bookkeeper extraordinaire (meaning she has done so much more than bookkeeping to keep us going), ANT got a Payroll Protection Loan and got most of our employees on Shared Work so they could get some unemployment for the hours we could not keep them busy.

I think this says a lot about the courage of this staff. They are courageous to see youth, veterans, and families who could be carrying COVID (despite our rigid precautions). Other staff care daily for our animals with limited volunteer help, and our office staff continues to keep the behind-the-scenes fundraising and operations going. We deeply appreciate the courageous team at ANT who are never too afraid to care for the hearts that come to us.

As our program income is down by \$46,000, we are also excited to report that we will receive a Whatcom Restart Grant to help support caring for our therapy animals. Financially, we are figuring out a way to make it all work -- by being flexible, creative, and grateful for all of the support we get from our community!

If you would like to contribute, please attend the Healing Hearts Breakfast, October 22nd. A virtual fundraiser for ANT, it will be a great opportunity to hear more from our courageous staff and participants out here at the farm. Read more about the Breakfast on page 7 – we hope to see you there!

Thank You For Our New Round Pen!

By: Jaime Arnett

Last year Animals as Natural Therapy began a very special fundraising campaign to Raise the Roof on a new Round Pen.

Our round pen is an essential working space for our programs here at ANT. It is used for ground work, team exercises, first rides, “temptation alley” (an obstacle course for teens in recovery), exercising our herd, and much more. However, the old round pen was built over 30 years ago using re-purposed boards from a 100+ year-old silo. **Many of the posts and cross boards were aged and rotting, and in dire need of replacement.** And without a cover, the round pen filled quickly with deep puddles and left us wading through sessions. ANT had no large covered arena for our horses, participants, staff, and volunteers.

This presented challenges during the winter months **with no protection from the elements; and facing freezing temperatures, snow, sleet, and rain.** Last winter alone we were forced to cancel two weeks of sessions due to weather conditions, losing valuable time and interrupting the progress our participants had established.

Our proposed solution was a 60 foot-diameter, canvas-covered steel frame round pen with 4-foot sides (affording participants more privacy during sessions) that would offer our youth, veterans, and horses a safe, dry space for their sessions.

And with the help of generous grantors and grassroots donations from our community, WE DID IT!

We’d like to extend our deepest gratitude to the Timken Foundation of Canton, DV & IDA J McEachern Foundation, Norman Archibald Charitable Foundation, the Bellingham Bay Rotary Club, and all who donated to our Giving Tuesday “Raise the Round Pen” campaign. We also have a special thanks to our builders, Equine Concepts, who have been incredibly generous. They will be completing the work before winter hits even though we are still working on getting them the remaining funds!



Before – so wet!

Left: The old round pen

“You guys need a big tarp to go over us when we ride so our horses don’t get wet” ~ 9 year-old from Parkview Elementary BRIDGES Program



Now – so dry!

Left: The new round pen! Haley and participant free lunge Abbie.

Below: What the cover will look like when it’s finished. A dry, safe space for participants to be.



ANT'S GALA REPORT CARD



\$80,892

NET FUNDS RAISED

Through ticket sales, donations, & first time ever online Live & Silent Auctions!



\$29,250

BUSINESS SPONSORSHIPS

Business support more than doubled from 2019 ~ Thank you!

200+ PARTICIPANTS



82 NEW DONORS!



\$19K IN CASH GIFTS



This year’s online Gala was a success, even though we had to pivot quickly!



Tinkerbelle on Toby

**Join us for the Healing Hearts Breakfast
October 22nd, 2020 ~ 7:30-8:30AM**

In the midst of a challenging year, join us for stories of hope and healing. Fill your cup, celebrate what's possible, and learn about the impact ANT has had in our community!

Normally an in-person event, this important fundraiser for ANT will be held on Zoom this year to keep everyone safe.

We have an exciting program, with keynote speaker Dr. Aubrey Fine. Dr. Fine has been on the faculty at California State Polytechnic University since 1981. Aubrey's primary research interests relate to the psycho-social impact of human animal interactions and animal assisted interventions, social skills training for children with ADHD, and resilience in children. Dr. Fine is the author of several books including *Our Faithful Companions*, *Parent Child Dance*, *Therapist's Guide to Learning and Attention Disorders*, and *The Handbook on Animal Assisted Therapy*. After Dr. Fine we will hear from our founder Sonja Wingard, and get first hand stories from ANT participants including a veteran and a New Horizons graduate.



Those that register by October 15th get a free handmade scone & tea they can pick up the night before the event!

Register on our website: animalsasnaturaltherapy.org

Can you help us out? ANT's WISH LIST

- Fly Spray (organic)
- Large Push Brooms
- Large Rabbit Water Crocks or Bottles
- Mare Magic Equine Supplement
- Gauze Bandages/Vet Wrap
- Equine Hair Detangler
- Alfalfa Cubes & Pellets
- Albers Rabbit Feed
- Himalayan Salt Blocks
- Timothy Pellets
- Horse Treats
- Grain-free Dog Treats
- 2-Horse Tall/Wide Trailer



- Warm Winter Gloves
- Copy & Photo Paper
- Cardstock & Envelopes (4x5")
- USPS Mailing Stamps
- Shop Vacuum



Child & Youth Size

- Leather Riding Boots
- Rubber Boots
- ASTM/SEI Riding Helmets



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ANIMALS AS NATURAL THERAPY

HEALING HEARTS BREAKFAST

A virtual fundraiser for ANT

OCTOBER 22, 2020
7:30 - 8:30 AM

Hope is found on stable ground

Personal stories of hope and healing from the barnyard

**Please join us Thursday, October 22nd
7:30 – 8:30 AM**

Find hope, inspiration, and an amazing presentation by keynote Dr. Aubrey Fine

Register at
www.animalsasnaturaltherapy.org

A Big Thank You

We would like to extend a special thank you to every individual and business for helping get us through this pandemic. We want to thank you for supporting each other and your neighbors. We are so grateful to be a part of this community!