

EXTENDED INSIGHTS...

ASPIRO/ SANDHILL COLLABORATION REAPS BENEFITS

By: Matthew MacQueen and Linda Zimmerman
(Recently, residents of the Sandhill Residential Treatment Center from New Mexico learned how beneficial it could be to participate in Aspiro Adventures wilderness therapy in Utah. This a report of this very positive encounter –Lon)

Tall, sheer red rock formations surround our remote locale in the high Utah desert. Winding canyons and improbable arches, still being carved by the slow yet mighty forces of nature, allowed Jim's yell to resonate far beyond the distant Colorado River. Over and over, "I love you, Mom!" could be heard bouncing across canyon walls until the words dissipated into hot thin air. In this vast desert wilderness, one has only what is carried with them, be it mental, physical or emotional. Trust is of the essence, and the need to reach out for emotional support becomes inescapable. Dangling one hundred sixty feet above the earth from a rope, anchored by a sun-baked rock, is without doubt one of the most frightening, yet exhilarating, experience. Legs and arms tremor relentlessly, and the heart beats more rapidly up here. Fear for safety and survival dominates consciousness until slowly, suddenly, amidst the exquisite backdrop of majestic rock cliffs and yawning arches - a sort of spiritual appreciation takes hold. "I love you, Mom!" echoes profoundly.

For six days in Moab, Utah, the kids and staff of Sandhill Child Development Center in New Mexico embraced adventure learning at its finest. With the generous help of Aspiro Adventures, a Utah based outdoor therapy program, Sandhill's summer 2008 camping trip literally reached new heights! The amazing team at Aspiro prepared an adventure agenda packed full of activities

including rock climbing, rafting, hiking, bouldering, discovering swimmin' holes, and finally the unforgettable 160 foot rappel down Corona Arch.

Yes, the opening narrative is non-fiction. Jim, a 12 year old Sandhill student, took on the 160 foot rappel and discovered that fear can deliver a jolt as powerful as an electrical current. But at no time over the past year as Jim and I have gotten to know each other, have I seen him more jubilant and alive than when his feet touched ground at the base of Corona Arch.

The roots of the August joint venture between Sandhill Center and Aspiro were planted at IECA Minneapolis in May 2008, where casual conversation at the Woodbury Pedal Pub, and recognition of a shared passion for working with troubled children, ignited the sparks of collaboration. While Aspiro and Sandhill work in different treatment venues (wilderness v. residential), it was quickly evident that the programs share similar philosophies regarding the path to healthy change.

Aspiro bills itself as "an alternative to 'tough love' wilderness programs." Weaving an innovative clinical approach into an array of daily adventure activities helps students build self-efficacy and discover new strengths and coping strategies that allow them to move through old issues.

Always looking for fresh and effective approaches to treatment for kids, Sandhill CEO Linda Zimmerman has been a driving force behind the Center since the doors opened nearly five years ago. Emphasizing trust and nurture, strong relationships are forged between staff and students at Sandhill. These relationships are rooted in safety and allow children to experience emotional connection with adults as rewarding.

When children feel safe, healthy learning begins to take



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COLLABORATION:

Randy Oakley, and guides Dan, Martin, Kate and Christina. Their kind spirits and willingness to work, teach and play together with Sandhill staff and kids helped us tap into the healing energy that the Moab wilderness exudes. Thanks also to Josh Watson for his creative energy and enthusiasm. Reflecting on our collaboration with Aspiro, we will remember that when the goal is healthy change, it helps to be surrounded by kindness and infused with the spirit of adventure.

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TIPS FOR STUDENT COMMUNITY SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

By Eve Eifler, Co-Director,
Tips on Trips and Camps, Baltimore, MD

Although this essay is geared toward the child living at home, it has good information for parents or educational consultants looking for alternative activities for their troubled teen or good ideas for students who completed a therapeutic or emotional growth boarding school-Lon

Community service programs have risen in popularity, chiefly in response to high school requirements for community service hours. As a teen summer trip advisor, I am often asked, "why should I pay to have my teen do community service?" It is a good question, since many kids stay home and perform work in their own communities. However, it is like asking whether day camp has as much impact as a quality overnight camp.

The experiences that teens have when they step outside the comforts of home, work alongside others who are less fortunate, immerse themselves in a foreign culture – be it in Louisiana or halfway around the world – are much deeper and more meaningful than staying around town for the summer. If you are looking for a return on your "investment" from your teen's summer experience, a well-organized community service program may just be the best investment you could make.

When you hear the words community service, perhaps you conjure up images of the Peace Corps. And, while some summer community service programs adhere to this 1960's model, others have become more diverse. Most teen programs today offer some service component, but the focus varies dramatically - from the design of the program, to the type of work performed, to living accommodations. If you are researching this type of experience for your teen, it is important to look at recent trends in order to pick the right program for your child.

Mission or Focus. The "original mission" of the program generally guides how many hours will be spent doing community service and what the participants will do in their free time. The "hard core" service programs usually choose a central project that the participants can see through to completion. Teens live with host families for at least part of their time away and spend less time on adventure activities and travel. It is important to decide whether service, language or adventure travel is the primary goal for your teen. This can help guide you toward a particular trip. Many programs offer a balance of all three, giving the parent more "bang" for the buck.

Younger students. Most community service projects