

The Abilene Reflector-Chronicle

Unbridled love part of Shiloh Ranch

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WORKING TOGETHER – Brett and Ivy Graves work with each other and volunteers to minister to the children and families that visit Shiloh Ranch. (Photo by Nicole Printz)

Kids and adults from all backgrounds are finding a place where they feel welcomed and loved – Shiloh Ranch Ministries.

Colorful handprints line the fence of the arena, each with an accompanying signature and date. The kids who visit can look at the handprints and realize there is hope - that other kids have come through hard situations and abuse, Brett Graves explains.

What began with a horse and a mission trip has become beyond what owners Brett or Ivy Graves could have ever imagined.

“We got a horse for our daughter,” Brett says with a laugh. Now seven horses adorn the Graves’ backyard.

The Graves have been living north of Solomon for seven years, but vision for the ministry didn’t begin until about three years ago. Brett explains that his family urged him to go on a mission trip to Oklahoma. He lost his job and while on the mission trip, he began to sense God leading him toward ministry, especially with children.

The ranch has been three years in the making, but has only been open since June of last year. About 60 kids and some parents have visited the ranch already. The Graves invited Big Brothers Big Sisters of Salina to send their children that have not been placed with a mentor. Children also come from as far as Minneapolis and Kansas City to spend time with the horses. Why horses?

“We went with what we know,” Brett said. “We might add dogs later.”

The kids are welcomed at the ranch, invited to spend time with the horses, play games, and make crafts. However, they also know it is safe to talk to either the Graves or a volunteer.

“Craft time is when a lot of the volunteers and kids connect,” Ivy says.

Samples of picture frames made during craft time hang on the wall in the building that doubles as a tack room. Each child makes a craft, has a picture from their horseback ride, and receives a cross necklace to take home.

The Graves enjoy seeing a shy child slowly warm up to the horses and eventually people over the course of a visit. They emphasize one-on-one mentoring. Many of their volunteers are from their church, Bennington Bible Church. The church has been very supportive of the Graves’ ministry. The extended families of the Graves have also been willing to help whenever possible. People have donated saddles, various pieces of tack, boots, hats, as well as items such as a heater.

There are great plans for the future, as well. Although they still see some hard-core fans come during the winter time, spring is when they expect to see more children coming to the ranch. They also hope to see more adults

and families.

Brett would like to have a dorm-style facility to house visiting Native American kids from Anadarko, Okla. He explained his vision for a summer program that would help the Native American children learn skills such as small engine repair.

Over the new year, the Graves made the important step of filing for non profit organization status.

They also hope to expand their arena and put lighting in so that they can ride later at night.

“Just one step at a time,” Brett emphasizes.

One step, one kid, one horse at a time has and will be influencing people for a lifetime of good.