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year, and he says he knew the program could really help the homeless youth he was working with. He inquired with Korschgen and she agreed.

"Street kids," he says, "they're hyper-vigilant – watching for the cops – just everyone that walks by. They feel ashamed. For them to come here and not be surrounded by that is very helpful."

Horses have the ability to pick up on human emotions, noticing minuscule facial expressions and movements, says Vaughn, and they often mirror whatever the human they're interacting with is feeling. The way people react to approaching, guiding and gaining the trust of a 1,000-pound animal also plays an important role, she says.

Cody Surratt, 25, has come to the ranch with p:ear several times, and was happy during the second session when the same horse he'd worked with the first time sought him out.

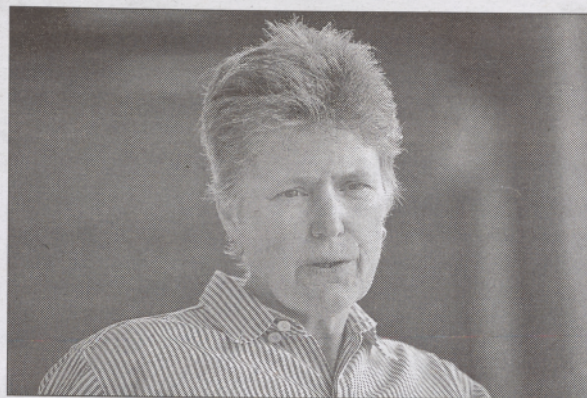
"Horses tend to have very apparent body language that is usually pretty deliberate and straightforward," says Surratt. He says at first he "didn't quite get it," but he soon realized that by observing and analyzing the horse's behavior in cooperation with his own behavior, he came to an understanding of mutual trust with the horse.

"It happens a lot, that people who have survived traumas, end up having deep trust issues and other issues that are stigmatized in our society as something dirty that makes people broken and needs to be hidden," says Surratt. "It seems that equine therapy subtly subverts an immediate reaction of distrust towards something by using a very large and noticeable example like a horse. Gaining a mutual trust with something like that can really be comforting."

Korschgen explains she and other therapists at the ranch use a combination of Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) techniques and their own customized exercises.

"A lot of what we do involves metaphor, so when a person is grooming a horse, or is petting or taking the tangles out of the

mane, we might ask them about the other tangles in their lives, or 'What is the dust or dirt that is coming up for you as you do that?'"



PHOTOS BY BEN BRINK

After intake, Sandell sat down in the stable and selected a brush from a collection of grooming tools. The theme this day: self care. He wrote down examples of self care on a piece of paper, and taped it to the brush. Then the group moved out to the center's enormous covered arena, and Sandell used the same brush to groom an Arabian mare named In Harmony.

The goal is to complete a roughly six-month therapy program with each youth, but so far attendance has been spotty – which is always a challenge when working with homeless youth, says Nathan Engkjer, p:ear's Wilderness Recreation and Transition Coordinator. He plans to grow the program to also include ecotherapy activities such as gardening, archery and trail building, also offered on the 36-acre ranch.

The relief he says it brings to the youth who participate makes the challenge of getting a bunch of street kids into p:ear's Suburban for the 45-minute drive south once a month completely worthwhile.

"There's a lot more laughter on the ride home," he says.

*Alliance
Counseling and
Center at Heron
Hill co-owner and
director Joyce
Korschgen*

DIRECTOR'S DESK, from page 3

disheveled, wet and tired.

Street Roots was bombarded with media requests. What do we think? Is the city helping support the homeless? What is the long-term plan for affordable housing in the city? Will the sweeps do any good? Why do homeless people really not access social services? The questions range from the sophisticated to the absurd.

Commentary on social media and news sites throughout the city offer up differing opinions on the sweeps and homelessness overall, many of which tend to carry a underlying theme that Portland is a homeless mecca and people on the streets have it good. One commenter on Oregon Live replied to an op-ed written by the Rev. Chuck Currie of Portland suggesting homeless Portlanders should be put to death.

It's a common misnomer that many people experiencing homelessness don't want social services. In reality, the shelters are full.

Street Roots had reported early in the week that the largest shelter agency in the city, Transition Projects, had a 5-month wait list for men – 462 men on the list. And there's a 7-month wait list for women, with 271 in line. They have 310 shelter beds. They're all full. They almost always are. Portland Rescue Mission, the second largest shelter for homeless men was also full with a long waiting list.

The average wait time to access shelter and housing for our most vulnerable population is asinine. It takes weeks, sometimes months to even access a shelter bed. Once in shelter, it takes an estimated 2 to 6 months, and that's if you're lucky, to access some form of transitional housing. If an individual makes it this far, it can take up to three years to receive permanent housing.

My point is, it's not that people don't want to access services or to improve their quality of life, it's that our system is so backlogged and there is such little opportunity for housing in Portland that it makes extremely difficult for people who experience homelessness to simply get back on their feet.

In a time when our city faces a real and apparent housing crisis that continues to result in thousands of people being displaced from their neighborhoods and thousands more sleeping on our streets, I find it hard to stomach any neighborhood or business community that doesn't want to see a group like Right 2 Dream Too thrive. I find it equally as hard to comprehend that our collective leadership does not make housing the number one priority.

Possibly it's my own experience that blinds me. Still, it doesn't change the fact that human beings in our community are suffering. It doesn't change the fact that everyone, regardless of circumstance, deserves a safe place to call home, or that in 30-plus years of modern-day homelessness, camp sweeps have never solved homelessness. It doesn't change the fact that now, a week after the sweeps, it's having a detrimental impact on social services working with people on the streets and in the lives of many vulnerable people simply looking for a place to find shelter.

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