

Advantages of a Therapeutic Wilderness Hybrid Program

A Case Study of Shepherd's Hill Academy

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Introduction

Parents of hurting teens from across America and around the world are searching for therapeutic placement for their sons and daughters. Since each individual and situation is different, myriad factors come into play when determining the proper care for a child. These factors may include, but are not limited to, a child's diagnoses, academic status, temperament, location, gender and age.

There is no shortage of opportunities and options for parents as they seek hope and refuge for their child in crisis. Treatment Centers, Residential Programs, Wilderness Programs, and other Therapeutic environments are all viable options for struggling teens in various walks of life.

There is another option that has now proven to be incredibly effective in bringing healing to hurting teens and their entire families - arguably more effective than traditional approaches. This program is a hybrid that combines the therapeutic value of a wilderness program with the academic value of a therapeutic boarding school. This unique tandem of therapeutic approaches results in a synergy that offers struggling teens and their families the best of all worlds.

Shepherd's Hill Academy is one such residential program that features this unique hybrid approach, while offering a variety of other enriching therapeutic components as well.

Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Shepherd's Hill Academy is able to provide a wilderness experience as well as a structured academic setting for teenage boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17. The program features completely separate campuses for each gender, enabling students to thrive in a distraction-free environment with a program customized to best meet their individual needs. Located just 90 miles Northeast of Atlanta and 70 miles from the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport, the program is convenient for parents, Educational Consultants, Mental Health Professionals and others who wish to schedule a personalized tour of the 185 acre facility. Tucked away in the rural town of Martin, Georgia, the program is safe and secure, offering students an environment that is truly conducive to healing.

A Holistic Therapeutic Approach

While the structure of the program depends heavily on an environment that is naturally therapeutic, Shepherd's Hill Academy focuses on a strong commitment to therapeutic excellence.

Shepherd's Hill Academy features a team of licensed therapists dedicated to practicing an evidence-based, holistic approach to scientific therapeutic methods.

The Therapeutic team at Shepherd's Hill Academy is trained in the areas of:

- Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)
- Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)
- Mindfulness (which ties directly to the Wilderness Component)
- Unplugged Methods (allowing for a digital detox and increased healthy coping skills)
- Addiction Therapy (including both substance and behavioral)
- Family Trauma & Family Systems
- Aspects of Art Therapy & Yoga Psychotherapy
- Anger Management
- Equine Relationship Therapy

Individual Therapy

The program features a fully licensed therapeutic team, led by an on-site Clinical Director. The therapeutic team facilitates therapy for both genders, with boys' and girls' therapists on staff. Each student will meet individually for a weekly session with their on-site therapist. Shepherd's Hill Academy believes that consistency in therapy is very important in the teen's healing and success in the program.

Group Therapy

Students at Shepherd's Hill Academy also participate in weekly group therapy sessions. While "war-stories" and gloating concerning past experience is prohibited, students will learn healthy and constructive ways to work through their issues as a team. Practicing mutual respect, accountability and encouragement, teens discover healing as a team as well as individually.

Family Therapy

Family Therapy is a critical part of the success of the program at Shepherd's Hill Academy. Parents of each of the students are involved in monthly parent workshops held through a HIPAA Secure Network line. Parents are also invited to on-campus workshops provided monthly after each visitation. Twice a year, families are invited to engage in a parent and parent-sibling conferences. These information-packed weekends include presentations, hands-on activities, accountability, and spending quality time with their teen. Parents play a pivotal role in the healing of their teen, and are included throughout the entire program at Shepherd's Hill Academy. Parents are also provided with weekly reports, student calls, monthly therapeutic reports and access to a secure dropbox for photos of their child's activities.

Equine Relationship Therapy

Equine Relationship Therapy (ERT) is another therapeutic component that makes Shepherd's Hill Academy unique. The ERT program is facilitated by Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Equine Assisted Learning O.K. Corral Series certified instructors and counselors. Each student is assigned their own horse and will participate in learning valuable skills, such as:

- Problem Solving Skills
- Anger Management
- Setting and Reaching Goals
- Developing Communication Skills
- Personal Responsibility
- Learning Safe and Natural Horsemanship

Statistics

During a teen's stay at Shepherd's Hill Academy, trained staff work specifically to ensure that any medication regimen is dispensed as prescribed. The therapeutic team works directly with a family doctor or psychologist to determine any changes or updates to the regime during the child's stay in the program.

During their time in the program, nearly 70% of students enrolled at Shepherd's Hill Academy on a prescribed regimen were able to significantly reduce or be completely taken off of their medication.

The Therapeutic team at Shepherd's Hill Academy has been able to assist approximately 5% of students with starting a successful prescription regimen based on their condition.

An Academic Component

For many parents of struggling teens, the area of academics is of major concern. Often times, students who struggle with other life issues tend to fall behind academically. Many parents feel they must choose between their child's mental and physical wellbeing over their education. This is simply not the case with a hybrid program, as all areas of the child's wellbeing are addressed.

