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been the case that a child's chaos has manipulated the manner in which their parent responds to their needs. To break this pattern, families begin practicing new levels of awareness and communication. Building a new common language is central to this work. By creating awareness, identifying tools for interruption, and defining redirection (what will we do instead of the same old patterns?) new patterns of relating and communicating are established. "Reconstructing these old, destructive patterns is not only the first step to preparing for a successful transition, but is also an effective way to enlist the family—not blame them," says Jennings.

While parents and their children practice new manners of interacting with each other throughout their NLANC experience, this lesson is magnified during the Star level in a three-day, individual family workshop that occurs approximately four to six months prior to a girl's identified graduation date. "A therapeutic model often scares parents and sets up resistance to the process," explains Cat, "therefore we have chosen to implement a structured three-day process that is designed to trigger old responses and old behaviors and examine them in a safe and supported environment. The Life Learning Plan utilizes non-verbal, experiential, structured and concrete approaches to help families identify areas still of concern and address them aggressively and appropriately before the family unites for good in the home. As whole families are included—siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles—anyone who plays an active role in the girl's home life, it is a very effective tool to ensure that our students and their support systems are set up for success, not failure."

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As a supplement to their Star work and as they draw nearer to graduation, students are moved to the Angelique, a restored civil war-era former bed and breakfast located approximately ten minutes from the NLANC campus. "This begins their reintroduction to a life outside of the New Leaf container," notes Cat. "It eliminates a sudden transition from all to nothing and also allows us to test their ability to manage in a less structured setting. I would much rather have a student crash and burn under my roof, than 30 days after they graduate." The girls continue to spend the majority of their time at the main campus serving as role models to younger, less advanced students, yet they are shuttled each evening to the relative quiet of the Angelique. "It is a source of pride for the girls who live there, as well as a tangible recognition of their advancement."

With the inclusion of monthly home visits and more focused, intensive family work for impending graduates, NLANC is setting the bar for student transition preparedness. "Clinically and programmatically, it is highly appropriate to use a family systems approach," says Cat. "As in all families, established family patterns trigger everyone. We know if we do not engage in this level of work with the families, our students are too young and vulnerable to up hold their changes alone."

"We can no longer ignore our responsibility to support this process and indeed take charge of it in the interest of ethical service to the families that come to us," she continues. "We know this is the way to real and lasting change."

New Leaf Academy's parent company, Aspen Education Group or AEG, is an organization committed to improving the quality of life for youth and their families. Headquartered in Cerritos, CA, Aspen operates thirty programs in eleven states. Aspen has been providing innovative quality educational programs that promote academic and personal growth for over two decades.

"Strength is built when strength is tested." ~ *Anonymous*