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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Academics in a Therapeutic Setting



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This episode of Parent Choices for Struggling Teens, hosted by Lon Woodbury, was a discussion with guest Bryan Tomes, Executive Director of Asheville Academy for Girls, about Academics in a Therapeutic Setting. To begin the discussion Lon shared his opinion that in the past academics at therapeutic boarding schools have generally "taken a backseat" or been somewhat mediocre at best, with the exception of a few. Bryan rebutted that, "there has been an historic shift in therapeutic schools and programs offering more sophisticated academics, in addition to seeing that "school" is one of the many areas in which the student's behaviors arise."

"A school or program needs to identify a mission or vision for learning," continued Bryan. "In addition to looking at class schedules, curriculum, and the accreditation process, a therapeutic setting looks at a student's broad range of issues and their social and behavioral differences." He also discussed the importance of the size of the school and number of students per class in a therapeutic school because therapy and healing are built on relationship building.

Bryan went on to explain the importance of proper staff training in both academics and therapy as well. "It is so important to make sure the academic staff receives therapeutic training and are included in the therapeutic team meetings. They hear the goals for each child and can utilize interventions and skill building techniques in those areas of their classrooms. The students receive continuity in all areas and it normalizes the process."

Sharing a bit further, Bryan included, "Students need to see success in their academics as well as in relationships with their families and peers for a smooth successful transition after they leave a therapeutic school."

Lon added, "Sounds like a conductor of an orchestra, synchronizing all the factors, needs, textbooks, sports, arts and therapy needs."

Parents and Educational Consultants can help find the proper placement for a student needing the small or specialized classes that some students need to obtain academic success. With homework being a major problem in creating a dysfunction in families, smaller classes often allow more time for students to complete their work. Also, in a therapeutic setting, students are usually assessed to determine what kind of "learner" they are and an academic plan is created utilizing their strengths and weaknesses. Students learn organizational skills that often carry over to their next program, whether home at school or off to college.

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Tutors International

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Tutors International is a worldwide organization that provides experienced private tutors to work with children of all ages and nationalities from pre-school to college. They provide tutors in a wide variety of situations from helping students re-take critical exams, helping them with the transition of moving between international school systems, and supporting adolescents with AD/HD and dyslexia. Tutors International is also available where a family's lifestyle makes for a difficult 'fit' with standard schooling.

Tutors International was established in 1999 by Director, Adam Caller. He received his teaching degree from the University of York in 1991. He taught in the private sector for many years and was a tutor to prestigious families in France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, California and England. Adam has received specialist training in dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder and he is a member of the Independent Educational Consultant Association.

Tutors are available for full-time tutoring positions, for major support and tutoring outside school hours, or for home-schooling. Tutors International is able to source international tutors including multilingual travelling teachers to accompany families travelling around the world, or those whose lifestyle necessitates frequent travel. If parents or professionals feel that the student needs a educational assessment it can be arranged by Tutors International, the tutor will be able to address your child's needs effectively by the assessment.

Clients are able to arrange activities that go beyond ordinary schooling and Tutors International will do everything they can to make these activities happen such as: voice coaching, diving instruction, and private tutelage with a professor at Cambridge. Support is available for all the key exams: 11+, Common Entrance, ISEE, GCSEs, A levels, IB, and SATs. They can also arrange challenging educational adventures for the summer vacations and gap years.

[This information came from Adam Caller.]

Maturity begins when we are content to feel that we are right about something, without feeling the necessity to prove someone else is wrong.

~ Sydney J. Harris
1917-1986

Extended Insights...

How Vantage Point Changes Lives.

By: Jamie Ahern, MSW, CSW

Sometimes, I review my life and consider all that's happened in my world.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about the Vantage Point program at Aspiro, and I'm amazed with where we're at right now and what amazing clinicians we've got on board. As a former Vantage Point field guide-turned therapist, I have seen the workings of this program from the angle of "brush your teeth, pack your bags, walk the miles, and change your socks" to individual therapy sessions and phone calls with loving, albeit anxious parents.

For those who aren't familiar with the Vantage Point program, let me fill you in. First, however, let me give you the typical pitch I'd give another professional. Here goes:

"Vantage Point is a wilderness adventure therapy program designed specifically for adolescents and young adults who struggle with a variety of neurodevelopmental and cognitive issues such as autism spectrum disorders, severe Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, executive functioning deficits, learning differences (ex: Non-Verbal Learning Differences), social relationship management problems, impulse control and even traumatic brain injuries."

Whew! Now, let me tell you what I know to be true about the Vantage Point Program and its students.

Vantage Point is for those adolescents and young adults who have been left behind, marginalized, misunderstood, lost, teased and bullied. It's for those who have struggled tremendously in school, with their family and with building relationships with others. They often want so badly to be understood, to have friends, to be less anxious, and to not be confused and overwhelmed in social situations.

When I think of a Vantage Point student, I think of a 15-year old boy named Cameron I worked with when I was a field guide. During an initial therapy session with another therapist and me, Cameron broke down, cried and stated, "I just want to be normal. I just want to have friends."

