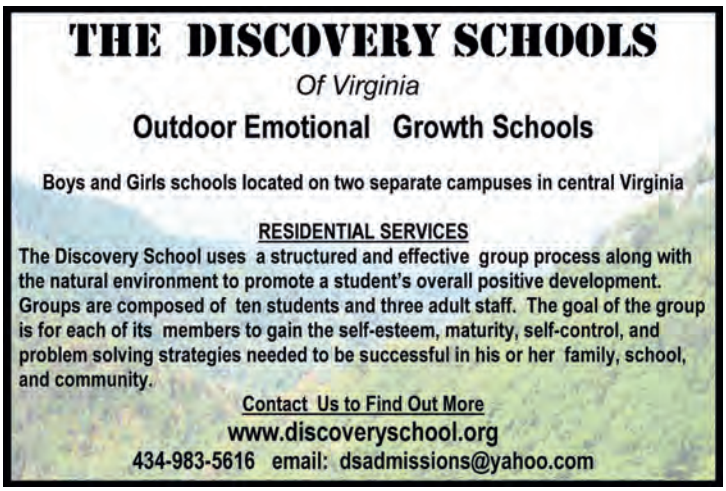
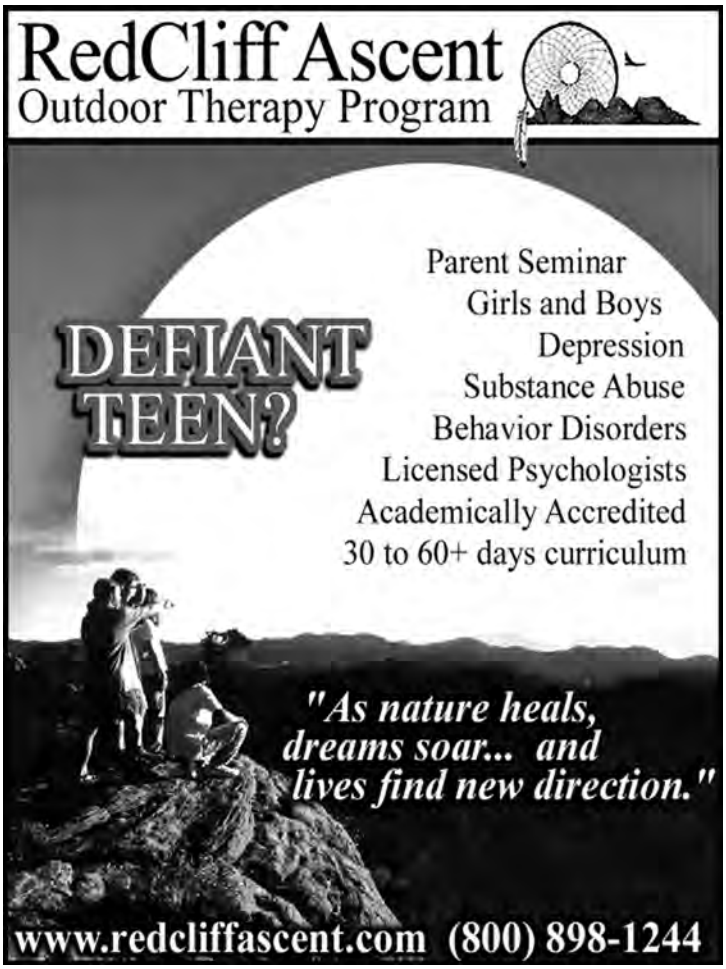






Visit Reports...

Academy at Swift River

800-258-1770
Mary Jo DeGrandi, Admissions Director
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www.swiftriver.com

Visit by: Judith E. Bessette, EdD, December 6, 2012

Tucked in the foothills of the Berkshires in Massachusetts, sitting on over six hundred acres of mixed forest, meadow, beaver ponds and mountain springs, you'll find the rambling white clapboard buildings of the Academy at Swift River (ASR). A college-prep, co-ed therapeutic boarding school, ASR serves high school students 14 – 18 years old with average to above average aptitude.

