

SHORTRIDGE ACADEMY

Milton, New Hampshire
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Visit by: Linda Cain, March 28, 2008

Shortridge Academy is located on 350 acres in a beautiful area of rural, southeast New Hampshire. It is a co-educational school enrolling students ages 14 – 17, who struggle with emotional or family difficulties. Some common issues include anxiety, opposition, depression, low self-esteem, ADHD, grief and loss, adoption, experimentation with substances, academic struggles, negative peer groups and poor decision-making. Most of the students come from a therapeutic wilderness program but that is not a requirement. The student body is bright and capable of handling a college preparatory curriculum.

The average length of stay at Shortridge is 16-18 months during which time a student will move through three phases: Foundations, Relationships and Leadership. In each phase, students participate in groups, activities and various learning opportunities. For the last year, Shortridge has thoughtfully and systematically instituted the Positive Youth Development (PYD) philosophy. The

“PYD” perspective believes all adolescents have strengths that need to be supported. These assets – referred to as the “Five Cs”, Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring – should be nurtured in a youth’s developmental years. Encouraging the progression of these five C’s in adolescence will bring about a 6th C – a committed young adult who “Contributes” to society.

Dr. Richard Lerner from Tufts University, and Dr. Christine Baber from the University of New Hampshire, are strong proponents of “PYD”. For the past year, they have consulted with Shortridge, put on workshops for the staff, educated the students about PYD, and finally, helped to implement the actual use of the PYD concept. Staff, students and parents all agree that the inclusion of PYD has been very positive.

The main building on campus is where the majority of the student’s time is spent. It consists of student locker (open cubbies) space for day storage, classrooms, teacher offices, comfortable gathering areas for the students, the dining hall, industrial kitchen, large multipurpose great room, music studio and administration and counselor offices.

The single sex dorms are modern cabin like buildings that have a large common area, four bedrooms, bathrooms, a laundry facility and an apartment for live-in staff. I visited the girl’s dormitory that felt



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very welcoming and homey. Many girls had stuffed animals and personal photos adorning their bunk bed or personal cubby area.

Student life at Shortridge is rich with activity. Some of the athletics and activities include soccer, lacrosse, golf, surfing, basketball, skiing, snowboarding, swimming, hiking, a weight room, a dance/yoga studio and a bike shop. There is also an art studio and a music-recording studio. The students are afforded numerous off-campus experiences that range from cultural events to apple picking.

Shortridge Academy is licensed by the State of New Hampshire Department of Education. It is currently an active candidate for accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Due to the small class size and encouragement of the teachers, students who had lost interest in academics, were failing classes, or falling behind in credits at previous schools, experience success and pride in their academics. I saw more than one example of caring rapport between teachers and students. Shortridge students take four core curriculum classes, PE and an elective. SAT Prep is offered on campus. Graduating students go to college, traditional boarding school or return to their home high school with success. Although there are no specific learning disability support services such as remediation or a learning center, students with mild learning disabilities are flourishing academically

within the small class sizes and wealth of individual attention.

The students and staff were not only willing, but also eager, to share their enthusiasm for Shortridge with me. Many students shared their appreciation for the opportunity to be at Shortridge and work through personal struggles with such supportive adults. A girl – who was just a few weeks away from graduating – told me that although she had not wanted to be at Shortridge in the beginning, she now felt it was the greatest gift her parents could have given her. Her face radiated as she said she felt so supported at the school that she was able to do the hard work of learning to love herself again, care for herself and trust herself. She said she was also going to leave with something she didn't possess when she arrived: personal integrity. I felt very welcomed by everyone and reluctantly departed the warmth displayed at Shortridge Academy.

About the Author:

Linda D. Cain, MSED, is an Educational Consultant and owner of At Risk Alternatives, LLC, in Boulder, CO. She works with behavior disordered, substance using, emotionally disturbed or learning disabled students of all ages. For more information call 720-299-8844 or visit www.atriskalternatives.com.



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