Our Community of Care & Connection

From The Director

She climbed out of the vehicle after a long ride out to the farm from the city. Her heart heavy, thoughts dark and attitude surly. The therapist invited her to sit on the swing in outdoor waiting area. She looked out over the vast green landscape dotted with horses grazing peacefully. The first sigh escaped her masked lips. Her arms still tightly crossed in front of her heart until the orange barn cat leapt nimbly into her lap. He persuaded her arms to unfold and as the cat snuggled in, the woman’s brow unfurled and a smile spread expansively across her face. At that moment a door opened that had been slammed shut and her therapy session began.

A parent wearily guides her son to the computer screen. The parent is exhausted from endless hours of home school assignments, therapy exercises and meeting the demands of working a job from home. The boy is agitated, still unable to adapt to the abrupt changes in his dependable routine. His sleeping, eating and toiletting are all off schedule. The screen opens and the boy sees a familiar face holding his favorite Eric Carle book. A pony in the background has lifted his head from grazing to regard the scene and presses its muzzle close to the camera. The boy squeals with delight and tears in to hear his favorite story.

With the impact of a pandemic half way through our fiscal year we pivoted, straddled, shut down, opened up, masked, cleaned and distanced our way through to serving our clients. Not all of them could transition with us to receive services. HYH went out of its way to provide visuals of the farm, story time and yoga videos for people to stay connected. Those who could participate in services transitioned as best they could to telehealth services and eventually coming back out to the farm, one at a time, safely distanced, masked and temperatures measured.

Our capacity cut in half, our income down to a trickle, we continued to work harder than ever. The horses and property needed 24/7 care. In small numbers, our team kept the essential care of the farm and property going while inventing ways to keep our therapy services safe and accessible. We realized that without success from the first half of our fiscal year, our doors would have closed.

In that first half of our fiscal year we saw an increase in client services and a big jump in donor dollars thanks to a beautiful gift from the Brachman family. We were focused on growth. By mid March that focus shifted to weathering the pandemic.

At HYH we have a history of resilience and know how to meet a challenge. Our mission is moving forward from trauma and disability. As an organization we must practice what we teach. HYH will continue to adapt and move forward creating a safe and accessible environment that cares for its herd, its wonderful team, its 69 acres and most importantly the people we serve. Thank you for making it possible.

- Janet Weisberg, MS OTR/L, HPCS, Founding Director

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Summary of Financial Position

HYH continues to operate with fiscal responsibility and integrity. Our farm continues to prove beneficial to HYH clients, team members and the community we serve. This past year HYH generated $573,000 in total revenue, generating an operating profit of $46,700. We managed our expenses and generated an operating cash flow of $71,300. We closed our fiscal year 2020 with $108,000 of liquidity.

Hold Your Horses generates revenue from client fees, events, grant funding and private donations. This fiscal year we received a remarkable gift of $100,000 from the Brachman family. This gift boosted our overall revenue and has helped sustain the organization through a very challenging period of time. The pandemic impacted HYH six months into our fiscal year. We transitioned to telehealth with less than a two week break in services. We then managed a phased re-opening for safe in-person services. These changes to how we provide services allowed us to serve the greatest needs in our client community. Support from our donors made it possible for HYH to maintain a connection with all of our clients, even when client capacity and revenue was down.

We are abundantly grateful to the Brachman family and all of our donors. This incredible support allows us to continue making the investment in our clients, team, horses, farm and community.
Mental Health

As a practitioner of Animal Assisted Interventions for the past 28 years it has been my pleasure to partner with Hold Your Horses and practice equine facilitated psychotherapy at the barn.

Mental health is a strong component of the work at Hold Your Horses. The clinical work and programs have grown from 5 individual sessions per week, conducted by Cairns Psychological Services beginning in 2014, to include contracted work with Hennepin County, equine facilitated learning trainings, and restorative workshops. Due to the high demand for mental health treatment this past year Hold Your Horses hired another clinician to conduct even more equine facilitated mental health therapy sessions.

The opportunity for clients to come to the farm, connect with the horses, be outside in the natural world, and move their bodies as they process often painful and difficult emotions can be life changing. In my work with trauma and other mental health challenges, clients often ask “When can we go to the farm?” “When can I work with the horses?”

