Stewart-Marchman Oaks Halfway House

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Program Highlights

School Environment

All staff members collaborate to make education a high priority.

Resources & Community Involvement

Students are regularly involved in community activities.

COMPASS, a uniquely designed computer software program, provided students with individualized lessons.

An online network allows teachers and staff access to students' IEPs and IAPs.

Curriculum & Instruction

Students can participate in a hospitality training program while earning credits in school.

Students with a diploma/GED have the opportunity to take college courses at a local community college.

Educational Staff

All teachers are professionally certified in the areas they teach.

Oaks’ Best Practices

School Environment

Oaks Halfway House shares its grounds and instructional personnel with a day treatment program as well as with Stewart-Marchman Pines, Oaks’ all-female counterpart. Although space is limited, the environment is safe and orderly, and the staff maintains a positive atmosphere that engages students in productive learning activities. There is an overall consensus among the facility and educational staff at
Oaks that education is a top priority, and success in the program is dependent upon academic performance. The goal is to help students earn as many credits as possible to prepare them for their return to school or graduation. The program also considers substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and restorative justice as secondary goals. The educational and facility staffs promote self-esteem by recognizing and rewarding students for good behavior, while they set high expectations for the students — both academically and behaviorally.

Program treatment is unique for each student. A unit supervisor and a counselor review the success of past interventions and implement a plan that is best suited for each particular youth. Teachers and program staff designed a uniform discipline procedure and follow it to avoid conflict between the two groups. Students know what to expect, resulting in few discipline issues. Every Friday students are eligible for awards if they have 2500 points, no sanctions, and show academic improvement. With each course completion, students are able to choose something from the canteen. There are also awards for students of the month, most improved, and leadership. These students receive more telephone time, an opportunity to have dinner outside of the facility, or a trip to the movies.

The cooperation between the educational program and facility staff is strong, thus serving to counter the typically high attrition rates of juvenile justice staff members. This, in turn, creates a better learning environment for the students. When surveyed, the students at Oaks cited that they felt safe and were learning. Teacher and administrator surveys and interviews confirmed the program’s commitment to education, and echoed the students’ views that the environment at Oaks is safe and conducive to learning.

**Resources and Community Partnerships**

The school district provides support services, including Exceptional Student Education (ESE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Section 504, speech therapy, and educational psychological services to students, as needed. The school district also administers the program’s educational budget, which remains separate from the facility and treatment budgets. Unlike most juvenile facilities across Florida, Oaks Halfway House receives Medicaid, allowing it to support a higher proportion of students in need of special medical services.

There are 60 networked state-of-the-art computers in two labs for the students’ use. Students use COMPASS software for their curriculum and instruction. Moreover, each teacher has a computer to monitor students’ CAI activities and keep records of their performance, while there are TVs, VCRs, radios, and books-on-tape available in
all classrooms. Teachers and staff also have access to an online database used for storing student IEPs and IAPs.

As a benefit of the program's efforts to involve the community, students have opportunities to further their education and vocational training. Specifically, the Adams Mark Hotel instituted 'Hotel Motel ' where students learn a variety of tasks associated with hotel operation, such as helping with events sponsored by the hotel (e.g., coordinating, waiting tables). The American Motorcycle Institute gives scholarships, and the Daytona Beach Community College offers enrollment to students who already have a GED. Moreover, the school district provides career connection coaches that visit the program twice a year and allows all students access to a broad scope of career exploration based on their abilities, interests, and aptitudes.

Other activities in the community include The Beachside Neighborhood Watch, which is a group with local police department involvement that allows students to participate in crime prevention in the community. Students also participate in projects coordinated by Habitat for Humanity, attend countywide job fairs, and provide cleanup and other community services. In addition, pizza chains may donate food for award parties, and every Wednesday night is family education night. Former students often return to share their experiences and provide encouragement to students still in the program.

