Places for Struggling Teens™

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"It is more important to get it right, than to get it first."

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Is The Market Saturated?

By Lon Woodbury



(Written by Lon in Tucson, AZ while attending the 2011 national NATSAP Conference)

Today was the first full day of the annual National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs (NATSAP) Conference. This conference gives us a chance meet in person and catch up on the news around the network from those we have been talking with on the phone or through the social media during the past year. Along with simple socializing, these gatherings allow us to compare notes on issues important to the network of schools and programs for young people with problems that have been developing since the last time we have had a chance to talk in person. At the same time there are numerous training opportunities to learn of program developments and of new knowledge being generated by leaders in the network.

During this networking, one of the common questions I heard today was "Is the market saturated?"

To those professionals outside this network working in more traditional education and mental health programs surviving on public funding, this question might seem strange. To those professionals outside this network, the question of funding is a question of politicians and civil servants deciding who to fund and how much. Essentially this is a political question with decisions made based on political considerations.

To parent-choice programs such as those that are NATSAP members, however, it is parents who decide who to fund and the ability to survive financially is a question of who can best provide the services enough parents are willing to fund through paying tuition. When a category of service, such as services for young adults over the age of 18 needing a residential program satisfy those parents demand, the market is said to be saturated and the excess services will not attract enough parents to survive financially.

If the market is saturated it would be wise for a would-be founder of a program to expend their efforts elsewhere.

These questions got me to thinking about what determines if a market is saturated, and my answer was something like the following:

The market doesn't seem to be saturated yet because three important factors driving parent demand are still increasing….

First, every year more parents realize when they have a child in crisis; they can arrange a solution for themselves by enrolling their child in an appropriate private-pay program. They realize they no longer have to wait until some authority decides for them. When there are more parents looking for specialized services for their struggling teen, there is room for more programs to be successful, and the market is yet to be saturated.

The second factor is the possibility of developing a program individually tailored for the specific needs of a specific child is becoming more feasible every year. As computer capabilities increase, research is using the capability to better understanding child development, and the most important aspect of this is a rapidly increasing understanding of how the brain works, and especially how experiences influence the development of children's brains. This enhanced understanding can improve the chances of success, and even allow success in situations that would have had less success, or failures, just a few years ago. Better services with better or

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