

THE CLOCK

were quickly found and brought to justice. Big Brother is alive and well here and yet this has not produced a responsible society. Something is missing.

The latest issue of The Family Therapy Networker features a cover article titled "Are Parents obsolete?" Adults are going to have to wrest back control of the culture from teenagers who should not be left in charge. How can they be expected to manage themselves without good role models and clear guidelines for responsible behavior? Montana Academy monitors and controls the environment. We do not allow free access to media. We search students on and off campus and know what is going on in their lives. We provide structure and containment for teenagers who do not have the wisdom to manage themselves. The adults are firmly in charge but they are also willing to engage with students on all levels. They eat lunch with them. They play with them. They attend daily

groups to talk about all aspects of their lives. They act as role models and create close relationships. Within the context of such relationships there are few aspects of life which cannot be discussed. The adults provide perspective along with affection and discipline. We have good reason to think that this model works. Our graduates are proof that with appropriate close adult attention teenagers can grow into responsible and thoughtful young adults.

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VISIT REPORT...

ISLAND VIEW RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT CENTER

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Visit By: Judith E. Bessette, EdD, October 2011

Island View RTC opened in 1994. Its founders, both experienced mental health professionals, envisioned a program that would help troubled teens build on their strengths, abandon self-defeating behaviors, understand their unique gifts and accept help. The building blocks for positive change at Island View included therapy, milieu programming, academics, recreation and psychiatry.

Today's Island View describes itself as building healthy futures on a solid foundation and uses the very same building blocks...continuing to help boys and girls 13 to 17 build on their strengths, abandon self-defeating behaviors, understand their unique gifts and accept help.

Have there been changes at Island View since 1994? Of course! Its ownership has changed, clinical leadership has changed and, recently, there have been several changes in the position of Executive Director. While the school at one time worked with 110 students, they've downsized – another change – with a current capacity of 76.

In my recent visit, I found that while all of those things had changed...there was much more that remained the same. I was struck by the longevity of the staff, not only the leadership and therapy teams, but also the academic team and the milieu staff itself.

When I asked about this legacy of longevity, staff members at every level talked about camaraderie, teamwork, and the

sense of family at Island View. I even talked with a student who, after telling me that Island View had saved his life, went on to say that while he knew the program was "owned by some big corporation" it felt to him like one big family...and a mostly happy family!

There was a sense of cohesion on clinical team. Jason Drake, Clinical Director, explained that several therapists have specialty areas...trauma, adoption, ADHD and executive functioning, sexual abuse, grief and loss to name a few...backed by on-going specialized training in several modern therapies.

Staff talked about the advantages to them (and to the students) of having their psychiatrists on site four days each week. All of this underscores Island View's ability to serve clinically complex cases.

Milieu staff talked about the ongoing training they get from the clinical team on a monthly basis. They talked about their sense of "really being heard" as an integral part of the treatment process and I could sense their pride in knowing that what they do, day in and day out, is critical to each teen's success.

David Hans, PsyD, Executive Director of both Island View and the Aspen Institute, is a clinical psychologist with over 25 years of experience in therapeutic programming and corporate management. Prior to joining Aspen Education Group in 2009, he worked with youth and families in a variety of settings including therapeutic boarding schools, residential treatment centers and in private practice.

David reinforced what I had learned from other staff members...that much of Island View's success with complicated teens is a result of a truly integrated program...a therapeutic setting where psychiatry, academics, milieu programming and recreation all have an equal role in treatment.

I sat down with two boys – one there for nearly a year and close to graduating – the other having been at Island View for only a couple of months. Talking with students is always something I enjoy. They explained that every student is part of a team...creating a more intimate group for every student within the larger environment. There are two teams of boys and two of girls. Team members learn problem-solving skills, develop accountability and serve as mentors to one another. While Island View is co-ed, the teams are single sex and there are limited and highly supervised interactions between boys and girls.

The boys also talked about having individual therapy and family therapy weekly (more often if necessary) and about having group sessions with their team as well as specialty groups for substance abuse and other issues like adoption. Both told me that they had learned a great deal about themselves through therapy. One of them, who had come to Island View from a psych hospital, had extremely complimentary things to say about his interactions with the psychiatrist assigned to his team.

Speaking of learning, the boys told me they liked the small class sizes (about ten students on average) and the range of classes offered in the fully accredited school. The school offers a rigorous college-prep curriculum. Both of these boys have every intention of going on to college once they graduate. I was under the impression that many of the other

students have similar intentions.

We ended our conversation with a discussion on the recreational offerings at Island View. Students participate in physical education every day. There is a weight room and a newly refurbished rock wall in the gym. Outside was an obstacle course. Many students participate in local 5K runs and half-marathons. In addition, off-campus trips are scheduled regularly to hike, camp, swim, ski and snowboard. The academic program mixes the beauty and wonder of Utah with recreation through an elective, Outdoor Classroom. Recently, a group of girls camped in Flaming Gorge, UT and learned about dinosaurs, astronomy, photography and biology.

My visit to campus ended with a walking tour through a pleasant and cheerful environment in the dorm areas, the school, the group rooms and the cafeteria.

I left feeling that the Island View Team is as strong as ever and remains an excellent choice for both troubled and more clinically complex teens. It is appropriate for kids who are depressed, bi-polar, abusing substances, suicidal, emotionally dysregulated, dealing with trauma, self-harming and/or dealing with other destructive behaviors, psychiatric disorders and other emotional issues. Call Laura Burt, Director of Admissions, to set up a visit and see just how solid this program is firsthand.

EXTENDED INSIGHTS...

LINGERING PERCEPTIONS ABOUT A NOT-SO-NEW MODEL

By Brian Church

While rapidly diminishing, industry perception (sometimes supported by our competition) is that Aspiro programs, including Aspiro, Kairos, and Vantage Point, are soft and “gimmicky,” a handful of consultants have indicated that some of the FUD (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt) thrown out by admission folks is that high adventure activities “distract from the important personal issues at-hand.” These comments are coming from folks who have not studied the research, those who have never visited our programs, and/or are simply misinformed.

The fact is that students in Aspiro Group programs experience all the benefits of wilderness living - they are always in the outdoors. When it snows on Second Nature kids, it snows on Aspiro Group kids. When it rains on Outback kids, it rains on Aspiro Group kids. When the sun is beating down on Open Sky kids, it is the same for Aspiro Group participants. The difference is that when kids aren't simply hiking, often in large circles, our students are engaged in clinically rich activities where serious growth occurs. Not only do our students have the benefit of the challenges of weather and hiking, they are also engaged in

demanding high-adventure activities that consistently give us valuable information about how students handle novel environments and challenges. We believe these novel environments give us deeper information and a more accurate assessment about how the student may transfer into a new environment after wilderness.

For some who may not be as familiar with our programs, the perception might be that we simply do “recreational activities.” The truth of the matter is that our activities are implemented with serious clinical outcomes in mind. Wilderness guides, who are experts in teaching and mentoring through powerful high-adventure activities, drive the change process in astonishing ways. A wealth of clinically rich information is communicated to therapists, who can process and plan for upcoming itineraries and individual and group counseling sessions.

One of the most glaring underlying characteristics in most of our clients is an unhealthy level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the basic internal belief that one can overcome any challenge with sufficient effort and drive. Those who lack a healthy level of self-efficacy believe they are incapable of finding success in specific areas of their life, and often in EVERY area.

One of the primary goals of Aspiro Group programs, are to significantly change the perception of one's personal abilities. We want students to understand just how capable they are, and