DBGR Rises Above the Mouse River Flood

By Del Hager

In the spring of 2011, the flood waters of the Mouse River threw a big scare into everyone along its path, including the staff and residents of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch near Minot. As the waters receded and people moved back into their homes, most everyone became somewhat complacent. They felt the flood had passed. Then, the heavy rains came from the North, the Canadian dams gave out and the second flood, the BIG flood hit! Today, as thousands of people up and down the river valley are realizing, the recovery will take years to complete.

DBGR President, Gene Kaseman, estimates the actual physical damage to the Ranch is around $400,000. That’s minor in comparison to what could have happened had they not been able to build a substantially safe dike and install an inflatable water bladder around the lower portions of the property to protect most of the buildings. The damage they received is primarily from ground water seepage and sewer backup that left basements full of water but not from flooding river water. However, “recovering from the flood really set us back,” he explained.

The Minot Community Youth Home, located in Minot, was not able to be saved. It received flood waters onto the second floor and had to be destroyed. The home served youth ages 14-17 with primarily addiction issues. (See photo)
The main campus was empty for three months. About forty youth were evacuated to DBGR facilities in Bismarck and Fargo. Some were sent on home visits. At the same time, staff members were scrambling to manage both work responsibilities and personal tragedy from the loss of homes and property. Amanda Mosser, Executive Assistant to the President, was one of the unfortunate ones. She said, “I started working here right during the flood. I was out of my home. There were about sixty of us that were affected.” Amazingly, they did not have to lay off any staff because of the flood. Staff members were instrumental in the clean-up process of flood recovery at the Ranch and in the homes of co-workers. It has taken until about March of this year to get DBGR back to normal numbers of both residents and staff.

Disaster relief money helped with clean-up and rebuilding projects. The Ranch is a Recognized Social Ministry Organization of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and an Affiliated Social Ministry Organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). The Guthrie Oklahoma District Lutheran Woman’s Missionary League contributed $4000 to help repair damage to cottages. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Disaster Relief Grant provided $5000 which was split among the sixty affected employees to aid in their direct needs. Subsequently, that same organization provided a $9000 grant specifically for families with children in the Day Program; and, another grant written in conjunction with a few Lutheran congregations in Minot. The grand total was about $200,000.

Not only did they need money to repair the Minot facility but the Fargo and Bismarck locations of DBGR needed to temporarily remodel some of their buildings in order to accommodate the influx of students. The overriding goal was to get the kids back to Minot in the fall by the time school started. They met their goal but it was a very challenging transition.

In order to meet current and future needs of the Minot DBGR, Kaseman stated, “Our biggest issue right now is we are building larger amounts of staff housing for recruitment and retention.” Strategically, it means some of
the previous organizational plans for the Ranch have changed or been placed on hold. The building project will soon begin on a piece of property owned by the Ranch just across the street from the north gate. A twelve unit apartment, some four-plex’s, twin homes and single family units will be offered to staff at a very affordable rent. It will be built as a subdivision with a homeowners association but there’s a possibility some lots could be sold to the public.

Among the future plans they are considering is the possible licensure to accept 5-10 year olds in the Minot facility. The current license is for age 10 years and above. Kaseman explained that this idea has come about at the urging of local Special Education consortiums. He stated, “We do have an elementary classroom so we have some expertise in that area. (Agencies) are seeing a need for earlier intervention. They are seeing problems at an earlier age and (DBGR is) trying to address those in maybe, short term residential care. We have an elementary playground. We have the resources. We have some wonderful medical staff. We have the man power to do it. It’s just honing that expertise."

In describing the kinds of problems they might anticipate with the younger population, he stated, “Dealing with that population, I talked to Special Ed people and they can’t handle these younger children with psychiatric and mental health issues. A statistic is three out of one-thousand are born addicted to prescription drugs or a mother doesn’t realize that she is pregnant and is still drinking. When she realizes she is pregnant she stops drinking but she stopped drinking too late.”

Therapeutic foster care is another area of potential growth in the future. They are looking at the service needs of western North Dakota and trying to come up with a plan to help address those needs. Population diversity and the sheer numbers of people moving in are creating opportunities for additional services and growing the Ranch’s mission. Kaseman talked about looking at more community based services and developing alliances in the western part of the state.

