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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Connecting With The Future

By: Lon Woodbury



One of the most common questions I receive from professionals in the network of private parent-choice residential schools and programs for struggling teens is what the future holds for our work. My initial answer is usually rather flippant, mumbling something about the crystal ball being rather fuzzy. However, it is a serious question and deserves a serious answer.

I had the opportunity last week to help develop a serious answer through participating in a panel that addressed that very issue of social trends at the Annual Northwest Get-Together help in Naples Idaho, which is a very small town between Bonners Ferry and Sandpoint Idaho. Participating in that panel were myself, Kimball DeLemare from Interchange, and Brandi Elliott from Northwest Academy, calling the subject "Connecting with the Future."

I started off with a review of seven trends I see in society that will likely have some kind of impact on our network in the next few years for better or worse. Each is of course debatable but for sure something is changing in each of these.

1. Parent Empowerment. The whole growth of our network is based on the willingness and ability of more and more parents with struggling teens to take matters into their own hands to find and enroll their child in a school or program that they think can help their child with behavioral and/or emotional problems. This parallels a similar trend for an increasing number of people taking more responsibility for their own health in insisting they make the final decision for health treatment instead of the traditional meekly accepting "doctor's orders," and as part of that by the increasing decision to diet and take diet supplements.
2. Regulations. Everything seems to be coming under government attention, and regulations on both the state and federal level are constantly increasing. Many fear that if someone is working with a child without some regulatory agency looking over their shoulder that is a formula for abuse. In addition, more and more disapproved behaviors are being criminalized, requiring additional areas of regulation.
3. Parenting Changes. Parents have increasingly acted to change and expand their understanding of the "protect and provide" role to include protecting their children from consequences from their own decisions. Risk aversion is increasingly the norm in custom and official policy with parents increasingly making decisions for their children from "play dates" to college and career decisions. In addition our children seem to be learning from their parents that the goal is to win at any cost.
4. Therapeutic Nation. Psychological knowledge is rapidly increasing which can make professionals working with children with problems more effective. At the same time this knowledge is used by more people to justify claiming victim-hood status (Through no fault of my own) and using medication as quick-fix solutions for all kinds of problems.
5. The Hurried Child. There is a push for increased adult rights and privileges for children at younger and younger ages. This includes things like beauty pageants for 5-year-olds, sleep-overs by members of the opposite sex, and children in effect running the family.

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