

PROMISING PRACTICES



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New Hope Foundation embraces technology

Virtual school is now a virtual reality

Since the inception of New Hope's adolescent services in the early 1980's, they have included fully accredited academics as a major component of their residential rehabilitation programs. While this is the case, it has always been a challenge to routinely meet the specific needs of individual students because of their different subject and academic learning level needs. This is even with the highly qualified educators New Hope employs and keeping the student teacher ratio to no more than 7 to 1. As one might imagine, at any given time New Hope is serving some students struggling with basic math or reading skills, while others need to continue work in their advanced placement calculus, or foreign language classes. The objective has always been to give students the opportunity to improve their academic skills while keeping up with their home school class work while in treatment.



Toward the end of the 2005/2006 academic year, New Hope Foundation began researching computer based and on-line offerings to supplement the work of teaching staff. They found a small, but burgeoning

group of well developed and qualified on-line high school programs available and included was the Monmouth/Ocean (New Jersey)

Regional Trainings

A Behavioral Health and Child and Youth Services Regional Training will be held September 11-12, Las Vegas, NV

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Educational Services Commissions (MOESC) Virtual School, a program initially developed to serve homebound student learning. MOESC helped New Hope with some staffing needs in the past and was excited about the possibility of using their virtual platform to expand educational offerings to better meet the specific needs of students in treatment at New Hope. It has always been a priority at New Hope to connect with a student's home school district to better match course work with their current learning objectives and needs, and now they are able to further assess student needs with a virtual school based, pre-class testing so that work assigned can specifically build on class work completed; in most cases students don't miss a beat. While New Hope Foundation does provide an introductory class for students that are not familiar with computers, this is a relatively rare need and the students who do require the class quickly pick up the skills required to successfully work in the Virtual School.

Startup required refitting one of the classrooms at New Hope's new Marlboro (New Jersey) facility and their IT consultants were extremely helpful in the selection of the most serviceable, lowest cost equipment and network options. This included cost savings from the purchase of rebuilt desktop computers. The Virtual School program is run on a wireless network that is independent of any clinical or administrative systems and student access is limited to the on-line classroom and specific assignment related web sites. The basic virtual school offers courses in four major areas of study to include a choice of four English, three history, four science, and four math classes that can be assigned at three different learning levels: remedial, standard, or advanced. This translates into 45 specific learning platforms. Additional program options were recently added to meet the needs of classified students working at levels as low as 3rd and 4th grade.

On-line class work is supplemented with off-line assignments, physical education and recreation to include class trips. All of this is integrated with New Hope's intensive residential treatment program (ASAM III-7)



that includes prescribed medical and psychiatric care, individual and group counseling, case management, and family programming. The Virtual School Lab is facilitated by New Jersey Certified teachers and teacher aids that manage classroom behavior, and enhance on-line teacher instruction and coaching with more immediate coaching, equipment, site navigation, and basic learning needs.

New Hope works closely with MOESC to help students phase back into their home school settings more successfully. Returning to a main stream high school from "rehab" can be quite a daunting experience, a stress and

exposure that often leads to relapse. A supported “phasing in” allows students to return to some, but not all classes at once while continuing their on-line class work at home or in a more accommodating and safer setting.

New Hope’s experience to date suggests that Virtual School students are better able to keep pace and place with their classmates. They leave their treatment setting with the help they need as well as academic growth that includes no less than: improved computer skills, a new experience with independent learning, an understanding of fundamental research techniques, greater awareness of a wide variety of computer programs, the experience of success in an academic endeavor, and greater self confidence in a personal ability to succeed in an ever more technical world.

New Hope anticipates expanding the Virtual School to a second facility in the fall of 2008 and is discussing the possibility of creating an option that works with intensive outpatient programming for students suspended, or expelled from regular school settings.

For more information about New Hope Foundation and their Virtual School, please visit www.newhopefoundation.org.

For more information about the Behavioral Health edition of the Promising Practices eNewsletter, please contact Michele Irwin at mirwin@carf.org.

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