With the strong influence of the Lutheran Church throughout the entire history of the Ranch, it’s only natural that spirituality would play an important role in the lives of the youth during their placement. Kaseman explained, “We have a strong spiritual life program. We just hired a Chaplin. It’s basically part of our therapeutic milieu. We are not proselytizing kids but we do a spiritual assessment and address issues of right and wrong and morality and make it an important part of therapy. We work with families on this too. If they want to do something off campus, we will make that available. If they are not attending church, well, that’s fine but there is still the emphasis of right and wrong and morality. Mosser said, “There is a spiritual life group every week where they sit down as a group in each cottage but they are not forced by any means.” Kaseman believes that the youth today are probably more accepting of the spiritual life then youth from past years. He explained, “The age of the kids we have has drifted down somewhat. We’re not working with delinquent kids as much as we are with behavioral issues. It goes back to the therapeutic need. You have to figure out what is right and what is wrong and you have to have some degree of morals to make it work. And spirituality addresses that.”

When a youth first comes to the Ranch they undergo a very rigorous assessment. One of the first things they do is a complete medical work-up. They often find health issues that become a part of the Individual Treatment Plan along with an Individual Education Plan. Admission criteria are based on one or a combination of the following:

- The youth has emotionally/behaviorally disturbed behavior patterns. Such behavior may range from extremely passive and withdrawn to aggressive. The behavior does not conform to expectations of home, school, and/or community.
- Youth needs outpatient aftercare and residential programming for chemical dependency (Minot Campus). DBGR is licensed for this care, however, cannot accept an individual who is in need of inpatient drug treatment.
- There is a history of failures and non-achievement in school due to behavioral/emotional disturbance and/or learning disability.
- Cognitive level of function is program specific.
- The application of a child with special health needs is considered on the basis of available resources to meet those needs.
- Youth has a primary diagnosis of sexual disorder and has been adjudicated for a sexual offense. Through the Sexual Responsibility Program on the Minot Campus, DBGR offers services for children
with these diagnoses. However, we do not accept youth who display a high risk of repeated sexual acting out behavior.

- Youth has a current DSM IV diagnoses on all five axis.
- Clients must be capable of regulating life threatening behaviors at the time of admission.

Minot DBGR has five resident cottages designed for 58 beds for boys and girls ages 10-18. The referrals typically come from social services, special education, district courts, medical doctors, and families.

Dakota Memorial School is one of the unique features of DBGR. In addition to the on-campus residents, they currently have thirty-six Day Program students from the Minot Public School system enrolled in grades 4-12. “Some of those kids just find that they are more successful here than in a building with 800 kids,” according to school Principal Dave Schoch. They attempt to transition students back to their home school but sometimes the Day Program students are able to graduate from DMS along with the residents. “This year we have seven (total) graduating,” he said. DMS is accredited by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement. Approximately two-thirds of the students receive Special Education services. Schoch explained, “We just organized as a school wide Title I (program). Any student that comes here because of neglect or delinquent treatment automatically can get Title I services.” They employ two full-time and three part-time Special Education teachers in addition to two teachers in each department such as math, science, social studies, etc.

Jan Roers, Director of the Horse Program at DBGR-Minot, came to the facility in 2011 with a lifetime of experiences and education with horses. She shares her gift of knowledge with the youth and staff in a remarkable way. “Years ago, I was given a picture from somebody at our barn and it said, ‘Everything I needed to know I learned from my horse’” she said. “And you know what? It’s true!” The lessons learned through Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) include riding, grooming, feeding, nurturing, and the like, are lessons that transfer learning to all aspects of life for the youth participating in the program at DBGR. Leadership, responsibility, confidence, respect, trust, self-esteem are but some of the important intangible lessons learned. Roers explained, “Horses live in such a different world than we do and it gives the kids an opportunity to really put themselves in other beings shoes. That’s good for any of us. It’s wonderful practice for the kids.” Riding is an opportunity to capture those teaching moments in a fun way. She said, “Horses love rules because it keeps them safe but when they don’t understand (a command) they sometimes resist, and surprisingly, that strikes a chord (with the youth).” While grooming the horses, “kids are a little more open to talking when they are not sitting across the desk with an adult. What the horses provide is a real rich opportunity for metaphor. For example, we can stress the importance of hygiene with a horse. Or, you can put two horses together that haven’t been getting along and talk about coping skills; how to fit in better; to adapt more.”
A summer program run in conjunction with Trinity Hospital is called Hippo Therapy. It’s mostly for kids in need of physical, occupational and speech therapy. “Hippo is Greek for horse,” Roers explained. “Instead of them having to go into the therapy room at the hospital, they get to do their therapy on a horse. Imagine how much more fun that is and how much more you can get done!” Some youth from the Ranch are in a work study program and during Hippo Therapy they can volunteer to help the hospital patients. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to increase that empathy and they get to interact with other kids. The (DBGR) kids know the horses. They are in a situation that they are doing something that they are trained to do. It’s an absolute confidence builder.”

