

HOPE ReNEWS

In Every Journey There is Hope From End to End

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Spring 2007

Foundation Update

Sending a child to treatment is a drastic decision. Supporting the child when he or she is there requires no less.

Our kids go through a wrenching experience in which therapists employ every tactic in the book to coax the emerging adult from the throes of the child's adolescent impulses. If you've ever sat in on a group therapy session you know what I mean.

My daughter is 21 years old. I am still wrestling with changing my own behavior to support her growth and independence. Her therapist has pointed out a number of ways I get in the way of the process. He's right. I hate that he's right, but he's right.

In the issue we look at the parent's role. If we are as important to our child's health and development as we are told, then the stakes are high. We've got to get it right.

I heard of a mother who removed her child from Vista because she thought the program was just too rough on her kid. If Vista is too hard, what does that child face when he gets smacked by life? And do we really want to be bailing out our 24 year olds?

Last month Vista hosted its Parent Meeting which fulfilled a strong desire on the part of Hope Renewals and Vista to offer families support as they go through the arduous process of having a child in treatment.

Vista put on a very classy event. One parent said how he had always admired

"This issue is about the parent's perspective. We would love your feedback."


his kid's therapist, but that this meeting gave him a chance to see the overall quality of other therapists and to get the benefit of their perspective on the treatment process.

A number of themes were raised at the meeting which suggests topics for a next get together. Among them were adoption, how to respond when kids backslide, co-parenting a child in treatment after a divorce and managing the meds, particularly when children are over 18 and should, ostensibly, be responsible for their own drugs.

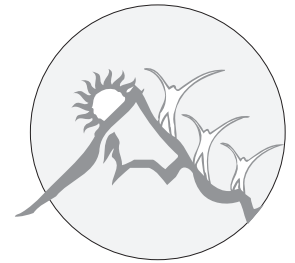
I spoke to as many families as I could, though time did not permit me to speak with them all. Vista families share a unique experience and I personally felt a great relief to be among other moms and dads who understood what I had been through.

This issue is about the parent's perspective. We would love your feedback.

Sincerely,



Cathy Gilson
President



Hope Renewals, Inc.

is a non-profit organization established to:

- ▲ Provide partial scholarships for families committed to the therapeutic process who face financial challenges.
- ▲ Serve as a source of support and information for families with children in residential treatment.

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Views expressed in Hope ReNews are not necessarily those of Vista.

Parent's Point of View

Anne C. Roark

Looking back on it, as I often do, I wonder if I could have stopped our daughter's descent into madness.

She was 12 years old when we took her out of middle school and put her in a mental hospital. She had been a brilliant and happy child, full of questions, brimming with potential, popular with other kids, at ease with adults. And then one day, it all vanished. Seemingly in the blink of an eye, the mind of a beautiful, vibrant child disappeared, leaving in its wake a skeletal body on the verge of collapse. How could doting, adoring parents let something like this happen? I was her mother, was I to blame? The question moved into my brain like the proverbial elephant. It became the only thing I could think about but the one thing I couldn't talk about.

I didn't even know what the expression *an elephant in the room* meant when my husband and I put our daughter in the adolescent residential program for eating disorders at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute. There were many things I didn't know back then: That *residential program* was sometimes a euphemism for a locked psychiatric ward. That *eating disorders* weren't simply diets gone awry but a complex set of psychiatric

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conditions with a higher death rate than any other mental illness.

Before the decision was made to hospitalize our daughter, her therapist called me in, as therapists often do with parents, and gently urged me to see someone myself. The anxiety I had felt all my life could be treated. Perhaps I could explore my own eating issues. The implied criticism stuck in my craw. I didn't know I had eating issues. I certainly didn't

think self-discipline at the dinner table was a sign of mental illness.

As much as I wanted my daughter to get well and as quick as I had been to blame myself for *everything*, hearing something specific I might have done wrong as a parent was both painful and threatening.

I went to see a psychiatrist ostensibly to get medication to relieve anxiety, but he was not as gentle as my daughter's therapist had been. "Your daughter is going to get well, despite you or with your help. The choice is yours."

All good and well-meaning parents say they will do whatever it takes to help their child get well, but when it comes down to it many of us can't do what is asked of us. We don't have the time or patience or the courage or will to take ourselves apart piece by piece and put ourselves back together. The irony is that's exactly what we ask our children to do when they are in trouble.

The other irony is that we put our children into programs we hope make them well and then behave in ways that undermine those programs. In my case, it was the smallest of subversions – a diet coke slipped in during evening visiting hours. I thought of it as giving of comfort and forging a secret little mother-daughter bond. But it was also showing a child who needed boundaries how to break a rule.

I began to see many small things in new ways in the six months our daughter was in the hospital. After a while, they began to add up. I also started making changes in myself – how I ate, for example. The more I ate, the smaller the elephant in my mind became. I knew that I had contributed to our daughter's illness but I also could see there were other causes, too.

Now that our daughter is a young woman and is safely ensconced in a university half way across the country, it's easier for me to talk about the elephant in less euphemistic terms. I am no more to blame for her illness than I am responsible for her recovery. I had a hand in both. I can live with that, and so can she.

