

DISCOVERING OUR ROOTS

Annual Demographics Report Edition- December 2024



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Dear Friends,

As we approach the close of another year, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude for each of you who join me in continuing to champion our rural community.

While assuming my role as the third Executive Director of Down Home Ranch, I find myself reflecting on how much the land and people have been part of my life. I often think about the three 100-year-old Post Oaks that stand at the Ranch's entrance. These trees have quietly witnessed countless arrivals, first visits, and last goodbyes over the past 35 years. Much like our mission, their roots run deep in the Blackland Prairie soil of Central Texas, grounding us through every season and providing a foundation for growth, support, and lasting impact.

Our shared mission is to empower the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through social, educational, residential and vocational opportunities.

My connection with the Ranch began unexpectedly in the spring of 2004. A last minute decision to drive an hour and a half with friends to volunteer in the greenhouse ended up altering the course of my life. I spent the day washing and filling pots for the poinsettia crop, not knowing that the Ranch would cross my path a few more times. Four years later, I finally answered the call and began working as a Weekend Direct Support Professional and then moved to full-time in Barnabas House. There, I supported six guys as we hiked, fished, planted ghost peppers, and made more salsa than we could eat.

When I rejoined DHR in 2017 as Chief Operating Officer, I brought with me a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape and practical application of what community based services looked like for those with disabilities. It should be no surprise to anyone receiving my letter that DHR is unmatched at offering a high-quality rural life full of opportunities, friendships, and meaningful relationships.

I am struck by how often I hear people describe the Ranch as a place of hope and inspiration. For so many, seeds of hope have been sown on these rolling hills. As those seeds take root, they provide new experiences, passions, and purpose, allowing people to be their truest selves. This cycle of growth binds us together and nourishes the vision for the future of Down Home Ranch.

This holiday season, I invite you to plant the seeds for continued growth by making a gift to Down Home Ranch. Every contribution, no matter the size, cultivates a community of opportunity for the individuals we serve. It is truly your belief in the mission and your support that sustains the Ranch and makes our shared vision a reality.

With appreciation,



Barry Hamilton, LCSW
Executive Director

The *Seeds* of a New Beginning



The journey of planting a forever home for Down Home Ranch's oldest resident

By Arria Minor

Nestled deep in the small town of Taylor, TX stood a monumental brick structure that would change the life of Terry Pundsack forever.

She'd grown very familiar with First National Bank, as she has been accompanying her mother to run her weekly errands since as long as she could remember. After all, the town was so small that she could bike its entire acreage in the matter of minutes.

As she stood tightly behind her mother, she spotted a small, inconspicuous piece of paper hastily taped to the wall of the bank:

“Down Home Ranch's First Ever Yam Bake Fundraiser”

This moment, though unanticipated, would be the conception of Terry's trailblazing journey at Down Home Ranch.

Terry's story begins when the Ranch's roots were only a seed of a dream.

The founders, Jerry and Judy Horton, had a vision of a community that would encourage friendship, community and opportunity.

For Terry, this dream was planted at a crucial time in her life.



Terry posing while volunteering at the greenhouse

The 30 year-old had just moved back with her mother after her husband of 17 years tragically passed. Though Terry's mother became her caretaker, her condition began to worsen in time, and it became apparent that she couldn't care for her daughter much longer.

"Mom began to worry...

'What would happen to Terry once I'm gone?'

We didn't have the proper programs back then, but Mom always refused to institutionalize her," said Terry's younger sister, Tina. "The problem was that there were no options besides institutions."

After attending the fundraiser, the pair knew instantly that the Ranch was destined to be Terry's forever home.



Terry with founder Judy Horton



...ishing, evening vespers—all these and more made Ranch Camp #1 a great week.

Roster: Ranch Camp 1, June 1995

Geary, Kathleen
Moore, Lynda
Orr, Becky
Pendsack, Terry

Volunteers/Staff

Blair, Ken
Geary, Pat
Hammond, Eleanor
Harris, Gaye
Harris, Mickey
Harris, Ann

Hearn, Tony
Horton, Jerry
Horton, Judy
Westover, Brock
Westover, Vicki

Helpers Before/During Camp

Comer, Ralph
Hunt, Dan & Lindy
Lindquist, Mary Jo
Palmer, Pat
Vaughn, Joanna

She attended DHR's first ever Ranch Camp in 1995, back when campers slept in borrowed tents and cots in the blazing summer heat. Though its humble beginnings were far from lavish, she fell in love with the community that the Ranch fostered.

Terry felt like she was destined to be a Rancher. It was by no coincidence that she stumbled upon the Yam Bake flyer that day, and she remained steadfast in achieving her vision.

Still, she faced a great obstacle. The state had not yet granted DHR the ability to accept Terry's Medicaid funding.

