

CHANGES

strategic agreements or affiliations with other providers.

Another trend is the increasing need for statistics to prove effectiveness. Research of this type has always been important, but the demand for statistical proof is increasing and survival well might depend on having it.

Another trend is the movement toward electronic medical records, and making all that information easily available to all authorized providers. We all have all heard of inadequate health treatment due to incomplete records, and similar lack of important records or insights in the network of private special needs schools and programs all too often exist also.

COMMENTS BY ANDY ANDERSON, MRA

These trends are not new. Whatever changes, Obama Care etc. The need for small/smaller schools and programs and the fact that collaboration has always been there and has been viable as a strategy forever. It is the reluctance of people to trust, share, assist and work for the greater good that it has never been widespread.

I saw this most clearly when I was the Executive Director at NATSAP. Conglomerates looked down at and pushed the smaller schools and programs around. The little guys could not compete.

Go to a conference and try to get referral sources to have dinner and one would find out several groups were taking very large groups of people on huge outings, costing a small fortune. As the great Chief Tecumseh stated, a twig is easily broken, a bunch of twigs is strong.

Part of surviving and thriving is not just about legislation, limited funding, parity, escalation of costs, and the fact that increased diagnoses of autism and the spectrum along with new diagnoses are growing.

Economies of scale are not guaranteed and pure. My observations are that economies of scale can provide quality services, but it can also push profit mongering, weakened quality and loss of connection between students, clients and families.

Particularly in private pay, parents wanting the best for their children are seeking the right fit where they are most comfortable and assured of the service quality and delivery. Private owners of for- profits and not-for-profits can compete and survive if not thrive.

The push is on to solve this problem as a national issue.

According to Open Minds, Behavioral Health Care, driven by the changes in Health Care in general, is changing and the future environment for providing behavioral health care will be significantly different than it is now. The individual provider as well as small owner operated schools and programs will be severely challenged to survive, but in my view there is a good chance that those prepared for these changes can survive and still maintain enough of their independence to continue to provide parent-choice personalized services.

As to collaboration and alliances, one only need look at ISPA. A little less than eight (8) years ago, professionals of conglomerates and very large programs laughed at me and told me ISPA had no chance to succeed. They said I would not gain 5 members if I worked at it for five (5) years. We have 17 strong small and smaller members and may grow to twenty (our limit, no one else's). I have also turned some folks away who did not fit our standard, philosophy and our call words – "caring for families and their loved ones comes first, profits come second". If you work really hard, do things really well and truly know your market, customer care and customer service, you will be successful.

ISPA members are doing quite well. If the sky is falling or about to fall, Open Minds may be right. Maybe we should look up, but we are too busy helping improve our services and business practices and listening to those we serve, not to keep our eyes on the ball.

"Parent choice" says it all. There will always be lots of parents that will not sit back and let the government or large corporations direct and instruct their actions, decisions and lives, not so long as America truly is the land of the "free and the brave".

Sincerely,

Andy Anderson, MRA

Founder and CEO, Independent Small Programs Alliance

Thanks Andy. It was ISPA I had in mind in talking about alliances and affiliations for small owner-operated programs. -Lon

VISIT REPORTS...

MONTANA ACADEMY

Marion, MT

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Visit by: Kristie Campbell, BS Psy, IECA, on May 25, 2012

The Lost Prairie is an amazing valley in Montana, truly hidden from the highway miles down a backcountry dirt road. At a back edge of the large prairie, nestled in the hills of Western Montana sits the campus of Montana Academy, a therapeutic boarding school for troubled teens. Montana

Academy is considered among professional independent educational consultants to be one of the best in the network and on my visit, I could completely understand why.