Assessments, Diagnostics, and Guidance

Once a student is referred to the facility, the program staff is notified of his arrival the day before his enrollment. At this time, the guidance counselor obtains the student's past records, uses them to assess proper grade placement, and to determine whether the student should be placed on a GED diploma or standard diploma track. Finding records for out-of-county students typically poses a greater challenge. Occasionally, files come with the student. If they do not, the counselor begins by asking family members or the student where he was last enrolled.

The Wide Range Achievement Test – 3 (WRAT-3) is administered for reading and mathematics. For writing, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) 7&8 or a writing sample based on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is given, depending on the age of the student. For vocational assessment, Career Quest, Quick Screen, the Brigance aptitude test, and a learning styles inventory are given. These are, in turn, used to write goals for individual academic plans (IAPs). If the student enters with an individual educational plan (IEP), then goals are based on the IEP. Students are given assignments on the computer until they are properly placed in academic courses.

The decision to place a student on a GED or high school diploma track is based on what is most appropriate for the individual student’s needs. The guidance counselor may look to the home school or ask his parents. To be eligible for a GED diploma, the
student must be at least 16 years of age, lacking in credits for his age, take the TABE test to determine readiness for the GED, and have parental permission. Eligible students can prepare for the GED test using computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and GED preparation workbooks. Students take the GED at the local community college.

In the event that a student enters the program with a GED, Oaks can provide them with practical arts. However, Oaks established a partnership with the Daytona Beach Community College (DBCC) so that students would also have the option of taking college courses while in the program. This is especially important for students who already have a GED diploma; they can continue their education while in the program, thus providing additional incentives to pursue a higher degree once they leave. Students enroll in the Skills, Tasks, and Results Training Program (S.T.A.R.T.). The curriculum prepares students for entry into the lodging industry by providing them with the knowledge necessary to succeed in their profession. Stewart-Marchman staff members may teach the courses after completing the DBCC adjunct faculty application. Once the student has completed his coursework and 90 days of employment, and has passed an exam, he receives a Nationally Recognized Certificate of Achievement that goes toward Industry Certification in one specialty area (i.e. Food and Beverage, Guest Services, or Housekeeping).

Weekly treatment team meetings are held four times a month, at which point IEPs and IAPs are reviewed and revised as necessary. Teachers participate in the first two meetings of the month and submit academic progress reports for the remaining two. Volusia County has an advanced online system for teachers and other staff to enter student IEP and IAP information into an Excel document. Their centralized Internet drive location allows access by all school employees. Further, IAPs are provided via e-mail to all Stewart-Marchman staff. Progress is monitored weekly through CAI activities, as well as by student presentations at treatment team meetings, during which they detail their daily progress.

**Exit and Aftercare Services**

Between 45 and 60 days before a student leaves the program, there is a meeting among teachers, program staff, and clinicians to determine his post-placement options. The guidance counselor also helps by organizing records in order to identify all of the credits the student may have earned in previous schools. The guidance counselor meets with the student to discuss graduation requirements, options, and other concerns the student may have.

In the case of local students, once students leave, they are eligible for Eckerd Reentry, which places them back in school. Follow-up is conducted on students returning to Volusia and surrounding counties. Moreover, these students have access to ongoing substance abuse treatment and a grant to help pay for strategic family therapy. The receiving school has electronic access to the student's records, making it easier to track him. Furthermore, teachers visit the reentry school for students with disabilities.
Out-of-county students at Oaks have the same treatment team process. If a parent has difficulties attending meetings, the program accommodates by setting up videoconferences for parents, the student, and the student’s juvenile probation officer (JPO). Out-of-county student records are sent to the receiving schools, but it is clearly more difficult to conduct follow-up and provide counseling services for students that do not live in the immediate area.

The program attempts to make monthly contact with all students and their parents for up to one year following their release from the program. There is an 800 number help-line available to students in addition to online aftercare chat rooms. According to interviews with program staff, they hear back from 50% of the former students for various reasons, typically just to let the Oaks staff know how they are doing.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

Classrooms are determined by the student’s dorm room assignment. There are two teachers in each classroom of 20 students (one of whom is ESE-certified), and they co-teach all subject areas to all students. Additionally, one paraprofessional is present in each classroom to assist both the students and the teachers, while a systems operator makes sure the equipment is running properly.

