



For many young men and women, leaving home and transitioning to college or the work world is a daunting and overwhelming challenge. Thrust into the real world alone, with few advocates, they often are overwhelmed by isolation and lack of structure and support. Robert Fischer, M.D., psychiatrist, co-founded **Optimum Performance Institute** in 2004 to meet the needs of these young adults, ages 17-25.



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VISIT REPORTS...

SEACHANGE HAWAII

OCEAN BASED WILDERNESS THERAPY

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Visit by Lon Woodbury, MA, IECA, CEP, February 2011

As we watched the pod of whales spouting and playing in their Hawaiian winter waters this afternoon, the SeaChange Hawaii staff were explaining to us, this is a common scene for the cadets who are learning to crew the 98 foot sailing vessel SSV Makani Olu (Gracious Wind) around the Hawaiian Islands. Whales are common to Hawaiian waters during the winter months up to the end of February, but the rest of the year many other sea creatures are spotted playing around the ship, including dolphins. Of course any sighting like this is exciting to the struggling teens that compose the cadets and crew in training.

The occasion today was a visit by several Independent Educational Consultants (including myself) from around the country to view and better understand this relatively new program based on ocean going experiences. The group

included Educational Consultants: Jim Noland of Pennsylvania, Ginnie Reiss of California, Kristie Karge of Vermont, Judi Robinovitz of Florida and her husband Alan, and me, hailing from North Idaho.

The parent organization is Marimed Foundation which has been working with public pay troubled teens for some twenty years. SeaChange Hawaii was formed to make this unique opportunity available to parent-choice, private pay parents while drawing on the experience and resources of Marimed Foundation

Essentially, SeaChange took the ideas of wilderness programming, such as teamwork in overcoming the challenges of nature and solos for introspection, and adapted them to ocean going experiences. The source of the name SeaChange comes originally from one of Shakespeare's plays and refers to the various concepts of a milestone, a crossroads, a breaking point, a turning point, or a moment of truth. All of these expressions best describe an experience that will change the lives of the boy and girl cadets for the better. In every sense, this is intended to be a "working ship" with real sailing challenges and real experiences.

At first I expected the program would screen out difficult to work with teens, but was assured by SeaChange staff, that their experience has been successful in working with children with severe problems that otherwise would have had to go to a clinically based Residential Treatment Center. Their major concern in admissions is if a student has a tendency toward violence. If a student tends toward

violence in reacting to situations, then on board a ship might not be the best place for that child. Thus, they look very close at students diagnosed with a Conduct Disorder to ensure that any possible violent tendencies are either exaggerated in the reports, or might make life aboard a ship unsafe for themselves and the other cadets. They informed me they have an excellent safety record and there have been no serious incidents since Marimed Foundation started ocean voyages as a healing experience since about 1990.

SeaChange Hawaii is for boys and girls ages 14-17 that have personal challenges needing interventions to learn how to overcome those challenges. Most of the 28 day program is spent on board the SSV Makani Olu (Gracious Wind), a Coast Guard certified and inspected 98 foot Sailing School Vessel with sophisticated navigation equipment and sleeping, living and classroom space for 20 people.

They have identified four significant channels in the Islands the ship is to cross, each used as a phase in the program and each loaded with intentionally designed experiences that challenge core beliefs, feelings and behaviors. Accompanied with experienced sailors and Master's Level Voyaging Therapists, the cadets (crew in training) all have increasing responsibilities for the smooth functioning of the ship and overcoming daily challenges that are an inherent part of sailing. Cadets are helped to make connections between lessons learned at sea and their challenges at home.

As graduates have observed, the challenges are real rather than contrived, and each cadet has increasing responsibilities throughout the voyage. Each cadet becomes necessary to the successful functioning of the ship. "Being necessary" is something many of them have never experienced before. Learning teamwork, and fitting into the team by providing their contribution to the whole team, is a powerful and transformational experience.

