

students with two or three staff with the students at all times. They use an expedition type model, with the students hiking five-six days a week. Thus there is the constant challenge of learning the responsibilities of setting up camp, tying a pack properly, preparing the fire and campsite along with preparing and cooking the food. All of these are good exercises in learning how to work cooperatively, a skill most of these young people badly need.

The basic focus of the staff is to facilitate the impact of the wilderness. The key to that is the staff's ability to be aware of and have empathy with what the student is going through. Thus they will be aware of when the student needs some help, encouragement or motivation and can provide the proper interaction. It goes almost without saying that sensitivity standards are high for staff in the field. WQ insists the wilderness impact is greatest when the experiences are real rather than contrived, with the staff providing a safety net for the students. Safety is a priority, with WQ keeping an EMT close by in a trailer for rapid response in case of an emergency.

Debriefing is another key aspect of what WQ emphasizes. It is where the staff must help the student mentally and emotionally process through each experience. In this process, the staff frequently uses metaphors to help the students relate their wilderness experience back to how they have been living their lives. Some professionals feel that at least half the value and learning of a wilderness experience is in the skill of the staff in helping the student debrief.

One activity unique to WQ is the night hike. Over the years WQ has developed this into a sophisticated experience with tremendous impact. Larry explains that this experience, followed immediately by a solo, is the experience most often referenced to by students as the one having the greatest impact. Students report a connection with their higher power most often during this experience. Starting about dusk, each student hikes alone over a well marked trail several miles until about dawn, each student separated by about 15 minutes. Although all students spend the whole hike alone, they are tracked and observed by staff. There are also a number of additional safety measures.

To magnify their experience after the night hike, they go immediately into a three day and two night solo. Larry reports that this is probably the most powerful 72 hour experience of their entire stay at WQ.

If kids develop unrealistic opinions of themselves, and those views are rejected by others, the kids are potentially dangerous.

-Brad Bushman

PACIFIC QUEST

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Visit by Lon Woodbury MA, IECA, CEP, June 3, 2009

Our "welcome" to the Ohana camp (which is translated from the Hawaiian as family) was a very impressive experience. Walking up the dirt road that led to the camp, we were met by two students who wordlessly started drumming, and turned, indicating we were to follow. The drummers slowly led us through the tropical garden spaces cultivated by the students.

As we arrived at the circle of students sitting on stumps, each with a word written on the top, additional drummers chimed in. The throbbing of a chorus of drums was an almost overwhelming experience, and signified that welcoming somebody into the community was a very serious and important ceremony. We were presented with Leis and greeted with burning sage on a seashell. I was conducted to the stump with the word "persistence" written on it, and my wife Denise was led to the stump with the word "magical" written on it. We were invited to sit, and that ended the welcoming and started the talking, with all members of the community introducing themselves. I was informed this ceremony is conducted for every new student that moves into the camp community, which has to convey to the newcomer that the welcome is sincere and their arrival is important. The words written on each of the stumps in the meeting circle is a fairly new innovation, a project of one of the students. The students seem to like it and use them by selecting the stump that has the word of a concept on which the student is currently working.

Pacific Quest was founded by Mike and Suzanne McKinney in 2004 as a coed wilderness program with an emphasis on their organic farm and sustainable life skills instead of hiking and survival skills. The goal is to develop personal responsibility in the students, figuring for some of the students that if future treatment is necessary that it will be facilitated if issues of personal responsibility have already been dealt with and no longer interfere with formal treatment. For students that are transitioning back to the home setting, the tools of personal responsibility are exactly what they need to go back home. The program screens out students that are highly oppositional, and emphasizes working with students who might be termed "acting in." As the students talked with us in the circle at the Ohana camp, it was

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obvious that some of them were definitely troubled, while seeming to be getting a lot out of their experience at Pacific Quest.

Care of the land is integral to their program, so each student is assigned (or picks) a plot of land to grow something that will be productive for the community. We saw all kinds of tropical plants along with lettuce and tomatoes thriving under the sometimes mixed care of the students (mixed especially in the Kuleana camp for the new students). The lesson of successfully growing something useful can give a profound sense of success for the students, along with the longer sense of cultivating something that will not produce until after the student has left but will be enjoyed by subsequent students. The students cultivate with their parents during visitation as well.

New students start with the Kuleana camp (which is roughly translated from the Hawaiian as “responsibility.”) It is an orientation that usually lasts one to two weeks. Basic aspects of self care are emphasized such as hygiene. Each student learns the history of the Hawaiian culture and is introduced to the concept of caring for the land, assuming basic camp responsibilities, and hygiene such as maintaining basic cleanliness, brushing their teeth, etc. The camp is approximately a thousand feet above sea level, and enjoys a breathtaking view of the Pacific with the surf very visible far below.

Once a student has accepted at some level the basic responsibilities to be learned, the student moves across the road to the Ohana camp to be welcomed into the community like we were. There, the garden plots were better cared for and nestled in the trees, had a more tropical look and the students were more actively working on their issues. The students prepare the meals, using a lot of produce from their garden plots. We had a very tasty “local” lunch with the students and engaged in conversations where everyone had something to say. This camp is where the real work by the students goes on, which includes a three day and three night solo. Each interaction with a student is designed to empower them.

Currently there are two phases in the program represented by the Kuleana and Ohana camps. Recently the program leased some buildings in Na’aleh to be used as offices as well as the possibility of being used in developing a third phase called Kokua, emphasizing service, leadership and transition. This is a natural extension of the current existing program, giving more obvious form to the concept of giving back to the greater community.

I have to say that the students looked good, including those that are troubled enough to probably need intensive treatment as a follow-up.

STEWART HOME SCHOOL

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Visit by Judith E. Bessette- June 23, 2009

On a serene 850 acres just outside Frankfort, KY, the Stewart Home School, a very special residential community for intellectually delayed individuals from 8 to over 80, offers the opportunity for continuing education, work, companionship, recreation and maximum development for residents. It’s a place that presents opportunities that might just allow dreams to come true for both students and their families.

The school — the dream-come-true of John Q. A. Stewart, MD — was established in 1893 and is currently run under the able direction of Dr. John P. Stewart, current chairman of the board and resident physician at the school. Five generations of Stewart physicians have continued the tradition of the school’s proud past and extend its dynamic opportunities for the future.

Longevity is a hallmark of the leadership team at the school with Sandy Bell, School Director, about to enter her 40th year of service and David Sellwood, Program Director, completing nearly 38 years. CEO, Barry Banker, who married a Stewart girl some 33 years ago, is the new kid on the block...with about 20 years of service under his belt. The current Dr. Stewart has been at the helm for 8 decades and shows no signs of stopping any time soon.

There are currently 374 students living on campus — close to twenty between the ages of 14 - 17 and another fifty or so between 17 - 23. The current student body comes from 38 states and 3 foreign countries. The oldest student, a spry 87, has called the school home for 80 years and introduced himself to me as “the leader of the band.” He offered to answer any questions I might have that stymied staff since he had been there longer than any of them!

I spent time in the majestic “Main Building” (built in the 1800’s as a resort and then converted into the first Kentucky Military Institute) interviewing Sandy about the program and their admissions policies. While they can take students as young as 8, the youngest student there today is 14. Every admission is carefully reviewed — to insure a good fit for both the candidate and the existing student body. There is no upper age limit but all residents must be ambulatory to be admitted and to continue to reside there.

Sandy explained that while the range of IQ’s “on paper” was in the 30s on the low side and the 90s at