

WATERFALL CANYON

Ogden, Utah
Karen Nickel - Admissions Director
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www.waterfallcanyon.com

Visit by Linda Cain, October 25, 2006

Waterfall Canyon is a small, home-based program located on a large lot in a pleasant, residential neighborhood in Ogden, UT. It is a 12 to 18 month program that serves 12 adolescent boys ages 12 - 17 who are either cognitively impaired with an IQ range of 70 - 90 or have a low "social IQ" such as those with Asperger's. An appropriate student might struggle with ADHD, ODD, anxiety, anger management, low self-esteem, stealing, substance abuse, impulsivity or sexual reactivity. Many of the residents have experienced a disrupted adoption. Students who are inappropriate include boys who need medical detox, have a primary diagnosis of substance dependency, display chronic violent behaviors that could endanger a group environment, have a severe sexual disorder or have a physical handicap that would limit them from fully participating in the program.

Karen Nickel, one of the founders and director of admissions, greeted me at the door of this spacious, beautifully maintained home on a cool, rainy day. The atmosphere was homey and warm and was festively decorated for Halloween. I had the opportunity to spend the morning with the boys, starting with an impressive, homemade breakfast. Meals are family style around two large tables. During breakfast the boys were polite, well mannered and chatted easily with all the adults present. The young man sitting next to me enthusiastically told me about his gains in math when I asked him about school. After breakfast, I took a tour of the home led by one of the boys. The bedrooms are much larger than usual, very nicely decorated and shared by three or four boys. Each boy has his own desk, bulletin board, closet space, drawers and personal laundry system. The rooms were clean and orderly, with personal items organized neatly in each boy's area.

Staff and students then gathered in the comfortable living room so I could hear more about each part of the day. I was struck by the boys' eagerness to convey their accomplishments and the look of genuine pride on the faces of the staff as each boy spoke. The staff's belief in each student was very evident. Staff to



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student ratio is 1:4 during the day and 1:6 during at night while students are sleeping.

Each student's therapeutic treatment plan is formulated for his unique needs and includes individual, family and group therapy. All of the clinical staff members are licensed and credentialed. The individual therapy consists of at least one hour per week and may be accomplished in many brief sessions depending on the student's attention span. There is weekly family phone therapy as well as four family weekends per year. Each family is asked to attend at least two of these during their child's stay. Group therapy consists of two different types. Specialty groups deal with issues such as adoption, grief and loss, substance abuse, etc. The students also attend groups that follow the MRT (Moral Recognition Therapy) Model. This model is designed to enhance ego, social, moral and positive behavioral growth in a progressive, step by step fashion."

In addition, every boy participates in the social skills group, which uses the ART (Aggression replacement Training) approach. ART consists of three components: skill-streaming, anger management and moral reasoning. In skill streaming the students have the opportunity to learn, observe and role-play new social skills. In anger management, the boys learn to

identify their "triggers" and learn "reducers" that help them cope with their anger in a healthy way. In moral reasoning, the boys are given scenarios and have the opportunity to discuss the proper responses to those.

Academics are an important part of the day and the boys attend school Monday through Friday at Woodland Hills School. Accredited by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools, Woodland Hills provides individualized attention, is equipped to deal with learning disabilities and can help students regain lost credit. Many of the boys were "underachievers" before coming to Waterfall Canyon but now exhibit pride in their current success at school. The boys I talked to looked forward to school and expressed sincere appreciation of their teacher.

Recreational activities are plentiful and include a daily fitness program, physical training, snowboarding, camping and river running. The boys also have plenty of opportunities to practice their social skills during community service projects and the many off-campus activities. They enjoy going bowling, to movies, participating in sporting

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For more information, contact:
Barbara Potignano

800-260-9178 or 936-447-4617

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activities such as soccer, attending sporting and community events and seeing local theater productions.

Waterfall Canyon opened on August 1, 2006, as the collaborative effort of founders and owners Karen Nickel, Richard Dimick, Kathy Nickel and Frank Nickel. They owned and operated Progressive Youth, Inc., a residential program that successfully helped boys from the State of Utah since 1996. Waterfall Canyon offers a very caring, professional staff with a well thought out structured program that encourages students in their academics, effectively teaches life and social skills, helps the student learn effective ways of managing their behavior and empowers them by building up their self confidence. A high degree of owner involvement and commitment is evident and is contributing to the effectiveness of this program.

About the Author:

Linda D. Cain, MSED, is an Educational Consultant, and owner of At Risk Alternatives, LLC, in Boulder, CO. She has worked with at-risk youth for many years as a teacher and as a foster parent. www.atriskalternatives.com.

NEW PERSPECTIVES...

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TAVASI

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435-770-1031

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Tavasi is a group home serving twelve young men ages 13-17. All Tavasi students reside voluntarily and choose to participate in the family style program. At Tavasi the focus is on living an ethical life and problems are resolved through problem solving with life coaches and peers.

Prior to coming to Tavasi residents have successfully completed treatment in a more structured and secure setting. These young men have recognized and addressed significant emotional, mental and behavioral challenges and have learned skills to deal with the many issues that lead a young person to treatment: depression, anxiety, substance abuse, trauma, anger, defiance, etc.