"Terry was on the HCS waiting list for ten years, but back then the Ranch wasn't able to take her funding. I called up Jerry and said, 'as soon as you accept Terry's funding, call us and we'll be right there! But that didn't stop her from being at the Ranch, she still volunteered and worked in the kitchen," said Tina.

Terry (top right) on the first ever camp roster, 1995

Finally, Jerry would make that fateful call that answered her prayers, and Terry would become one of the first women to move into an HCS home at Down Home Ranch.

She has made close friends, found a church home she attends regularly, bonded with staff and has found true love again.

“Her last group home was just a place she stayed, but it wasn’t home,” said Tina, “The Ranch is home, it truly is her home now. She’s doing really well, and I’m so happy about that.”

Today, at 73, Terry is the Ranch’s oldest resident. She spends her days comfortably accompanied by her peers and enjoys sewing, dancing, participating in the Special Olympics and staying active.

Her story is a reminder of the bravery it takes to let go of the familiar and embrace the unknown, sowing not just a new chapter but an entirely new garden. It’s a vibrant testament to the strength it takes to start over and the beauty that comes from planting your seeds in places you never thought you could call home.



Terry taking a photo at the Pavilion



Terry and friends working in the kitchen



Terry and her boyfriend, Charles, posing for a New Year's photo



Terry enjoying the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



GROWING AN ENTERPRISE

The blossoming of two artists' careers from hobby to business

By Arria Minor

Julia and Rebekah's roots run deep when it comes to art and creating. They both diligently attend art class at the Ranch, and pour their creativity into bold, vibrant pieces. Rebekah's journey began about two years ago, where she discovered her love for art through participating in enterprise class. She finds joy in various artistic and creative outlets such as sewing, painting and drawing. For Julia, her artwork has always been inspired by her life experiences and reflects her goals and aspirations. Her most recent piece, titled "A Stairway to Heaven" represents the beauty and closeness between life on Earth and Heaven.

"My desire was to make something that God would want me to," said Julia. "It's vibrant because there's another world you can't see but it's always there."

Recently, the artist duo turned their love of art into a profitable enterprise. Their work was sold to Tarrytown Expocare Pharmacy's largest location in Austin to be viewed by the hundreds of staff and patrons entering their doors every single day. The two presented their carefully packaged work, including "A Stairway to Heaven," to staff including the company's CEO. It was a moment of joy as they took their love of art class at the Ranch and transitioned into showcasing their work in a professional setting. With their work now on display for countless people to enjoy, Julia and Rebekah continue to inspire others to pursue their creative dreams and embrace the beauty in the world around them.



Rebekah holding her artwork



Julia holding 'Stairway to Heaven'



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF RANCH CAMP

Ranch Camp began in 1995 with 23 Campers utilizing donated tents and cots from the Texas National Guard, and a few rented port-a-potties. Nearly 30 years later, Camp has grown into a broad endeavor serving hundreds each year. This summer is set to be a special one as Ranch Camp celebrates its 30th birthday! Have a one-of-a-kind summer swimming in the 52' pool, dropping a line in the pond, caring for animals, taking a hike, and kayaking like a pro. It's going to be an unforgettable summer of fun!



Ranch Camp Summer 2025 Dates

Session #1: June 8- June 13

Session #2: June 15th – June 20th

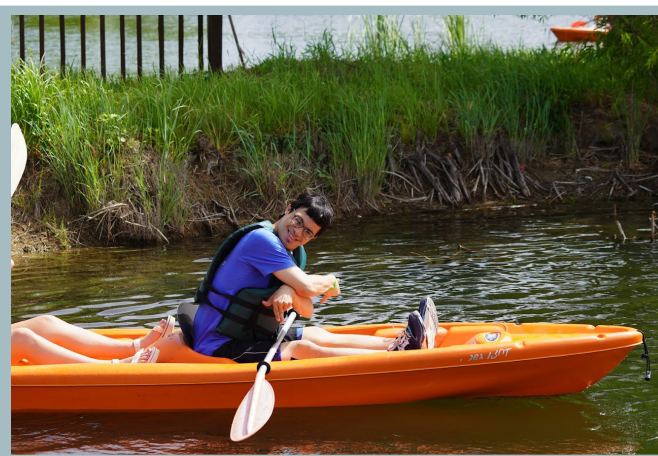
Session #3: June 22nd – June 27th

Session #4: June 29th – July 4th (**Teen session ages 13-17**)

Session #5: July 6th – July 11th

Session #6: July 13th- July 18th

Visit [www.downhomeranch.org/Ranch Camp](http://www.downhomeranch.org/Ranch%20Camp) to register!

