

Stem cell therapy a lifesaver for horse at Hendrick Home for Children

Cash is first horse to receive the treatment in Abilene

By [Hannah Boen](#)

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PHOTO BY NELLIE DONEVA, NELLIE DONEVA

Ashley Graves feeds Cash. The home adopted the horse into its program three years ago, and staff worked through the injury with the help of pain medications.

When Cash, an equine therapy horse at Hendrick Home for Children, was diagnosed with a degenerative leg injury, his future looked grim.

The home adopted the 10-year-old horse into its program three years ago, and staff worked through the injury with the help of pain medications. However, in recent months, the injury became severe and the home was faced with the difficult decision to put the horse down.



PHOTO BY NELLIE DONEVA, NELLIE DONEVA

Nellie Doneva/Reporter-News Ashley Graves cleans up Cash's stall. The home adopted the 10-year-old horse into its program three years ago, and staff worked through the injury with the help of pain medications.



PHOTO BY NELLIE DONEVA, NELLIE DONEVA

photos by Nellie Doneva/Reporter-News Ashley Graves cleans up Cash's stall at Hendrick Home for Children on June 29. The 10-year-old horse received stem cell therapy to help with joint problems in his front leg.

As director of recreation and equine programs at Hendrick Home, Lora Jones has seen many horses leave the facility due to illness or injury. But thanks to technology provided by a local veterinarian, she may have the pleasure of seeing fewer horses lost to common equine injuries.

Veterinarian Allen Bolt is the first in Abilene to provide in-clinic stem cell regenerative therapy. Cash was the first horse to receive the therapy locally and, luckily for him, the procedure was a lifesaver.

"It was kind of to the point that we were going to have to put the horse down," Bolt said. "It wasn't fair to him, he was hurting too bad. We were burning up his belly with anti-inflammatories to relieve the pain."

About three weeks after hearing about Cash's condition, Bolt had the horse in surgery. It's a minor procedure, Bolt said, that requires extraction of stem cells from the neck area, then concentrating and re-injecting the cells in an affected area.

Bolt made Big Country history in May when he performed the first local stem cell therapy on Boomer, a 14-year-old Staffordshire bull terrier. The vet was happy to report the dog has not needed another dose of pain medication since the day he received the treatment. He looks forward to similar results for Cash.

"Our goal isn't to get him back to performance level," Bolt said. "Our goal is to give him a level of comfort, where we can keep him around. Those kids love on him

and if we keep him where he's pet quality and comfortable, we will be happy with that."

It wasn't in the home's budget to allow for the \$3,000 surgery, but Rescue the Animals and Bolt partnered to provide the treatment at no cost.

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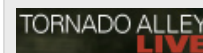


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Rescue the Animals President Paul Washburn said being able to help fund the surgery not only allowed the organization to help an animal in need, but provided insight into a procedure he might consider using again.

"We wanted to experiment with this one and see if we're able to help the horse," he said. "If you have a dog and you have to amputate a leg, the dog gets along fine. The problem with a horse is you won't know if the horse is going to be able to function or not."

The number of neglected horses is growing in the Big Country, he said, and the rescue organization is seeing an increasing need for homes for unwanted horses.

"They closed the slaughter houses, and that's great," he said. "But now the horses are standing out in the field starving to death. A horse is a very expensive thing to keep so we're seeing a lot more demand for places for the horses to go."

Injured horses especially are susceptible to neglect, but if stem cell therapy is successful, he believes it could be much easier to save the lives of lame horses.

Therapy horses like Cash are an integral part of helping children at the home, Jones said, and housing the horses in general encourages compassion and responsibility among the youth on campus.

Because they house about two dozen horses at a time, staff and youth are prepared to occasionally experience loss.

"The kids are used to horses coming and going some," Jones said. "We do lose some to illness or injury."

Although it's at times inevitable, the thought of losing Cash, a favorite among children at the home, was heart-wrenching.

"Any time you lose something you love, it's tough," Jones said. "It's especially hard for kids who have already experienced a lot of loss."

However, saving the horse's life was about so much more than keeping the children from being upset over a lost pet, she said.

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"We try to teach them animals aren't disposable," she said, "they're important, they have value. This is a big part of teaching responsibility. We're trying to do everything we can to help him."

Cash still has a long way to go in his recovery, she said, but Bolt expects him to be moving around within the next 90 days.


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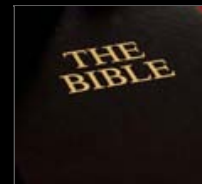
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