ASR students all have some combination of behavioral, emotional and learning issues, including moderate mood disorders, academic underachievement, school avoidance, attention disorders, low self-esteem, adoption issues, unresolved grief and substance abuse. Through clinically intense individual, group and family therapy; an academic program that offers both college prep classes as well as support for moderate learning differences; and a strong residential program that incorporates both community service and a vigorous outdoor recreation program, students are able to rediscover themselves and the infinite possibilities of their lives.

ASR was opened by Aspen Education Group in 1997. I've visited several times…and over the years, there have been many changes. From its original emotional growth model and its own wilderness program to the more clinically sophisticated therapeutic boarding school it is today, its core values remain intact. ASR remains a safe and nurturing environment – a place where adolescents can get back on track and discover their true potential.

Bar Clarke joined ASR about six months ago as Executive Director. He is uniquely positioned to lead the school. Bar has spent nearly 25 years working with adolescents and young adults. He has worked in and led private high schools – one in the US and one in Botswana. In 2004, Bar joined an educational consulting firm, serving as the Director of Special Needs Services, placing students in therapeutic school like ASR, residential treatment centers, drug and alcohol rehab facilities and young adult programs. In 2009, he opened his own consulting firm.

ASR's current outreach materials are organized around several key words…all starting with "R"… including rebuild, reinvent and rekindle…words that capture what can happen for a student there. It seems to me that these words also describe the new (or renewed) ASR…something Bar Clarke has been integral in creating.

I felt a wonderful sense of caring and community during my visit…a feeling that was validated by the students with whom I met…reflecting the school's commitment to hard work, academics, education and clinical integrity. One of the boys who toured me around had been at the school for nearly a year – so had about equal amounts of time with the current administration

and the former. He was quite animated and excited as he told me how Bar interacts with all of the kids and that he has an open-door policy that this young man (and many others) use and appreciate.

The integrated clinical program, under the auspices of Sharon Hartunian, LICSW, utilizes evidenced-based Stages of Change and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) as well as Motivational Interviewing and Psychodrama. ASR also offers Equine Therapy. All therapists on the clinical team have completed Intensive DBT training. DBT skills and protocols are incorporated into individual, family and group work, as well as in the residential and academic milieus.

The students advance through a four stage Journey which includes Awareness, Acceptance, Balance and Compassion. Each stage delineates behavioral expectations and builds in progressive, earned opportunities in preparation for transition to the next stage. Family work is fully integrated into the clinical programming through family therapy sessions and regularly scheduled family workshops, which engage both parents and students.

Recovery services are available for students diagnosed with substance abuse. As therapeutically recommended by the Licensed Alcohol and Drug counselor, there is a weekly Recovery Theme Group as well as on-campus and off-campus AA and NA meetings.

The academic program at ASR, with Peter Stevens, MA, serving as Interim Academic Director, is designed to develop confidence, self-advocacy and leadership skills along with critical thinking skills, curiosity and a global perspective. Accredited teachers lead small classes designed to prepare students for college. In addition to English, math, science, history and social sciences, ASR offers a large array of electives and independent studies. Physical education is required and includes individual and team sports as well as many activities in the rich outdoor environment.

Ann-Mary Cloutier, MA, is the full-time Learning Specialist and assists students with issues, including ADD, ADHD, executive functioning challenges, low processing speed, NLD, dyslexia and dysgraphia. The school serves as a test site for the PSAT, SAT and ACT. Individual tutoring can be arranged as needed.

Proud of their visual arts program, ASR offers photography, studio art, painting and print making. Local artists come to campus frequently to present workshops to interested students.

