

VISITS...

know it all, but we try to get as broad a foundation in whatever problem we are dealing with before we tackle it. This does not appear to have been done in this case in my personal opinion. As I write this, the surveys are currently not available online, for some unnamed reason. However, more information about the surveys can be obtained by going to www.strugglingteens.com/news/a_start-index.html.

The object of a
public school education
is not to learn anything useful
or indeed to learn anything at all.

It is to have the
character and mind trained,
to have the right social image,
and to make the right friends.

~ Anthony Glyn

ASPIRO

Riverton, Utah
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Visit by: Judith E. Bessette, EdD, October 25, 2006

When I first read about Aspiro, a wilderness program that opened last spring in Utah near Park City, and read their description of the program as cutting-edge, I was skeptical. I thought, "Aren't they all cutting edge, new and different?" And, I thought, do we really need another wilderness program?

But the more I read and the more I learned about the talent Aspiro had gathered together, the more I knew I needed to visit and see what it was all about, first-hand. Meeting Randy Oakley and his wife, Christina, at a regional NATSAP meeting just fueled my interest in visiting. Randy is the founder of the program and Christina wears two hats there. She's in charge of Business Operations but loves getting out with the kids in her role as a Lead Guide.

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For many young men and women, leaving home and transitioning to college or the work world is a daunting and overwhelming challenge. Thrust into the real world alone, with few advocates, they often are overwhelmed by isolation and lack of structure and support. Robert Fischer, M.D., psychiatrist, co-founded **Optimum Performance Institute** in 2004 to meet the needs of these young adults, ages 17-25.

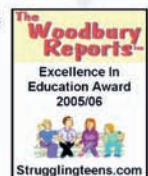
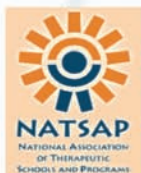


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ASPIRO: Continued from page 7

In October, Linda Cain and I met Brian Church at Utah Olympic Park, built in Park City for the Winter Olympics in 2002. Brian is the Director of Business Development. It was a gorgeous, crisp, sunshine-filled day and the ride to Hanna, where Aspiro's base camp is located, was beautiful. As we came up to the top of a hill, the base camp came into view, set in front of an unusual formation of red rock. And, a river runs through it – a lovely stretch of the Duchesne.

We sat down with Randy and watched an amazing video. It was amazing on several levels – not the least of which was the footage of various adventure activities including whitewater river rafting and canoeing, skiing, snowboarding, top-rope rock climbing, caving (in slot canyons, mind you), mountain-biking, horseback riding and the like – but also because the video captured the sense of accomplishment of the students in the program. One of the hallmarks of Aspiro's program is taking kids to the highest of highs in their outdoor experiences and you could see the results of that approach. When we learned that this video was a creation of one of the students, it made it even more remarkable.

We had the opportunity to meet Ken Betts, Program Director, Justin Robinson, the Director of Clinical Services as well as Farrah and Bridger Jensen, both Field Directors for Aspiro. Their combined years in the wilderness, working with troubled teens are impressive. I was struck by the fact that each of these individuals articulated the same mission and vision of the organization. Each talked about the importance of genuine relationships, of developing self-efficacy and about the true meaning of wilderness therapy versus offering therapy in the wilderness.

Randy has dreamed of running a program like Aspiro – which means to achieve, aspire or infuse with spirit – since 1988. At an IECA Conference in 2004, Randy (who was then at West Ridge Academy) participated in a brainstorming session with other West Ridge staff focused on “what a wilderness program might look like if you were designing it for your own kids.” At the conclusion of the conversation, Ken Allen, the head of West Ridge (and a strong financial backer of both programs) asked Randy to figure out what he needed to get the program off the ground...and Aspiro took its first students in April of 2006.

While a number of their first students were kids having trouble at West Ridge, those students are no longer the majority of the students at Aspiro. In addition to taking referrals from educational consultants, Aspiro is also working with students

from other residential facilities who have fallen off their track and need to refocus. Aspiro invites that school or facility to play an active role on the treatment team so when the student returns to the facility that sent him or her to Aspiro, everyone is on the same page.