Onsite Education

Shepherd's Hill Academy takes great care in ensuring their academy is a top quality component to their hybrid program. Students are offered an on-site education where classes are on the main campus and staffed by Georgia state certified teaching instructors. The program also boasts an on-site principal, offering staff oversight and providing individualized attention to the needs of each student enrolled.

Accreditation

Shepherd's Hill Academy is fully accredited within the state of Georgia for grades 7-12. This helps to ensure that all students in grades 7-11 are earning credits that will transfer back to their home states. Graduating seniors receive an earned standard diploma from Shepherd's Hill Academy, allowing them the opportunity to pursue the career path of their choice.

Upon enrollment, the principal and faculty work alongside parents to develop an individualized success plan for each student. This allows students who have fallen behind to catch up and maintain high academic standing.

Shepherd's Hill Academy offers a wide variety of courses, including standard courses such as: Science, Social Studies, Math, English, History, and Art. The academy also features electives such as woodworking, shop, business classes, and foreign languages. Bible is also taught as a course within the academy.

The academy abides by the Georgia Standards of Excellence to provide a rigorous and thorough education. The Abeka Curriculum is utilized, along with other resources, in order to present traditional subject material from a biblical worldview.

Academic Environment

Small class sizes allow for students to receive individualized attention where they can grow and thrive. Teacher's aides are also on site to assist in individual educational goals or disciplinary actions. This allows teachers more time and freedom to teach without distraction or interruption.

Unique Learning Opportunities

Shepherd's Hill Academy is dedicated to the success of its students. Advanced Placement (AP) courses, SAT/ACT Preparatory courses, Dual Enrollment opportunities, and utilizing Georgia Virtual School for required coursework not provided on campus are all added benefits of the academy.

Students at Shepherd's Hill Academy who are Georgia residents may apply for the HOPE scholarship. The Shepherd's Hill Academy program also assists out-of-state students with scholarship applications. Shepherd's Hill Academy is sanctioned by the NCAA Eligibility Center. This means that courses successfully completed at Shepherd's Hill Academy are accepted by the NCAA for collegiate athletic eligibility.

Statistics

Shepherd's Hill Academy students boast exceptional SAT test scores. Historically, students have scored at or above National Average for all categories.

80% of Shepherd's Hill Academy high school graduates are accepted to a post-secondary education (2-year or 4-year institution) prior to their graduation ceremony.

Where They Are Now

Graduates of Shepherd's Hill Academy have been accepted to notable colleges and universities across the country. Just a small example of those who have accepted Shepherd's Hill Academy graduates include:

Notable Public Colleges & Universities:

- Atlanta Institute of Art in Atlanta, Georgia
- Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia
- Texas A&M in College Station, Texas
- Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina
- Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia

- University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa
- Georgia Tech in Atlanta, Georgia
- Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas
- University of Colorado, in Boulder, Colorado
- Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- University of North Georgia in Dahlonega, Georgia
- The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina

Notable Christian Colleges & Universities:

- Baylor University in Waco, Texas
- Bethel College in Mishawaka, Indiana
- North Greenville University in Tigerville, South Carolina
- Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio
- Union University in Jackson, Tennessee
- Toccoa Falls College in Toccoa Falls, Georgia
- Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia

Technical Schools:

- North Georgia Technical College in Clarkesville, Georgia
- Chattahoochee Technical College in Cherokee, Georgia
- Central Georgia Technical College in Macon, Georgia

A Wilderness Component

While a traditional wilderness program encompasses physical demands and a continuous adventure setting, the Shepherd's Hill Academy wilderness component serves as a natural detox for students. This holistic approach to healing offers an environment that is natural, peaceful and conducive to healing. Offering a "reset" of sorts, students, by way of their environmental setting, are challenged to go back to the basics. This environment allows the student to heal, grow and thrive without the distractions of popular culture, peers and other outside stimuli.

Students at Shepherd's Hill Academy dwell in rustic structures during their time at the program. Rustic, cabin-like homes (which they build and maintain) allow students to truly disconnect in an unplugged environment. Cabins do not have any electricity or running water. They do feature a wood-burning stove for warmth. A cook shelter and outhouse also accompany the cabin sites. Students spend their evenings and weekends at their shelters learning to build a fire, cook meals, teamwork, garden, and much more.

The wilderness component of Shepherd's Hill Academy is intentionally-designed and a proven therapeutic approach to healing. It brings troubled teens out of their comfort zones, while providing appropriate challenges in a safe and structured environment.

The wilderness component of Shepherd's Hill Academy is supervised by Residential Wilderness Counselors known as Direct Care Staff. Each counselor must go through an intensive interview processes to prove they are a trustworthy and responsible candidate for the position. Offering 24/7 supervision, Direct Care Staff must be thoroughly trained and certified. All Direct Care Staff at Shepherd's Hill Academy undergo 40+ hours of training. The training includes; but is not limited to: CPR, First-aid, Lifeguarding, Certified Safety Intervention protocols, and more. Staff are also required to pass a thorough background check and attend a program orientation before any time is spent on site with Shepherd's Hill Academy students.

