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VISIT REPORTS...

NEW LEAF ACADEMY OF NC

Hendersonville, North Carolina
Catherine Jennings, Executive Director
866 479-5323
www.newleafacademy.com

Visit By: Stephen Migden, PhD, July 24, 2006

New Leaf Academy of North Carolina is a boarding school for pre-adolescent and early adolescent girls experiencing adjustment or emotional difficulties. Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains, it is a member of the Aspen Education Group of Cerritos, CA. Its sister school with the same name is located in Bend, OR.

The North Carolina campus opened in 2005 with the goal of providing an extended middle school program to 10 to 14-year-old girls who are performing below their potential in school and/or making poor decisions in their personal lives. New Leaf focuses on character development education to strengthen academic skills, improve self-image, and create more positive family/peer relationships. Since opening a year ago, the school has undergone fairly rapid growth and is close to its capacity of 50 students.

The typical New Leaf student is socially and/or emotionally immature but with average to above average intelligence. Many are diagnosed with ADHD, depression, bi-polar, anxiety and/or mild oppositional defiant disorders. Some students have mild learning disabilities and some are diagnosed as high functioning students with Asperger's Syndrome or non-verbal learning disability. I was told that girls with school phobias are frequently seen at New Leaf. Students with significant problems such as physical aggression outside the home, serious running away, or sexual promiscuity are typically not served by New Leaf. The average length of stay is 18-24 months and the program offers year-round enrollment.

Students at New Leaf progress through a three-stage level system: Sun is devoted to accepting and understanding the rules and values of the school; Moon emphasizes personal responsibility with a focus on the issues that brought the student to the school; and in the Star level students are expected to demonstrate leadership skills as they prepare to transition out of New Leaf Academy. According to the New Leaf administrative team, which includes Executive Director Catherine "Cat" Jennings and Program Director Robiyn Mims, the treatment program emphasizes student initiative. For example, girls must petition for various earned privileges and counseling sessions are not set to a