Montana Academy was founded in 1997 by John and Carol Santa and John and Rosemary McKinnon. Together the four of them have created a program of healing for bright students who are talented and full of promise, yet struggle with exterior influences that hamper their maturity. Often they are misbehaving at home, struggling in school and/or dropping out of extra-curricular activities, etc. All of their families stand behind them, actively participate, and remain engaged in their children's lives while they are students at Montana Academy. Currently, John McKinnon and John Santa are Co-CEO; Rosemary McKinnon is Director of Admissions and Carol Santa

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is Director of Education.

We arrived at Montana Academy mid-morning to find a serene campus as the students were currently in class. As we walked up toward the main lodge that houses the administrative offices and the cafeteria, students began changing classes and the thought crossed my mind that this closely resembled a well-established college campus. Students freely walked between buildings throughout the well-maintained grounds and we could hear laughter and the sound of childhood playfulness echo off the surrounding hills.

Upon arrival, we met with Rosemary McKinnon, Director of Admissions. Rosemary's expertise in both the student and the family selection is impeccable. Staff knows the type of student they work best with and therefore the screening process is very thorough. Montana Academy is a school where matching the family with the program is as important to the administration as matching the student. The parent's role is critical. Parents must visit the school as part of the interview process before a student is accepted, and they must make a commitment to incorporate program components into their busy schedules. In addition, all students attend a wilderness prior to enrollment to help them settle down and work through any rebellious resistance.

After a brief walk through the administration building, we walked around the campus, taking a full tour of all the school buildings and residences. Montana Academy has a full sized multipurpose gymnasium complete with exercise equipment and sound proof music rooms. The school house itself has numerous classrooms for all academic offerings and there is an impressive library/ computer lab on campus as well. The newest building is a full counseling center with separate offices for each of the primary therapists, and conference rooms for group sessions and family workshops. The boys live at one end of the campus in a large dorm-style building, while the girls live all the way at the other end. Both homes were well-kept and organized, but as usual, the girls make their home more personal and decorated.

Rosemary discussed with us the different clans of Montana Academy as well as an important component called Sky House. In 2002, in order to avoid the mishap of regression after

graduation, Montana Academy implemented a transitional phase to their program. This transition from a protected ranch community back to what students call "the real world," provides ample challenges with the support needed to help them learn to succeed. All Sky House students enroll in college classes at the Community College and take internships or volunteer jobs in the community. Here they learn real life independent living skills. Currently 30 students live in the Boys' and Girls' Sky Houses in the Kalispell community.

In addition to excellent program components, Montana Academy also has a complete and professional lineup of staff. The clinical department is led by two clinical directors, Tim Corson, PsyD, and Nick Hong, PhD. Together they oversee all student case files and direct the clinical team. The rest of the clinical team involves both therapists and team leaders. Todd Cardin is the Director of Addiction Prevention and there is an MD and an RN on staff as well. All staff participates in several meetings per week to maintain open communication to keep everyone up to date on each student. Additional staff includes Team Leaders for weekdays and weekends, night staff, kitchen staff, administrative staff and teachers. Most of the teaching staff are Master's Level teachers, certified and well educated in their field of expertise. All of the staff we met were friendly; the students were obviously comfortable around them and yet displayed respect at all times.

The students appeared content and well-adjusted to life at the Academy. They were curious about us and at lunch, hung around us to ask us questions, and were eager to let us see who they were. The day we visited, the school newspaper was distributed and all the students were curious to see what the "press" had covered and learn the news about their community. One thing that stuck out in my mind about Montana Academy is the information sharing that happens around the lunchroom. When someone has something to announce or celebrate, like a birthday, the visit of a parent, or a transition to a new level, they address the community and



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then make their announcement. Then the room erupts with applause and approval from the community. This creates a sense of genuine fellowship and draws visitors into the community as well.

Despite the fact there were 70 students and several adults in the cafeteria, it did not feel crowded or chaotic. The entire lunch gathering was extremely well-organized. Each group sat at their own table and, one group at a time, went to the buffet to serve their lunches. The food was made fresh, tasty with wide variety of healthy options. After meals, students have the opportunity to gather in a great living space adjacent to the

lunch room to relax and spend time with their group until their group cleans up their table.