Depending upon a number of circumstances, a youth may be assigned to a particular horse during their stay at the Ranch. A genuine bond develops between the horse and the youth. For example, recently a young girl and been caring for a sorrel gelding named Charlie. Charlie suffered an injury and the girl stepped in to be a main caretaker for him. Roers taught the girl the use of horse massage in addition to other care-giving techniques requiring patience, skill and understanding. Roers explained that as much as six weeks after the girl was discharged, “I’m not kidding. Charlie is still a little forlorn. She was the only one working with him and it just worked out really good. I know it sounds crazy, but with this horse it is clear. He felt lost. We try to make it clear to the kids that they are so important to these horses. If you’re having a bad day or you’re feeling a little resistant, you are not the only one it affects.”

Safety is the first thing that needs to be taught to the youth when they’re working with the horses. The basic training that every youth starts with is called “the nature of the horse” training. She explained, “It’s important that they have control of their horse. There’s different ideas of what control is. With a horse, it’s not dominance. They need to understand you’re a leader. You have to be empathetic and understanding. With a horse, you act in a leader-like manner all the time. You reassure, you demonstrate, you reinforce.”

They try to match the right horse with the right youth whenever possible. For example, one of the horses that came to them had been hurt, “something bad had happened to her. We don’t know what, but she was afraid of people on the ground,” Roers said. They matched this horse with a young boy who had lived in fear from abuse. Through their work together, the horse became available to be used by everyone else. He was proud of that. It was an opportunity to say “(fear) is not going to go away overnight. It may never go away completely. But you can teach her that the world is a safe place and you need to be careful of people but there’s good people there too,” she explained.

The admission process to Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch is now handled in Bismarck as the central location for each of the three DBGR facilities in Minot, Bismarck and Fargo. This has helped to improve their ability to respond to the crisis being experienced by the referral source, according to Jane Brown, COO of Programs. They also have a Shelter Care Program to take youth for up to 96 hours or longer if it turns into an actual placement.

Working with the family is of paramount importance during the time a youth is at DBGR so they’ve developed a program called Collaborative Problem Solving. Brown explained, “What can we do in Residential, because it’s a pretty controlled environment, and what can we do to bring that to the home? What is working
here so we can work with the family on what is going to be practical.” In conjunction with the Wraparound team, a family therapist from the Ranch will work with the family on a myriad of topics in order to best prepare for the transition home. Group activities/therapies that the youth will participate in at DBGR include, independent living, addiction, problem/conflict resolution, trauma focused, cottage governance, art/photography, scrapbooking, sexual response, spiritual life, ranch-life, and wildlife club, to name several.

Each of the staff persons, each of the programs, and each of the activities that are a part of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch serve to achieve the vision of the organization: “Our vision is that all children and families achieve greater success in life.”

(Information for this article including some pictures was gathered through on-site interviews and in part, from the DBGR website @ www.dakotaranch.org. Please visit the website for additional information.)

From the State Office
By Dean Sturm, Foster Care Administrator

May proclaimed Children’s Foster Care Month in North Dakota

In an annual observance, North Dakota Governor, Jack Dalrymple, proclaimed May 2012 Children’s Foster Care Month in North Dakota. Within that proclamation, Governor Dalrymple noted many characteristics that are shared by foster care providers. These characteristics included being supportive, loving, caring, compassionate and dedicated, to name a few.

I would like to express my deepest respect and appreciation to all foster care providers in North Dakota. By allowing foster children to become a part of your families, you are ensuring that they will transition toward permanence in the safe and nurturing environment of your home. The lifelong effect that a good foster home can have on a child, and that a foster child can make on a foster home, cannot be fully measured. This was summed up in a quote from Richard David Bach when he noted, “The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other’s life.”

Thank you all for your dedication to creating and keeping bonds with foster children and ensuring that they have the opportunity to experience that noted respect and joy in their lives.

Until next time, have a great summer.