Being able to combine equine therapy with other modalities such as Sensorimotor psychotherapy (somatic work), Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Yoga calm and Adaptive Internal Relational Therapy (AIR network) is very powerful for clients. The work done at the farm often includes self-regulation, building self-worth, mindfulness, assertiveness, boundary setting, and let’s not forget allowing clients to have fun. Clients work with the horses in the outdoor paddocks, in the arenas, in the barn aisle, and these last few months even on the computer away from the actual barn. The novel experiences with horses allow for connection, relationship development and attunement. We can ask clients to watch horses body language, check in with their own internal world and determine what interactions feel safe, connected and healing for both them and the horse.

The work with Hennepin County includes group therapy and individual sessions for the Sexually Exploited Youth Program. The individual sessions utilize a cotreat model that includes both a mental health clinician and an occupational therapist. The cotreat sessions solidify the concepts learned in group to help the participating youth continue on their journey of self-regulation and healing.

The restorative work we have been able to conduct has proven to be beneficial to all the groups who have come to these one-day workshops. I often hear from past participants that they continue to utilize the experiential exercises and new learnings to remind them to be mindful, slow down and find moments of restoration each day. Offering compassion fatigue prevention to Hennepin County staff, Interfaith Outreach and Tubman Center mental health staff feels like a true gift. Our last workshop was a phenomenal experience for me as we were able to work with the Humphrey Institute International Fellows Program and offer experiential leadership work for leaders around the globe.

I look forward to continuing my work with Hold Your Horses helping to provide the precious healing work this awesome facility, horses and staff brings to each person who walks into the barn.

- Molly DePrekel, MA LP
Hold Your Horses
Calm

Calm, to me is a long-lost friend who I searched for with LED lights in the dark but rarely found. Until I began therapy sessions at Hold Your Horses.

Hi there, I am 30 years old and I work in the mental health field with children and families. I have seen many children share similar distress with sensory processing as I do. I was diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder two years ago. Certain sounds, smells, and tactile input can send my nervous system into overdrive daily and calming it down is extremely difficult. My body can enter a fight or flight response and it feels horrible. My whole body becomes tense and I become very irritated. Something is wrong. Red flag! Red flag! My brain is misfiring information. I never knew exactly what was going on until I began my own research. Finding occupational therapy for adults is extremely challenging. I was referred to Hold Your Horses and began working with Janet. I had only been around horses once in my life on a trail ride in Colorado. I was excited, but anxious.

I love the energy at Hold Your Horses farm. Nature brings me uninterrupted peace; I love the quiet and the stillness. Yet I longed for peace in my body just as nature quiets my mind. After two sessions Janet introduced me to Yoder. A white, short, and wide working horse who I felt a strong connection with and during this session I experienced a calm in my whole being I had never experienced before. This session was all about regulation, meditation, and calm. We rode around the arena and did some breathing exercises along with some stretching and distraction to keep my mind from becoming too anxious. After a bit of this Janet then had Yoder stop in the middle of the arena and asked me if I felt comfortable sitting on him backwards. I accepted this odd challenge because I understood that it had a purpose for my continued healing.

I flipped around and found myself sitting backwards looking at myself in the mirror. I laughed because Yoder and I looked silly and I loved it. I felt confident - a confidence I had not felt since I was a teenager. I had no anxiety in my system. I felt sturdy and connected with Janet, Yoder, and within myself. Janet asked me to lay down on Yoder and I did. I laid down and my cheek pressed against his back hip. I noticed how warm and soft he was against my cheek. He stood still and he was calm. I looked out into the beauty of the farm. The silence swooped me up and cradled me. I felt so safe. I felt so calm. My body relaxed. My brain slowed. I breathed. Yoder breathed. We were one. It was magic. To finally experience this full body sensation of complete calm, I was in awe. I did not want to leave. I knew I had to try to maintain this feeling in the world and Janet challenged me with just that. She asked me to stop and try to pull this moment back into my minds eye when I felt any sensory overload. I was pleased that I was able to do this to a degree. It’s a continued work in progress, but I am blessed that I found Hold Your Horses and the people and animals here. I truly believe it is a place of healing to whoever walks on the grounds seeking it. Magic is everywhere, we just must believe. Yoder and Janet brought me the magic of calm and I cannot thank them enough.

- Jo Thompson

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