At Oaks, all students are enrolled in language arts, math, social studies, reading, physical education (P.E.), science, and either practical arts or career education based on students’ grade levels, achievement levels, and their assessment results. CAI is the primary mode of learning for students, who are required to spend three hours of each school day on the computer for instruction. Volusia County Schools has designed a novel software program (COMPASS) for their core curriculum that integrates software programs such as Zebu, BoxerMath, Glencoe Science/Math, and Beyond Books. The COMPASS software is aligned with Florida Sunshine State Standards (FSSS) and the District Curriculum Guides. Courses are submitted for approval on an individual basis and revised when necessary. Each student has an individualized plan, which is developed based on the results of a variety of assessment tests in the COMPASS software. The VCS district-developed CAI courses are used for all high school students working toward a standard diploma. Teachers provide reading strategies for those students for whom reading is a challenge. Because COMPASS is competency-based instruction, students can catch up and earn more credits than are normally attainable in a similar time frame.

Academic progress is continuously communicated to students through daily postings on their computers of their credits earned. This is significant not only in that it helps to keep the students on track, but teachers also believe that it encourages them to develop a sense of accomplishment in their daily progress. In addition, students receive progress reports once a week, and report cards are given every nine weeks. Students using the computers for other purposes are rarely a
problem because teachers, from their own computers, have the capability of monitoring both student progress and online activities.

Teachers at the program find COMPASS beneficial when considering the educational diversity of their population. They feel that it increases student/teacher interaction and facilitates information sharing (i.e. records, test scores) among staff, thereby giving teachers the ability to address students’ needs more efficiently. Moreover, COMPASS prevents discipline issues because students remain engaged in the curriculum. When surveyed, students agreed that their teachers were able to give them individualized attention and answer questions. As a result, students reported that they did not feel ignored.

Offline individualized and/or group reading, writing, math, employability skills assignments and projects, textbooks, and worksheets are integrated with COMPASS to accommodate different learning styles, as well as to engage the students in the subject matter. Other instructional strategies include books-on-tape, reading aloud by teachers and students, educational videos, a daily reading of the newspaper, art activities related to reading, social studies, employability skills, role-playing, guest speakers, direct instruction, and classroom discussion. Additionally, students lacking in reading skills can participate in ‘Peers Working with Peers,’ an after school reading program in which students who have already earned a diploma help those who have trouble with reading.

**Educational Personnel and Teachers**

The educational program at Oaks consists of a lead educator, four teachers, an ESE specialist, a full-time reading specialist, two aides, two computer staff members, four treatment staff members, and a guidance counselor. Together, the teachers are certified in all highly qualified areas (i.e. English, social studies, math, and science), administration, elementary education, P.E., emotionally handicapped (EH), and exceptional student education (ESE). Further, the facility’s four licensed clinicians have master’s degrees.

The program’s most significant challenge is getting teachers certified in their core subject areas. A rotating schedule has replaced the old system so that teachers can provide instruction within their areas of certification. In addition, an ESE teacher remains in each classroom and is paired with certified core subject area teachers as much as possible to approximate a co-teaching model.
Additionally, all teachers participate in a wide variety of in-service training, such as ESOL, reading comprehension, career planning, educational technology, phonics, fluency, college reading courses on-line, and Teaching Integrated Math and Science (TIMS).

As previously mentioned, the collaboration between the educational program and facility staff provides a stable and pleasant working environment, which generates greater job satisfaction among the staff members and cooperation from the students. The facility's superior technology and online system is an efficient means of keeping track of student records and making sure all parties are involved. Whereas some schools would rely entirely on computer-assisted instruction, the teachers at Oaks apply various instructional strategies to ensure that students are receiving a well-rounded education. Through support from the school district, as well as their efforts to involve the students, community, and parents, the entire staff at Oaks can be credited with making it a successful program.