The wilderness component at Shepherd's Hill Academy is unique because it allows the program to integrate therapy into the teens' daily lives. By combining a wilderness setting, which is a short hike to the main campus, students are given the opportunity to participate in academics and therapy while still maintaining a rustic living experience. The consistency and structure of the program creates stability, trust, confidence and security for the students as they work to heal, grow and thrive.

What Does a Faith-based Approach Look Like?

Shepherd's Hill Academy is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, Christ-centered entity licensed as a therapeutic boarding school for troubled teens. But what does this mean for teens, families, and the healing process?

The Mission of Shepherd's Hill Academy

Shepherd's Hill Academy exists to bring hope and healing to teens and families in crisis. The program offers healing and hope in a variety of ways. Some of these ways include:

- Evidence-based Therapeutic Methods
- Mentorship Opportunities
- Family Networking and Training
- Accredited Academic Environment
- Proven Wilderness Component
- Abides and operates by Georgia state and federal HIPAA standards for Therapeutic Boarding School operations

Biblical Perspective in Therapy

Clinical Director, Kevin R. Kurtz, LPC, CCC, CAMS-II, explains the Therapeutic Methods of Shepherd's Hill Academy this way:

"First and foremost, treatment is developed on an individual basis. We meet your teen where they are upon coming to Shepherd's Hill Academy and begin work from that perspective. Secondly, we use therapeutic practices which come from biblical principles and evidence-based methods which are standard in the counseling field. Our desire is for lives to be changed. Your teen chooses whether God is a part of that."

When a student is enrolled at Shepherd's Hill Academy they will be involved in a variety of therapeutic programs including:

- Individual Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Group Therapy

- Equine Therapy

Shepherd's Hill Academy incorporates empirical evidence-based treatments that are selected based on the individual's needs.

Biblical Perspective in Residential Care

When a child arrives at Shepherd's Hill Academy, parents are assured the child will be well cared for, safe, and that their struggles will be handled with the utmost privacy, respect and sensitivity. Residential counselors and staff exemplify a biblical perspective in their daily interactions with students by exhibiting morality, integrity, truth and consistency.

A student does not need to be a person of a particular faith, in order to be accepted, enroll, or succeed at Shepherd's Hill Academy. While the program is founded and based on biblical principles, Shepherd's Hill Academy believes that faith in Christ is an issue of one's own personal volition. Therefore, no faith or religion will ever be forced or coerced upon a student during his or her time at Shepherd's Hill Academy. However, students will be exposed to devotions, chapel speakers, church services, and other events that promote a biblical worldview.

Biblical Perspective in Education

Shepherd's Hill Academy believes in the success of every child. Not only does the program want to see students succeed in the healing process, but also wishes to prepare and enable them to have a successful future. At Shepherd's Hill Academy, education is an important element that contributes to the overall success of a student.

In addition to a class on the Bible, Shepherd's Hill Academy offers rigorous courses in English, Mathematics, History, Science, Spanish and the Arts. Teens will be both challenged and mentored by dedicated teachers and staff who are invested in their success.

Program Advantages Breakdown

Authoritative Community

- Holistic Therapeutic Environment
- 40+ Hours of Staff Training & Certifications
- 24/7 Supervision
- Consistency that Creates Security
- Integrates Therapy into Everyday Life

Fully Accredited Academy

- State Certified On Site Teachers & Principal
- Advanced Placement & Dual Enrollment Course Options
- Individualized Academic Goals, Planning & Mentoring
- Teachers Aides Assisting with Discipline & Specialized Needs
- 5:1 Student to Staff Ratio Maintained in Classroom Setting

Unplugged Experiential Living

- Digital Technology Detox
- Wilderness Adventure Setting
- Faith-based Structure
- 5:1 Student to Staff Ratio
- Gender Specific Program
- Hands-on Constructive Learning

Evidence-based Treatment

- Licensed Therapeutic Team
- Empirical Evidence-based & Holistically Focused Treatment
- Provides Individual, Family & Group Therapy
- Equine Relationship Therapy & Yoga Psychotherapy
- Faith-based Perspective

Discover Shepherd's Hill Academy

Learn More

More detailed information concerning the Shepherd's Hill Academy program, structure, certifications, etc. can be found on the organization's website at:

www.shepherdshillacademy.org

Admissions Assistance

Anyone seeking placement for a troubled teenager is invited to speak directly with a Shepherd's Hill Academy Admissions team member regarding the program. Admissions counselors are trained to not only inform you about the Shepherd's Hill Academy program, but to help you find the best program for your child or client. Even if Shepherd's Hill Academy is not a fit for a particular child, Admissions team members are able to guide you to resources and partners who can further assist in the proper care you are seeking.

Admissions can be reached via web or phone at:

<https://www.shepherdshillacademy.org/inquire/>

706-779-5766

office@shepherdshillacademy.org

Visitors Welcome

Mental Health Professionals are invited to schedule a tour with the Founder & Director, Program Manager, and Director of Marketing at Shepherd's Hill Academy. Shepherd's Hill Academy also offers on-site visits for their team to travel and meet conveniently at your location.

Visits and Tours can be scheduled by contacting Lane Taylor at:

706-779-5766

lane@shepherdshillacademy.org