Using a rolling admissions approach, appropriate candidates are males and females, ages 13-17, and young adults, ages 18 to 30 years of age, with a history of moderate emotional and behavioral problems, low self-esteem, academic underachievement, substance abuse and family conflict.

On a consulting basis, Aspiro is served by Leroy Anderson, MD, a child/adolescent psychiatrist who has quite a reputation in the canyoneering world. Matt Eschler, LMFT, provides parenting workshops and aftercare services as needed and Chris McRoberts, PhD supervises a team of psychologists who test kids out on the trail.

We were impressed with the kids who visited with us just before leaving base camp for a several day trek in Moab. We talked with kids who'd been there for several weeks as well as one who had arrived only a few days earlier. They were complimentary about the staff – especially in regard to feeling respected and heard when they talked. They were excited about the trip and looking forward to the challenges ahead. One or two said the food could be better – but after all, they are teenagers!

Aspiro really is new and different – and here are several reasons why. This relationship-based program treats kids with an uncommon degree of respect for who they are and the strengths they bring with them to base camp and out on the trail. A recent visitor who sat in on an intake interview likened the experience to watching a high school student transfer from one school to another.

Aspiro uses a solution-focused therapy model combined with adventure therapy to build self-efficacy and discover new coping strategies for dealing with old issues. There are several credentialed recreation therapists on staff who are always looking for the accommodations that will allow every student to get the most out of the program.

Aspiro looks for the best and the brightest in its staff – and is open to each and every staff member owning a piece of the program. This philosophy should create stability in the staff at all levels – not just at the top.

Continued: **ASPIRO/** pg 10

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ASPIRO: Continued from page 9

And, Aspiro takes some other chances that set them apart. We learned about a seriously overweight kid who prospered there – and began losing weight. We learned about their ability to handle kids with diabetes – a real challenge in the wild.

We also learned that the admissions team has the ability to work with families who are stretched financially – an unusual circumstance for so new a program but yet another example of what makes Aspiro genuinely new, different and cutting-edge.

A new scientific truth
does not triumph by convincing
its opponents and making them
see the light,
but rather because its opponents
eventually die out,
and a new generation grows up
that is familiar with it.

~ Max Planck

LIVINGWELL TRANSITIONS

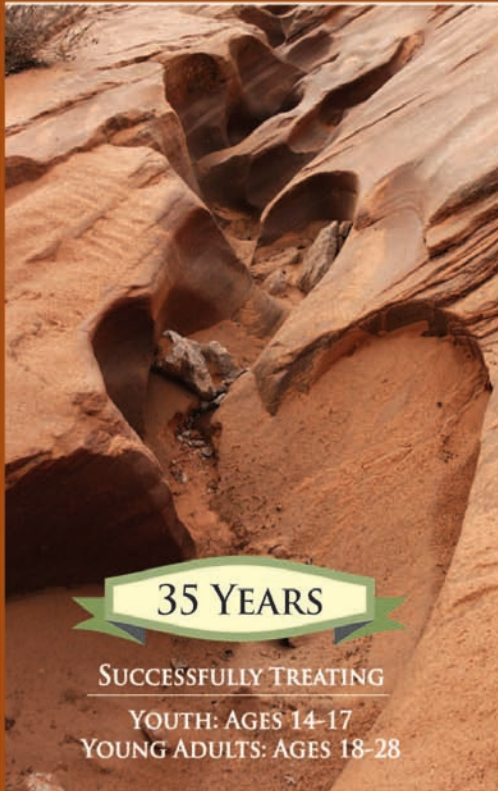
Boulder, Colorado
Julie Randall, Dir. Of Operations
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info@livingwelltransitions.com
www.livingwelltransitions.com

Lon's Visit: July 21, 2006

Living Well Transitions is a program for young adults ages 18 and above that is rather unique in that, except for the offices used for therapeutic activities and homework, computer access, etc., there are no facilities, not even a formal structure as we find in most programs. What Living Well does provide is an experienced support staff that has great flexibility developing healing relationships with the young people who are enrolled.

I had the chance to interview two young men while I was there who had been enrolled for some time. From their appearance, mannerisms, perspectives and intervention history, they showed every indication they would have been very difficult to work with. Actually, if I had met them as clients for the

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