

SUNRISE ACADEMY

Hurricane, Utah
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Visit by: Larry Stednitz, August 4, 2008

Sunrise Academy is a licensed residential treatment program located in Hurricane, Utah. The program has a capacity of 32 girls and is designed to address the unique needs of young women. The program works with girls who have a wide range of diagnosis and behaviors.

The last time I visited Sunrise Academy was about six years ago. Although a fledgling program at that time, Sunrise provided basic residential services, but lacked a clear definition of their milieu and struggled with coordination between residential services and the clinical services. These issues have been resolved and the leadership team has produced a tightly coordinated program and the milieu has evolved into a strong treatment program.

The executive director, Dave Prior, emphasized his team's efforts in refining the inter-department coordination. Corey Hickman, the residential director, stressed the importance of all disciplines and the

importance of their working closely together. I was able to attend a multidisciplinary case conference and it was clear that at Sunrise, all disciplines play an important role in carrying out the treatment of their girls.

Sunrise has a well defined milieu and a skilled multi-disciplinary team. An extensive fitness program has been developed and all girls who enroll at Sunrise Academy develop a comprehensive fitness plan. The fitness program includes running, bicycling, swimming, yoga and dance. This aspect of the program importantly involves all disciplines, including teachers, direct care staff, clinicians and administration staff. The fitness program not only helps the girls, but staff as well. A large number of staff participate with the girls, resulting in a common purpose and that is effective in the development of positive relationships between staff and the girls. Joel Beckstrand, the academic director, lost over forty pounds participating in the fitness program. Joel also has improved the academic component by moving away from BYU distant learning to textbook teaching of the State of Utah academic curriculum.

Along with the fitness milieu program, Sunrise utilizes a Family Systems model driven by an "Authoritative Guidance" philosophy. This component of the program requires all to be involved in a nurturing, supportive

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environment. Sunrise believes that students must learn that trust, respect and communication are essential to the development of healthy relationships.

The clinical department is directed by Jack Hinman, PsyD. The clinical component emphasizes the importance of providing creative clinical services unique to each girl's needs. The ratio of clinician to girls is one to eight, allowing flexibility in the provision of services. Dr. Hinman, formerly a clinician at Island View RTC, said that although each girl's clinical progress is officially documented each month, it is not uncommon to hold two or three treatment reviews a month depending on the needs of the girls. Individual and family therapy are provided weekly and specialty process groups are held five days per week.

Substance abuse groups utilizing the SMART Recovery approach are integral to the programming. DBT sessions are also provided as a basic aspect of weekly groups. Dr. Hinman is foundationally trained in DBT.

I met with two of the girls who had been at Sunrise, three and five months respectively. The girls spoke of their difficulties prior to Sunrise. Both felt that they were making progress and grateful to be at Sunrise. Of particular importance to the girls were the values incorporated into their level system. The levels were identified as Discovery, Belonging, Integrity, Independence, and Generosity. Each value level coincides with developmental progress within the program. For example, Discovery, the first level, stresses the importance of family, respect for self and others as well as an emphasis upon supporting others.

I also spent time watching a dance class in operation, several girls cooking and girls relaxing in the living room. They appeared to be relaxed, well dressed and well groomed. The atmosphere was pleasant and the girls were enjoying themselves.

Overall, Sunrise has arrived at a place where the clinical, direct care staff, teachers and administrators have reached a good level of smooth, integrated functioning. Located in a business district of Hurricane, the program has expanded its back yard into a large grass covered area and includes a small sized Olympic style pool. The area is large enough for the girls to spend time and obtain a feeling of isolation from the neighborhood. The proximity of Sunrise Academy to businesses enhances the older girl's opportunities in working and participating in the community.

Utah has a number of small residential treatment programs of approximately the same size as Sunrise. Sunrise Academy provides a good value for its families. Sunrise Academy is accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and licensed as an RTC by the State of Utah.