[North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple signs Proclamation Designating May as Foster Care Month. Photo L to R: Sue Blair, Foster Parent; Shari Doe, Director, Burleigh County Social Services; Governor Dalrymple; Dean Sturm, Foster Care Administrator; Rita Weisz, Regional Representative, West Central HSC; and, Michael Blair, Foster Parent.]
PROCLAMATION

CHILDREN’S FOSTER CARE MONTH
MAY 2012

WHEREAS, the family, serving as the primary source of love, identity, self-esteem and support, is the very foundation of our communities and our state; and

WHEREAS, in North Dakota, there are children and youth in foster care being provided with a safe, secure and stable home, along with the compassion and support of a foster family; and

WHEREAS, foster, kinship and adoptive families who open their homes and hearts to children who are in crisis, play a vital role in helping children and families heal and reconnect and preparing young people for successful futures; and

WHEREAS, dedicated foster families frequently adopt foster children, resulting in a greater need for more foster families; and

WHEREAS, it is important to recognize the valuable and continuing contributions of foster parents who show their love and support continuously; and

WHEREAS, the annual observance of Children’s Foster Care Month calls attention to the value of foster care as a temporary service that provides children and youth with a safe, stable and nurturing foster family until permanence can be achieved.

NOW, THEREFORE, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim May 2012, CHILDREN’S FOSTER CARE MONTH in the state of North Dakota.

Jack Dalrymple
Governor

ATTEST:

Alvin A. Jaeger
Secretary of State
We can all make a difference in someone’s life every day. That is especially true for foster parents. That’s the theme for this year’s foster and adoptive parent annual conference that will be held in Fargo October 5-6. Please plan to attend. I know that you will find it both fun and educational.

If you have never attended the state conference, you should know that it is open to both county licensed and PATH foster parent, social workers, and anyone else who has an interest in foster care. Foster parents can earn up to 12 continuing education credits and associated costs are reimbursable for all but first year licensees (registration costs, lodging, mileage, meals, childcare, etc.). Information on this year’s conference will be sent out mid-summer. Mark your calendar and plan to attend.

The North Dakota Foster and Adoptive Parent Association holds a short business meeting during each year’s conference. Anyone who registers for the conference is member of the association. This year’s agenda will include the election of a president and vice president. If you are interested in serving or nominating someone, please contact one of the association’s current officers. Please also consider volunteering to serve on one of the association’s committees (Scholarships & Awards, Financial Review, Website, Education/Convention Planning, and Legislation). Many hands make light work.

Scholarship and recognition award recipients will also be announced at the annual business meeting. Recognition award categories include foster parents of the year, social worker of the year, and social service agency of the year. If you would like to nominate someone for a scholarship or recognition award, please contact me and I will send you the corresponding nominating form. Contact information on all the association’s offices is presented below:

President  Jon Mielke (Bismarck - 2012)  jcmielke3@bis.midco.net
Vice President  Keatha McLeod (Horace - 2012)  cloudynd@Q.com
Treasurer  Jim Hooge (Munich -2013)  jim43hooge@gmail.com
Past President  Jim Schnabel (Venturia)  jmpmfarm@drtel.net
Human Services Rep.  Tara Muhlhauser  ND Dept. of Human Services

In closing, I want to especially thank everyone who has been involved in putting together the program for this year’s annual conference (the folks at UND’s Children & Family Services Training Center, county social services and PATH personnel, local foster parents, and association board members). Good programs do not just happen; they take an enormous amount of work. This year’s program is looking especially good and everyone involved deserves a huge “THANK YOU!”

Until next time, thanks for all that you do for the kids that you take into you home and your heart.

**ND Foster & Adoptive Family Conference**

October 5-6, 2012

Registration Fee: $80 per person.
Univeristy/College Students (does not include meals): $20.
Additional Meals to be purchased for children and other guests not attending the conference; and students:

- **Friday Evening Meal** $16.00
- *For children under 12 years* $5.00
- **Saturday Breakfast** $11.00
- **Saturday Lunch** $11.00

**Lodging** is available at the Fargo Doublewood Inn. Please call (701) 235-3333 and ask for the block of rooms associated with the ND Foster and Adoptive Family Conference. Rates will be $69.30 for Friday night, Oct. 5. Please call to reserve your room before September 5, 2012, to ensure the approved rates.

**Registration** fee includes $10 for NDFAPA membership, registration materials, Friday supper, Saturday breakfast and lunch, as well as breaks. Meals and breaks include vegetarian options. Forms for reimbursement of child care and other expenses will be available at registration. We apologize but are unable to accept credit/debit card payments at this time.