There is an ever-expanding list of clubs to join,including fly-fishing, summer sports, ceramics, anime, dance, yoga and martial arts. Over the past several years, students have begun to take advantage of the 27 cross-country ski trails on campus by running and biking which has led to participating in local 5K and 10K runs.

The residential program, headed by Cindy Efinger, is designed to promote positive social health, support safety, and reflect the values of ASR. Beyond dorm life, the residential staff works with students several times each week on community service projects, such as working with seniors and the homeless in the community as well as engaging in gardening and other campus improvements.

An exciting aspect of residential life that ASR has really expanded in recent months is their outdoor adventure program. Jamie Bishop, a full-time, certified outdoor instructor, offers quite an array of activities, including kayaking, white water rafting, rock climbing, cross-country and downhill skiing, hiking, mountain biking and overnight camping.

Four Circles Recovery Center is a state-of-the-art, innovative wilderness-based treatment program for young adult males and females, ages 18-28, with addiction, substance abuse, and co-occurring mental health issues.

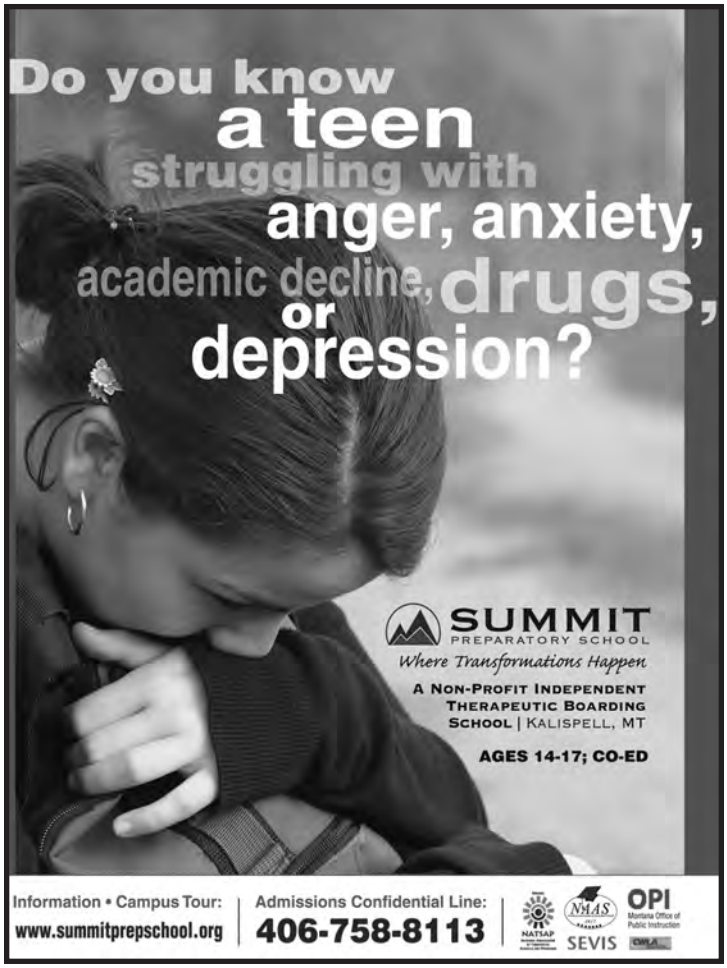
Four Circles Transition Program in Asheville, NC, is a transitional living / extended care facility for young adult males, ages 18-28, who are transitioning from any primary substance abuse treatment program.

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I found a safe and nurturing environment at ASR with an overall "positive vibe". If you haven't reconnected with the school recently, I encourage you to return. Just call Mary Jo DeGrandi, MA, in Admissions to set up a tour.

ASR is accredited by The Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is SEVIS approved and a member of both CITA and NATSAP. ASR is a program of Aspen Education Group – now a member of CRC Health Care, a comprehensive network of specialized behavior health care services.

Parent Choices For Struggling Teens
Mondays at Noon, PDT
LATalkRadio.com, Channel One