We decided it was time to go, and as we walked back to our car at the end of our visit, I remembered why Montana is called Big Sky Country. Even in the mountainous area of the western side of the state the mountains open to reveal the sky and the entire area seems to be larger than life. The location, the staff, and the atmosphere at Montana Academy all promote a place of healing for these kids, allowing them to blossom into the young adults they will soon become.

NEW PERSPECTIVES...

[New Perspectives schools and programs are those new to Woodbury Reports, Inc., and are presented to expand your knowledge, with the disclaimer that we know little more about them at this time than what appears here. Inclusion in Places for Struggling Teens™, of course, does not imply any endorsement by Woodbury Reports, Inc.]

BRITEPATH, LLC

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Britepath, LLC is an alternative, gap year program for college aged young adults who maybe struggling with academic challenges or feel like they are bored and restless, not knowing where they fit in or are searching for their place in the world. This program is not for those needing constant monitoring, but for those who have willingness to explore new ways of developing their own personal growth.

Bradley Midgett is one of the co-founders of Britepath, who initially started working with struggling teens as a wilderness guide. He then went on to earn two graduate degrees: Clinical Social Work and Intercultural Youth and Family Development. He has had his own private practice and ran his first international trip with young adults in 2001. Britepath's other co-founder and Director of Academics is David Nichols, who previous to opening this program, worked as a consultant and human resource professional. He then went on to join the Leadership School, as a teacher and found his new passion. David

has worked for a private boarding school for at-risk teens; as a private practice tutor and college admission coach and is a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Rounding out this small programs team is Aida Hutz-Midgett, EdD who is the Academic Consultant. Aida is an assistant professor at Boise State University in the Counselor Education Department. Dr. Hutz was recently recognized at the 2011 Idaho Counseling Association Conference and was awarded the Volunteer Service Wing Award for leading by example.

This experiential program focuses on four areas of learning for the students: Interdependent living, Academics and Vocation, Exploration and Community integration. Students live in apartments with other students close to the university and public transportation, gaining necessary life skills and experiences. Students may enroll in courses during their semesters or gain vocational skills with the bustling town of Boise. International travel to Latin America is available twice a semester, where students contribute to those living in communities of underprivileged and learn that they can create positive change in the world, while also building self confidence and creating new and different types of relationships.

[This information came from the Britepath website]

BRANDON SCHOOL AND RTC

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Brandon accepts boys only that have a range of educational, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. Because of their difficulties, these boys have not been successful in public schools or in their communities. The boys range in age between 7 and 17.

Tim Callahan, the founder of Brandon School and Residential Treatment Center in 1966 has been the President and Executive Director for 28 years. Prior to Brandon, Dr. Callahan spent nine years developing and leading two public urban special education schools. Joseph Tondorf, MS, M.Ed, has served as the Chief Operations Officer at Brandon for over 18 years. He holds advanced graduate degrees in both education and counseling and served as teacher, counselor, and administrator within the Boston Public Schools for nearly two

decades. Brandon has been providing services to troubled boys and their families as a non-profit school and residential center. The goal of Brandon's treatment program is to move boys as quickly as possible to a less restrictive school and home setting.

The Brandon campus is located in Natick, less than 30 minutes from Boston. The campus located on a wooded 35-acres host walking paths, sports fields, gardens and various outdoor education opportunities. Facilities in the newly remodeled special education school include classrooms, full size gymnasium, computer room, conference areas, family spaces, and a full-service kitchen that houses our vocational cooking program. Campus residences consist of three colonial style homes designed specifically to house Brandon's stabilization/diagnostic services and specialty programs. Also on campus is a residential wing with single rooms, designed to accommodate boys needing enhanced structure and supervision. Off campus are three neighborhood-based houses where Brandon offers treatment in home-like settings.

[This information came from the Brandon website]