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Conversation With A Therapist

Editor's Note: In this issue, we asked eight therapists to provide constructive suggestions to parents with children in residential treatment. They all responded to the following question:

Q While my son/daughter is at Vista, what are productive things I could do to assist in creating the best possible outcome?

A “As children come into treatment they have overwhelming amounts of guilt and confusion as to life, family relationships and their role therein. Parents can help by beginning the family sessions and treatment regimen with true statements about how their children’s choices have affected both them and their family. This doesn’t mean we need to guilt trip our children. It means as parents we talk about the intimate fear and sadness that we felt as a result of the choices that were made. Parents need to be honest about how they feel about fearing the loss of their child. Too many parents skirt the issue and minimize the affects out of fear of hurting their child further. It is equally important to express forgiveness towards our children after they have demonstrated true remorse through their efforts at Vista. Being able to capitalize on your child’s accomplishments feeds the self-esteem and is crucial to the healing process.

“...don’t allow your child to have an emotional back door out of treatment.”

Also, don’t allow your child to have an emotional back door out of treatment.

Do not make promises that “just go for a few months and then we will let you come home.” Or “If it gets too hard, tell us and we will come get you.” Your child will take that back door every time. And, of course, if you have concerns, talk with the therapist privately. Once clarification is obtained, SUPPORT THE PROGRAM 100%.”

A “Often times, when your child speaks to you about a problem, they are looking for understanding rather than a solution. For your child to feel valued by you, task orientated parents need to listen and work toward understanding rather than problem solving. Try not to take the problem over. Be an advisor and let your child be in charge of the process.”

A “Choose the news from home carefully. Hearing about what’s going on at home can interfere with treatment because kids tend to feel deprived and cut off. This can distract them from fully focusing on the work they are doing to get healthier. Avoid putting your child in the position of worrying about you or feeling overly needed at home.”

A “One of the most helpful things parents can do is trust the process. Your child and family will likely go through several ups and downs throughout the treatment process and you may even wonder at times if the treatment is “working”. Trust that it is – that the most difficult times are as necessary as the golden moments.”

A “Parents need to put a self-care plan in place. That plan could include therapy, attending Alanon meetings and sharing with people who are not afraid to be honest with them. It’s important to forgive yourself.”

“Your child and family will likely go through several ups and downs throughout the treatment process and you may even wonder at times if the treatment is ‘working’.”

A “Create a climate of hope – and optimism – and reflect this in interactions with your child. Be mindful that change occurs in very small increments and watch for and acknowledge miniscule changes.”

A “When a child leaves Vista and moves to Transition, the atmosphere is more adult orientated. Parents need to treat their young adults as young adults. They should encourage new behaviors and trust that their kids are capable of figuring out how to deal with an overdrawn checking account or how to catch a bus. When parents respond to difficult situations with an appropriate and helpful listening ear that is coupled with a consistent response of “how are you going to handle this situation?”, the young adult learns how to take care of himself or herself and with that grows intellectually and emotionally.”

Life In The Real World

Interviews with recent Grads at various levels of Transition Program living

STUDENT PROFILE

Brian is 18, a freshman at the University of Utah and is in Phase 2 of the Transition Program.

Q: How would you describe the interaction with your parents during your Vista experience?

A: Well, mostly it felt like my parents were on the same side as my therapist and, at first, it really frustrated me. I was completely new and felt like I didn't have any understanding as to what was going on for me. My first couple of family sessions were pretty frustrating.

Q: Who was your therapist?

A: Matt Checketts.

Q: He's great but you probably didn't think that at the time.

A: After the first couple of sessions I warmed up to him.

Q: It sounds like your parents were well aligned with Matt and you were the odd man out?

A: Yes, exactly. Once my outlook changed, I had no problem with the way that my parents were aligned. It was just my kind of oppositional thinking when I first got there.

Q: What do you think your parents did that was most helpful?

A: I guess it was that they were always supportive even when I made mistakes. I heard other parents being critical of the things their kids did. I just think it made the kids feel like they had less hope. I felt like I had a lot of hope

and things to look up to. I think that was a big thing for me.

Q: Describe that a little bit more for me – when parents were in opposition with their therapist?

A: I think it makes the kids feel torn. From my experience with one of my best friends at Vista, when he found out that his parents thought that he didn't need to be there, he accomplished nothing for the rest of his stay because he felt like he didn't belong. It just sort of took away everything that Vista was trying to do for him. My

“I heard other parents being critical of the things their kids did. I just think it made the kids feel like they had less hope.”

personal opinion was that he definitely could have used the time there but I guess it just kind of blinds the child from what can actually get done if your parents are in such disagreement.

Q: Describe how your relationship with your parents evolved during your time at Vista.

A: While I was at Vista before my first home pass, it was pretty frustrating for me because my parents hoped that I wasn't playing a game with them just to get home. I got really good at lying when I was home so it was hard for me to convince people that this time I was being serious. I guess the

turning point for me was waking up that first morning at home because then my parents could believe what I was doing was honest and there was less hesitation.

