

2024

# A CHANCE OF A LIFETIME PROGRESS REPORT





Dear Friends,

The mood with which we conclude this year is gratitude. Gratitude for everyone who crosses our path—people who come here for healing, people who contribute generously to our work, our partners, hay growers, feed store workers, and anyone in recovery from all that life throws at us. But most of all, we are grateful for our horses.

We see, every day, how they approach their healing work as one unit—one herd who moves together with the energies of love and hope. They know what they've come from—some from trauma, neglect and bitter abuse. They know what it is to move in this world from hurting to healing. They offer that experience to us without exception.

*Joost & Erica*

**JOOST LAMMERS & ERICA HESS**

*COLT Founders*

# INSIGHTS FROM THE HERD

Our sixth season of operation is coming to a close. As an organization dedicated to learning, opening, and healing, we have some particularly important take-aways to share:

**We experience** over and over again that healing takes place when our conscious or unconscious emotional armors melt away in a safe environment. The herd's safety is now robust enough that they can impart that well-being to everyone that comes here, no matter what stress, grief, distraction, or hurt we bring into the circle.

**We've learned** to embrace the mysterious nature of what goes on here on any given day. That embrace has to be led with the foundational embodiment of, "I don't know, but I trust."

**We've discovered** that the herd is a constellation. Fourteen horses operate as One. Each horse is an iridescent point of light. This constellation—this network of subtle energy—begins working on and caring for each human the moment they arrive on the grounds.

**We do things differently here.** We recognize that we are the horses' facilitators. Our job as facilitators is to LISTEN deeply to the herd. To do this well, we must grow our sensitivity to what the herd needs. We must be willing to pivot if the herd needs something. We are always listening for their direction, with an open and loving heart.

**We now know** that we have a successful, replicable methodology and method. We are eager to develop a manual and begin teaching others so that they, too, can offer safe havens where horses and humans may heal together.

**Most importantly, we've observed,** over hundreds of workshops, how the horses take away—piece by piece, emotion by emotion, hurt by hurt—everything that stands in the way of receiving love. Horses have unquestionable love and capacity for this work.

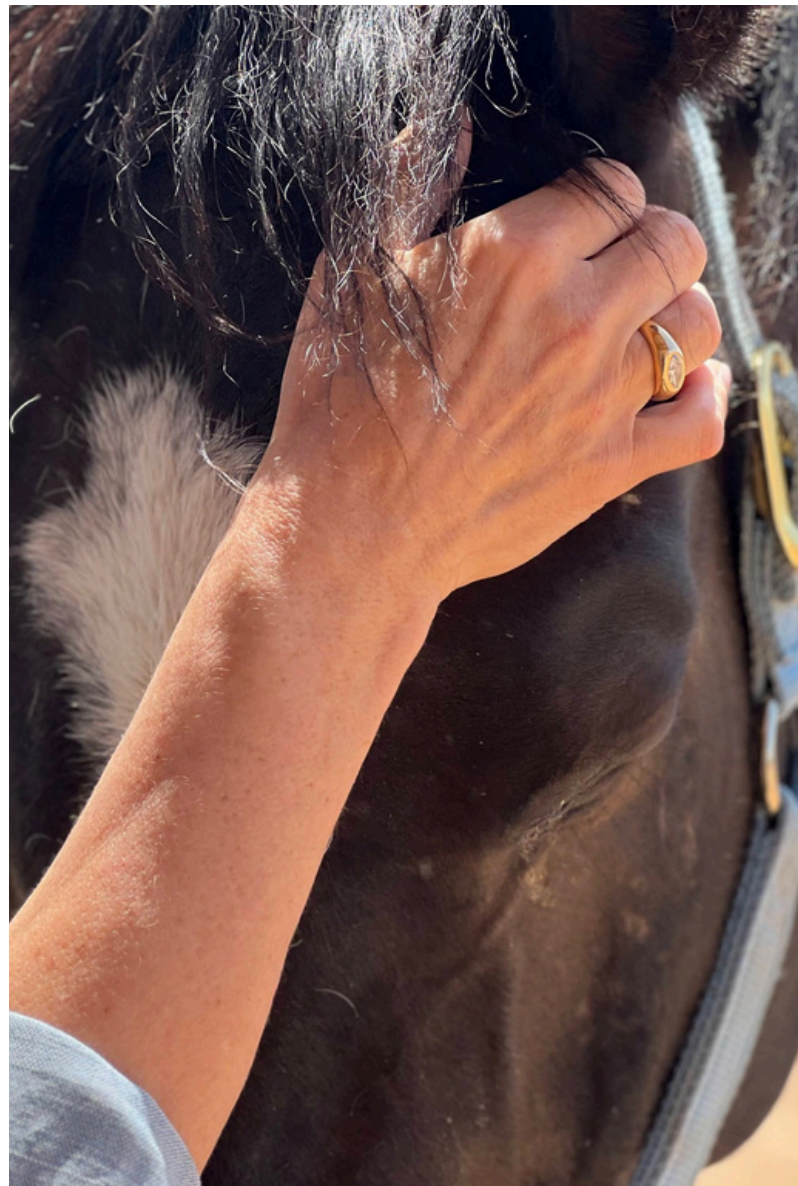
**It has never failed.** We watch people literally transform over three hours. Their faces change. They relax. They feel deeply buried emotions that suddenly surface. They open. They soften. They let go of stress, and get back into their parasympathetic nervous system. Most everyone leaves here feeling love. Giving love. Being loved. And feeling a sense of peace and belonging.