At Vantage Point, this young man experienced, for the first time in his life, being accepted into a peer group and forming real friendships. He was no longer picked on, bullied or just "tolerated." He was understood. His guides were patient with him. He did not get "left behind" when he struggled to keep up with others. In fact, he became loved and respected by his peers for having a positive, cheery outlook and a fascination for reptiles - of which Utah has no shortage. He was made fun of for these things in the past. Before coming to Vantage Point, he was isolating himself in his basement. After becoming accepted into a supporting, nurturing environment, Cameron was challenged to work on developing healthy

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coping behaviors. He began to talk about his thoughts and emotions. His therapist, Jamie Kaczmarek, worked with Cameron on developing specific social relationship management skills. Cameron, who had significant executive functioning deficits, became more independent and learned to cook his own meals, pack his backpack, keep track of his gear, plan ahead, transition more quickly, and make good decisions. Although Cameron will probably never be what society considers "normal", he began to feel more normal and accepted during his stay with Vantage Point. When he left, Cameron was more confident in social situations, he was able to more independently care for himself and he had further developed his ability to face challenging situations and overcome. He felt more "normal."

That is what I know Vantage Point to be.

It is, hands-down, the best place for these kids to make some serious changes in their emotional, behavioral and social well-being. In an effort to become the best treatment program that we can be, we have made some excellent additions to our clinical team in the last year.

As a Vantage Point therapist, I have a very strong belief that our clinical team is the best out there. We love our jobs, our company, and the amazing students we work with. As a former Vantage Point field guide, however, I know it's not just about the therapists! As a field guide, I was involved in extensive training in working with Vantage Point students. After all, it is a very unique population; I'd even say the most interesting and fun-loving population! Our Vantage Point field guides are particularly patient and maintain a focus on keeping Vantage Point students engaged in treatment. After all, these students have become skilled at avoiding engagement in school, with family or with other people in general. I can recall many, many times "on trail" when a Vantage Point student would shut down because they were overwhelmed, anxious and/or emotionally dysregulated. It required copious amounts of patience, empathy and creativity to assist these students in processing their thoughts and emotions to overcome their shut downs and continue through the day. Our field guides are so caring and skilled. I am very proud that I get to work with these amazing people.

One of my favorite theoretical frameworks is Positive Psychology. Within this framework is a belief in actively expressing gratitude, and how this active pursuit of being grateful can improve our "happiness." In that spirit, I will close by saying that I am grateful for my past year at Aspiro and the Vantage Point Program. I am grateful for a company and its professionals that care about the happiness of our students. Further, I am grateful for the happiness that working with these wonderful, quirky, and fun loving young men and women provides me!

Aspiro Group family of programs are based on a Wilderness Adventure Therapy (WAT) model. The Aspiro family of programs are a hybrid between traditional wilderness therapy, and adventure programs such as Outward Bound or NOLS.For more information, contact Josh Watson, LCSW, Director of Admissions and Marketing, 801-349-2740, jwatson@aspiroadventure.com, or visit www.aspiroadventure.com.

Seen N Heard...

News from Echo Springs: Echo Springs has some exciting announcements, as some team members take advantage of new adventures. Lisa Sutton, Admissions Advisor, is taking her career in a new direction. She'll be greatly missed, having made a significant contribution to Echo Springs over the past eight years. We wish her well in her career advancement. We are pleased to announce that Lucinda Kay, President of Let It Shine, LLC will be expanding her role with us to include admissions counseling. Lucinda has worked behind the scenes with Echo Springs for over three years on message development and communications, website management and expanding our social media presence. 208-267-1111

Woodbury Reports Visits New England Programs: Kristie Campbell, BS Psy, Educational Consultant, and Ron Campbell, BS both with Woodbury Reports, Inc., recently visited several New England schools and programs. Among them were Chamberlain School, Latham Centers, Cardinal Cushing Center, Germaine Lawrence the Merck Center, Berkshire Hills Music Academy, Academy at Swift River, Lakeview NeuroRehabilitation Center and Shortridge Academy. 208-267-5550

Q&A Associates Inc Discontinues Operation Of Willow Creek Lodge: Angie Shockley owner of Q&A Associates along with our management team are deeply saddened to announce that we will no longer be a managing owner of Willow Creek Lodge. Willow Creek Lodge, which opened in December of last year, has seen remarkable results with the young adult clients they have served over the past months. The program has been extremely successful in treating clients that have suffered from chronic stress and anxiety, trauma, depression, ADHD, Borderline Personality Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome. Unfortunately Angie was notified very recently that the owners of the Willow Creek property will no longer be honoring their lease agreement. This has come to a shock to the team at Q&A and we extend our sincerest apologies to those families and referring professionals that had prospective clients coming our way. This program and clinical model is a unique and successful program and our intention is to re-create this in West Virginia, where the other Q&A programs are located. 208-207-0930

Creating A New Dream: Sober College's proposal has been accepted by Guinness World Records to break the record for the world's largest dream catcher. For a young adult in recovery, the battle to live a healthy and sober life is ongoing. One can even say the nightmare is never really over as they struggle to maintain their sobriety. Sober College, a residential treatment facility for young adults (17-26) recognizes this struggle and in an attempt to create a symbol of hope for their future, its residents and staff will attempt to construct the world's largest dream catcher. 818-274-0304 ext. 107

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