Q: What advice would you give parents to help their child be successful in treatment?

A: It kind of depends on the kid, but as far as the way that parents should act, I think its important to trust your kid and leave a little bit of control with the child to do their own thing and find out where they want to go with their therapist. I pretty much discovered my issues myself without the prodding of my parents. I realized myself that I have things to work on.

Q: What did your parents do to take care of themselves while you were at Vista?

A: My dad was pretty busy, but I know my mom did some therapy and they both went to Al-anon and Narc-anon meetings during the time that I was gone. They said that really helped them out a lot.

Q: So tell me how are you doing now?

A: I think I am doing pretty well. I fluctuate from time to time – some things are harder for me than others. All I know is that I am coming up on 18 months sober and it is a pretty big accomplishment for me.

Q: It's a huge accomplishment. Congratulations and thanks for sharing.

The Difference You Make

Thanks to the generous contributions from our donors, Hope Renews has been able to address the urgent needs of families committed to the therapeutic process who face financial challenges. What follows are excerpts from their letters of thanks.

“It is not possible to express our gratitude for the assistance that Hope Renews has provided. It would not have been possible for our son to stay at Vista as long as he did without your help. It was a long, hard pull but I think that Tracy and the folks at Vista were able to give him the tools that he needs to live a good and productive life.”

—Parent

“Thank you so much for the financial support that made it possible for me to finish my treatment at Vista. Over time I got to where I needed to be to explore life in a healthy manner. I gained a sweet relationship with my family that I wouldn't trade for anything. Thanks for the support and help. Life is as good as ever.”

—Graduate

“It is amazing to see the family work together after so many years of conflict and aggression. The entire system has stabilized and their ability to enjoy themselves while maintaining appropriate boundaries is impressive. Please let the people of Hope Renews know my gratitude and respect for what they are providing my families.”

—Therapist

How You Can Help: The success of Hope Renews, Inc. relies on the support of the families we serve. Please be generous so together we can support as many families in crisis as possible!

Yes, we will help!

Enclosed is our 2007 contribution to Hope Renews, Inc.

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David Wiegand, SF Chronicle

HBO has launched an extraordinary multimedia project on addiction. It targets addiction for what it does to the lives of those who can't help themselves and for what it does to the lives of those who can't help loving them. But part of what makes the project so important and compelling is that the nine films that make up "Addiction" collectively target the various mythologies of addiction that perpetuate and exacerbate the problem.

The segment, *The Adolescent Addict*, confirms that teenagers have a higher risk of drug and alcohol dependence and that society does a bad job of identifying the problem early on. While the kids themselves say they turn to booze and pills because they are

bored, medical experts interviewed point to something more insidious and pervasive: For many kids, drugs and alcohol are the only coping mechanism they have. They haven't yet learned the better mechanisms that come with adulthood and experience on the planet.

We do get a warm feeling of hope watching a mom congratulate her teenage son as he graduates from a treatment program. A few minutes later, when a 42-year-old man, who's just seen brain-imaging evidence of what his meth addiction is doing to his body, tells Dr. Nora Volkow that he'll quit "in a year or so", we know he's doomed. A young couple try to get themselves off opiates. He's been

"For many kids, drugs and alcohol are the only coping mechanism they have."

using for four years and figures he'll have to give up the new drug Seboxone and switch to methadone for financial reasons.

As an adjunct to the film, HBO has created a supplementary series of 13 films meant to focus more specifically on individual aspects of a massive and complex problem. It's a lot, but after watching the opening documentary, you can't help wondering if it's anywhere near enough.

Tools For Parents

CONSULT OUR WEBSITE

The website for Hope Renews provides parents with a valuable link to important information. Past newsletters, reading recommendation, grant applications and more can be found on-line.

We have now added a new FEEDBACK LINK. Visit us at www.hoperenews.org and stay in touch!

SUGGESTED READING

New in this issue:

Choices & Consequences: What to Do When A Teenager Uses Alcohol/Drugs

Dick Schaeffer. Hazelden Foundation, 1987.

EXERPT: It is much more difficult for parents to stop enabling their children than it is for spouses and friends to stop enabling other adults. I've met many ex-spouses and ex-friends, but I've never met an ex-parent. Our children are our children forever.

Staying Sober

Terence T. Gorski and Merlene Miller. Herald House/Independent Press, 1968

What It Takes To Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble and How Four of Them Got Out

David L. Marcus. Houghton Mifflin, 2005

Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys

Dan Kindlon, Ph.D. and Michael Thompson, Ph.D. Ballantine Publishing Group, 2000

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls

Mary Pipher, Ph.D. Random House, 1994

Angry All The Time; An Emergency Guide to Anger Control

Ron Potter-Efron, MSW. New Harbinger, 1994.

Helping Your Chemically Dependent Teenager Recover; A Guide for Parents and Other Concerned Adults

Peter R. Cohen, MD. Hazelden Foundation, 1991.

Parents, Teens and Boundaries

Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. Health Communications, Inc., 1993.

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