**This is The Gift: That horses and humans heal together.**



## OPEN HEARTS DAY

This year, COLT hosted our first-ever gathering of special souls who support our work in a variety of ways. The purpose of this gathering was to offer guests a guided journey with our horses—the opportunity to slow down with us and experience what it feels like to receive a powerful and personal interaction with our herd. Fifty people attended and everyone had a hands-on, heart-opening experience and felt the healing power of horses.



## DOCUMENTING OUR WORK

Every day we give thanks for a gift we received some years ago—the gift of knowing that horses and humans can heal together. In honor of this knowing, we produced a short film that tells the story of how our horses and the humans who meet them help one another shine. Our role is to create the space for that to happen, and it's in this space where we feel seen.

We hope you'll [take a moment to watch](#).

# 2024 AT A GLANCE

In 2024, the herd welcomed 227 people—89 of these were new clients and 138 openings were filled with returning clients. As we look forward to less dependence on government funding, our increased support from foundations and generous individuals is encouraging.

## 2023

**Income: \$345,169**

- State Grant: \$255,600
- Donations: \$89,320
- Fees for service: \$2,250

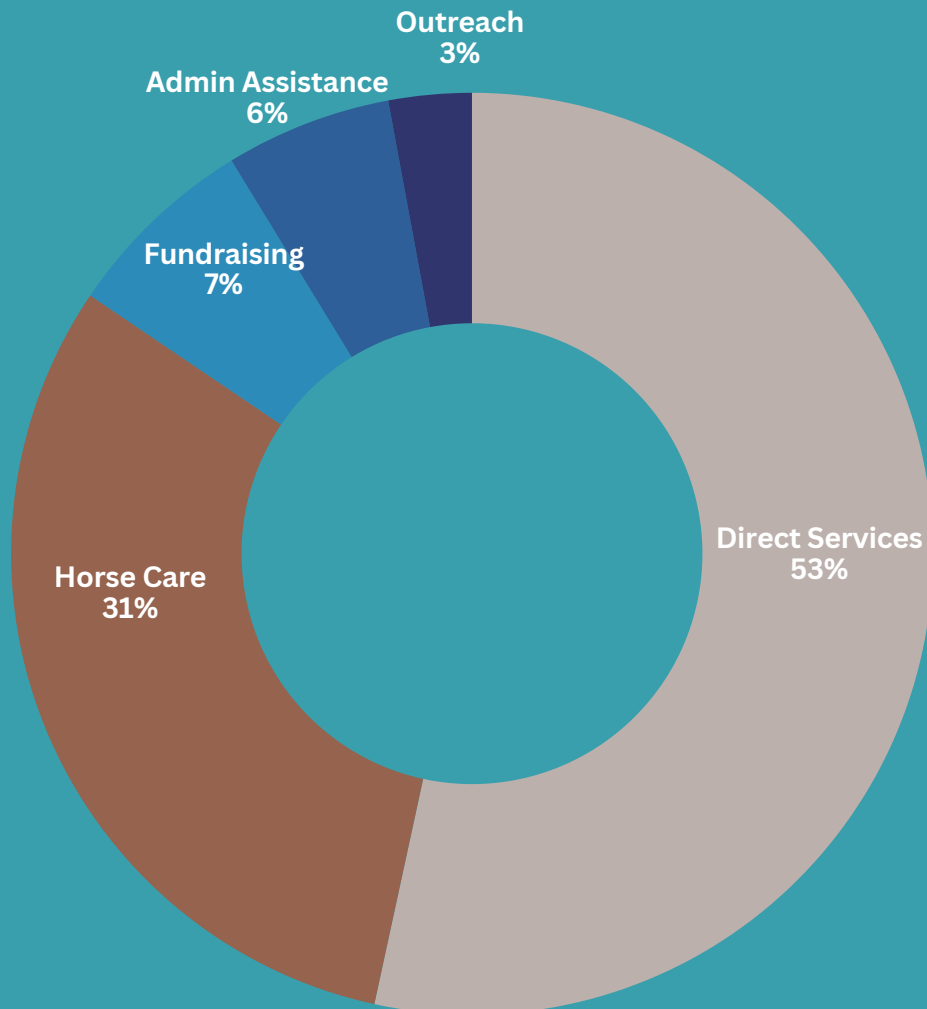
**Expenses: \$344,209**

## 2024

**Income: \$358,872**

- State Grant: \$211,000
- Donations: \$133,433
- Fees for service: \$4,441

**Expenses: \$341,770**



**My name is Chica.** I am a Quarter Horse of good breeding. I'm in my 30s and today, I am well taken care of. But that wasn't always the case.

I once lived on a cattle ranch, where my stern, sloped haunches came in handy for jumping and sprinting. I loved the work—feeling the wind in my mane and a happy rider on my back. At night, I had the freedom to graze, rest and recuperate.

But all that changed for reasons I can't recall. I was sold to a sad man who did not have the means to care for me. My coat grew rough and dirty and I was often cold and hungry.

One January day, a couple came by to see me. They spoke to the owner, did some paperwork and before I knew it, they were walking me out. Through the snow we went down the road a ways to their place, where there were other horses and a barn full of hay.

I haven't missed a meal since. My coat is healthy and I am happy. I am also the eldest of all—the lead mare of the herd. Even though we horses live in separate corrals, we are one unit. We look out for each other. And through some gentle work with Erica and Joost—the couple who rescued me—we have learned to look out for people, too.

The people who come to visit are from all walks of life. Most of them have, like me, walked through hard times. I can feel their grief and sadness. They sit with us and share why they came, what is on their hearts and minds. We horses stay near and still. Our language is silence. I usually pick one person and park myself right next to them. This way they sit exactly in my heart zone. I have gotten really good at this. The best comparison that I can give you is the purring of a cat. And when the people feel this, they often start to cry.