The result is a maritime experience, coupled with therapeutically designed experiences, with the ultimate destination being home, usually through some long term program like a therapeutic boarding school.

Along with their crew responsibilities, the program is working with BluePrint Education in developing a curriculum that will allow the students to receive academic credit. In addition each cadet receives individual therapy at least three times a week, daily group therapy, psycho educational lessons, and regular therapeutic journaling.

Parents are heavily involved. A parallel land based parent voyage is developed for parents designed to therapeutically mirror their cadet's voyage. In addition, through the sophisticated triple redundancy communication systems, parents have weekly phone or web-cam therapy sessions with their child, parents can track on the Internet the progress of the ship's voyage, be informed of important daily events of the ship's activities, participate in multi-family workshops and at the end, a reunification day with a day of sailing with the cadets demonstrating to their parents their maritime skills and ability to operate the ship as crew rather than cadets.

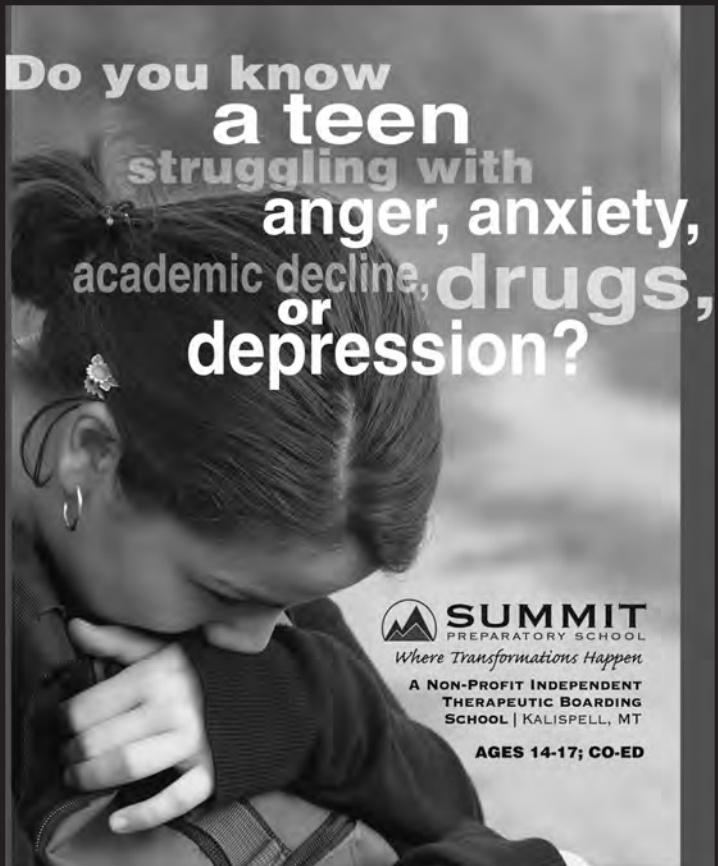
Today was a shortened version of a voyage. Although lasting only two hours, we consultants were pressed into

Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of men, but from doing something worthwhile.

~ Sir Wilfred Grenfell

service to help the crew in the operation of the ship, taking the place of the cadets. The goal was to give us a slight taste of what a full voyage would be like and what would be expected from the cadets, and to get the feel of what the cadets would be going through. We sailed out of the harbor toward Diamond Head and slowly turned around and headed back to the ship's berth. We were divided into teams to reflect the three watches the cadets would be assigned and helped with everything from checking the engine room and other areas for possible developing problems, to taking the helm for a time, and watching for obstacles off the bow.

Unfortunately, the last cadets had graduated, and the next ones had not yet arrived, so we didn't have the opportunity to observe the kids. However, the actual experience was very impressive by meeting the staff, having a chance to work with them, and to experience a brief sailing experience. It gave a good idea of how things would work on a real voyage with cadets on board. I was impressed with how smooth they worked together. This is a unique program, and might have a unique appeal to some kids badly needing this approach in getting closer to nature.



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