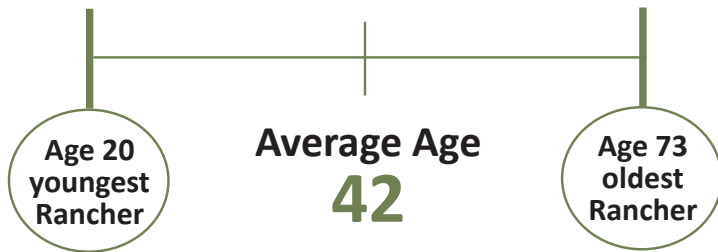


Campers are all smiles gearing up for a fun day on the pond

THOSE WE SERVE

Residential and Day Program Profile 2024

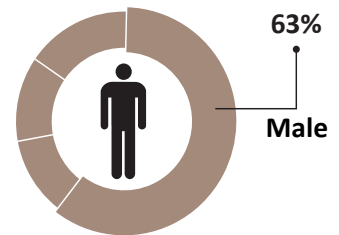
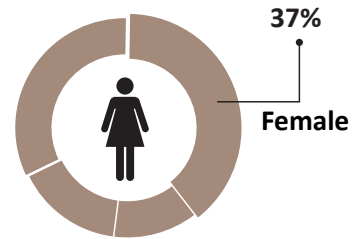
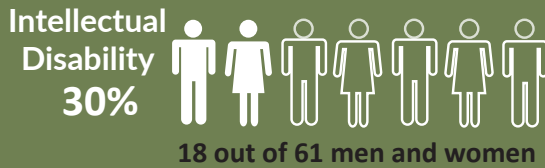
**TOTAL
RESIDENTIAL AND
DAY PROGRAM 61**



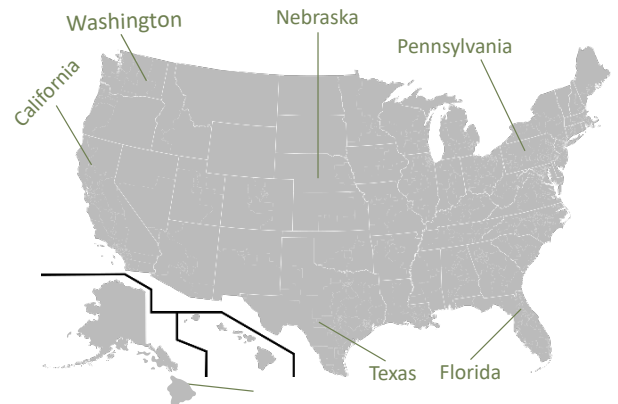
Rancher Travis happily visiting with his friends from Sunnybrook Christian Church at the annual mission trip

DIAGNOSIS STATISTICS

100% of Ranchers have an IDD diagnosis



Ranchers come from six states...



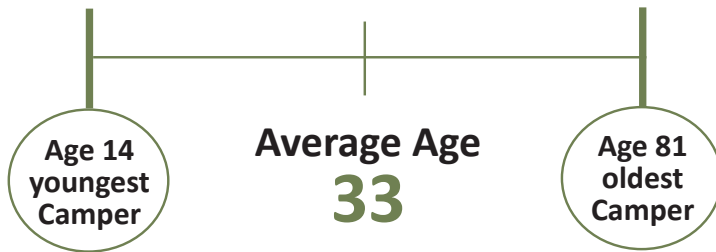
THOSE WE SERVE

Ranch Camp Profile 2024

TOTAL
RANCH CAMP
ATTENDANCE

244

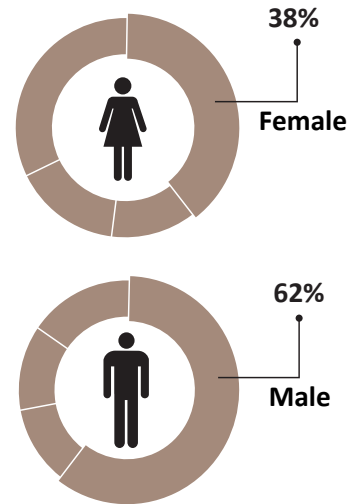
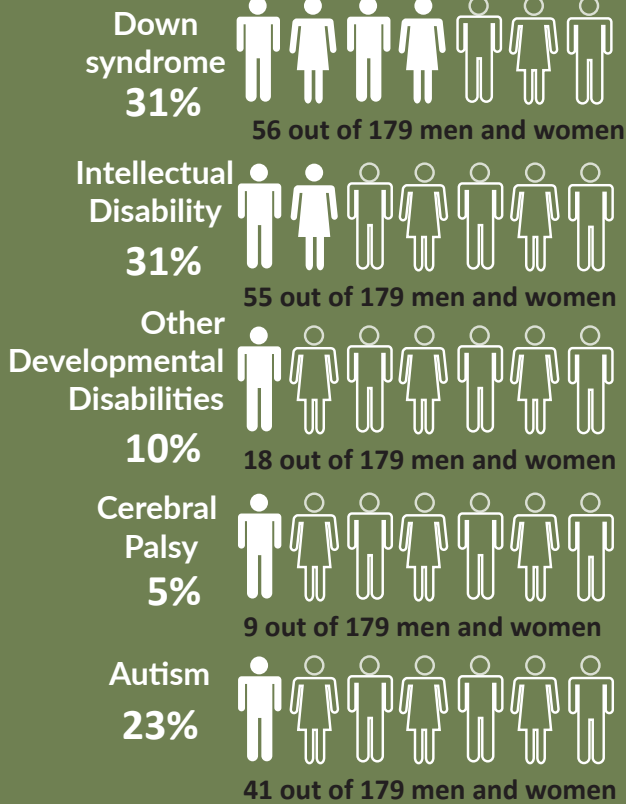
179 Unique Campers