I love my life at the sanctuary and I am eternally thankful to Erica and Joost and all who help us. As a 'spokes horse' for the herd, I can tell you that I am not alone in that gratitude. We all feel it and we all share it with abundance.



## CARA'S STORY

Just a year and a half ago, I found myself in a dark place. My addiction had taken my independence, my ambition and my hope. The spark that lit up my life and guided me was nearly extinguished. I checked in to a treatment facility in April of 2023 feeling defeated and fearful. I was introduced to equine therapy there. The two horses I would visit for an hour once a week became one of the most consistent aspects of my recovery.



When I left the facility, I craved that connection that one can foster so readily with horses, but I was living in a halfway house, working an unpaid internship and had no car. A fellow recovering addict told me about something called A Chance of a Lifetime. I signed up for a workshop and managed to coordinate transportation. From the moment I stepped out of the car, onto the grounds and into the sun I felt some things that I hadn't felt in a very long time—freedom, acceptance and hope.

It's difficult to explain what happens when one steps into a herd of horses. There aren't words for it and this is one of the things I love so much about it. It's not about the words, it's about the feelings and the state of being. In the herd, I can feel freely and without judgement. A gentle head nudge or piercing look into my eyes lets me know that the herd knows, accepts that and accepts me. These horses have shown me what it means to coexist authentically. Each of them have particular personalities and interact differently. They have each taught me something about myself and the way I interact with the world around me. Horses are exquisitely beautiful mirrors of the soul. They have taught me how to slow down and how to BE in my truth.

Again, words fall short of explaining how grateful I am that COLT exists. It has become an integral part of my life. I spend time with the horses and the people of COLT weekly because it nourishes my spirit. The spark that was almost out has been fanned and is burning bright.

# **WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF:**

## **Our Community Partners**

Casa Familia Emergency Shelter for Women & Families

The Celia Lipton Farris & Victor W. Farris Foundation

Dennis Friends Foundation

Four Corners Equine Rescue

Gale Family Foundation

The Melville Hankins Family Foundation

The Life Link

Marineau Family Foundation

Meddleton Equine Clinic

The New Mexico Health Care Authority

Santa Fe Community Foundation

Serenity Mesa Recovery Center

St. Elizabeth Shelters & Supportive Housing

## **Our Board of Directors**

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Beth Shapiro

Maria Gale, Special Advisor

Barbara Groth, Special Advisor

**The many generous individuals who give  
from their heart to our herd.**

