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Wild to Mild – a Mustang Horse Story

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Staff Creative Residencies Summer 2024 Self-Assessment

Wild to Mild – a Mustang Horse Story

Tess Graham, Library Specialist I at the J.D. Williams Library, developed an equine therapy program with Monkey, the horse.

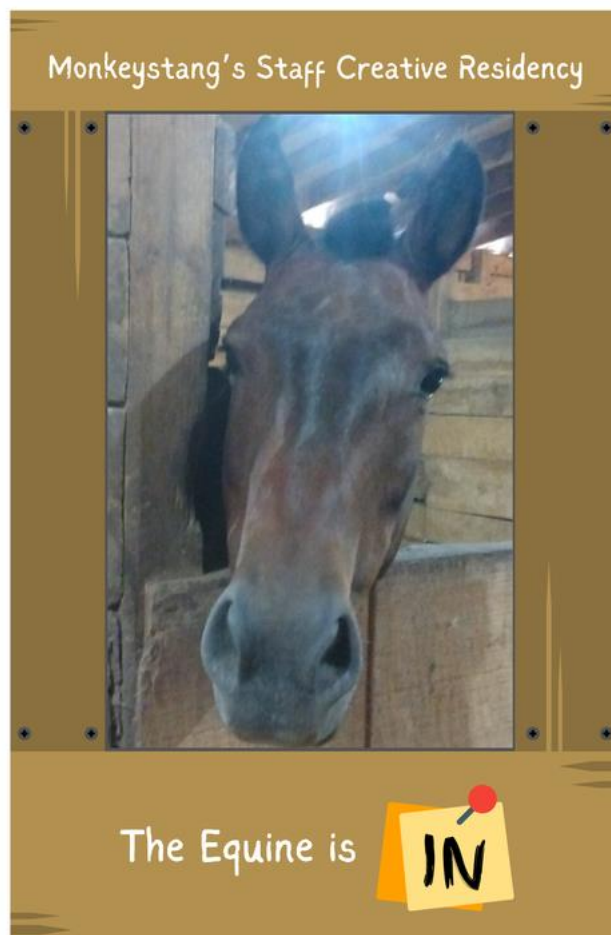
I'm so grateful for this time and opportunity that the University has provided through the Staff Creative Residency program! The very first benefit has been the structure the residency provided as well as the support, passion, and interests of this cohort. It's been a wonderful group to get to know and I appreciate these new relationships with my fellow grantees and staff members!

I adopted Mr. Monk, my formerly wild mustang stallion, based on a photo and video of him being removed from a drought-closed range in Nevada. He was untouched, all right! And quite explosive. I asked him for 10 months to get my first touch on him. Now his presence and bravery are so inspiring. He is true to himself but he shows love for me as his herdmate daily. I wanted to find ways to share him with others that would be safe for him and for humans.

I knew his strengths would lie as a non-riding therapy horse of some sort. As part of the creative residency I interviewed psychotherapists and educators and an art therapist who use equines with patients and clients. I visited a therapy center for veterans with PTSD and their horses. I watched online courses from <https://pathintl.org/> (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.)) There's a brilliant program for using horses to teach reading and math skills, and another that I discovered for creating a curriculum for work-readiness skills for teenagers.

Using those prototypes I collected, I created a plan for a 1-hour interaction with him to help people connect to him and use some of his coping strategies. The two requirements for interacting with him are consent and a common language. He shows people how to meet a horse, how to perform a nose-to-tail “vibe check” to see if interacting with him is safe or if they should back off, and how to connect with him by thinking about memories and emotions they can share with him. He so clearly communicates his reactions of green (he accepts a place or an action), yellow (Monkey is thinking about your request) and red (“DON’T cross my boundaries”). When a human joins up with a horse and there’s that common language of green-yellow-red, it transfers straightforwardly to working with other humans.

He has learned to play interactively with a large playground ball with his visitors and he loves for kids to read books to him. He has quite a sense of humor. Both of those activities make a bridge to self-discovery for humans by taking the pressure of “talking” off the table. The next things I’m thinking about for him are working with immigrants (because he’s very connected to loss – he involuntarily moved from Nevada to Mississippi and has never seen his family or herd since his roundup) and working and playing with people who are experiencing writer’s block and having trouble expressing what they want to write.





Monkey the Mustang has met many friends through the Summer 2024 Staff Creative Residency.