Camper enjoying a barnyard day with the chickens

DIAGNOSIS STATISTICS

100% of Campers have an IDD diagnosis



Campers came from ten states...





Flourishing in New Soil

A Family's Path of Uprooting with a Purpose

By Arria Minor

The Decker family had always called Michigan home. Situated among tall pines and a beautiful landscape, their life was steady, predictable and familiar.

Megan raised her three boys in the city of Ann Arbor, and was comfortably settled into her life and career.

Still, the lives of the Decker family were about to be uprooted in a profound way.

When they first heard about Down Home Ranch—a place designed to foster independence, community, and belonging—it felt like a distant dream. Moving across the country to Texas seemed daunting. Yet, the hope of a brighter future for their son, Brandon, was a call they couldn't ignore.

Leaving behind friends, family, and the home they'd raised their boys in was intimidating. But in their hearts, the Deckers knew that taking this leap wasn't just about better services. It was about giving Brandon a life filled with possibilities, and the opportunity to thrive.

"There were no other programs like the Ranch in Michigan. It was pretty much like, once you age out of special education, that's it. You just live at home. We would come back every now and then, just to drive through and imagine Brandon living there," said Megan.

This sentiment is true for many families of children with IDD. In fact, it's so common it has been dubbed as the "Disability Cliff," or the sudden lack of resources for individuals with disabilities once they age out of special education in the school system.

"Many young adults with developmental disabilities find a reality that is very different from the one they had gotten used to. When they lose their federal entitlement to special education, they are thrown into an underfunded and uncoordinated system in which few services are available as a matter of right."

-Samuel Bagenstos, Professor of Law at the University of Michigan Law School.



Rancher Brandon all smiles at the Bluebell factory



Brandon enjoying DHR's fitness center



Brandon and his girlfriend, Emelia, at the museum



Brandon exploring the Dinosaur Park

The family refused to let the limited resources in their area dictate Brandon's future. After their initial visit to the Ranch, one thing became clear: it was time to make a life-changing decision.

In 2018, Brandon attended his first-ever Ranch Camp. From the very start, it was evident that he belonged— he was meant to be a Rancher.

“Our vision was always to have Brandon be at the Ranch,” said Megan. “We decided that it was time, our other children were in school and my husband and I were able to be pretty flexible with our jobs. It didn't take too much convincing!”

However, just a few short years after uprooting their lives to settle in Texas, the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges.

Without the option of physically attending Day Program, Brandon chose to stay close to the Ranch by volunteering with his father, Robert.

“It took time to adjust, some times were difficult. It hasn't always been easy, just figuring out logistics. I just had to figure it out,” said Megan.

Thankfully, Day Program was able to open its doors again, and soon after, Brandon began attending five days per week.

He's now flourishing at the Ranch, with a supportive community, friends, and a girlfriend.

“The Ranch is such a gift for him,” said Megan. “He has really blossomed. Brandon has always been a happy and smiling person- but now he's smiling more. He's even got a gal out there! It's perfect for us and for him.”

The family has settled into their lives in Texas, with their eldest son even moving down to join them. Their leap of faith bore the fruit of happiness, proving that sacrifice is often eclipsed by reward.

It's often in moments of uncertainty and transformation that the greatest gifts are found. What feels like tearing out deeply embedded roots can be an opportunity to plant yourself in richer soil. With time, those roots intertwine with new experiences, creating a foundation even more resilient than before. Uprooting isn't the end of growth—it's the beginning of a thriving future, where you can flourish in ways you never thought possible.




Roots are strong—they spread wide and grow deep. They are our origins. While each Rancher may come to Down Home Ranch with different beginnings, they each find a chosen family here. The Ranch is a place to explore and deepen roots, uncover passions, and discover hobbies. Through unique programming, DHR provides opportunities for Ranchers to learn what they love—and what they don't—fostering self-discovery and growth every step of the way.


Down Home Ranch, Inc

Visit. Learn. Get Involved

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