



Swift River News

Spring 2007

Volume 9, Issue 1

NEW BEGINNINGS
IN NEW ENGLAND

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A Tough Decision

My family helped me come to a tough decision recently. I have decided to accept a job offer with another organization within our industry that I believe will be good for my family and for my long-term career goals. By the time you receive your

Spring *ASR News*, I will have worked my last day at ASR as the Executive Director on Friday, March 9. Frank Bartolomeo, LICSW, PhD (candidate) will serve as the Interim Executive Director until a permanent replacement has been selected. Bo Turner, Senior Vice President of the Aspen Eastern Region Residential Schools, will work with Frank and will be responsible for leading the search for a permanent replacement.

Frank, as the most senior staff member and because he is an incredibly accomplished professional and leader, will ensure there is

no disruption to the services we are providing our students and families. Frank will be primarily supported, as am I, by Bo Turner; Josh Becker, Director of Educational Services; and Rhonda Papallo, Director of Admissions & Student Support Services as well as all the other leadership team members at ASR. During the period when Frank is serving as the Executive Director, counseling services administrative responsibilities will be shared amongst his senior clinicians. We hope the process of appointing a final candidate will be completed this spring.

This was an incredibly

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February 2007 Graduates

Good things come in small packages, so they say, and our February '07 group of graduates proves the point. Though few in number, they made it a special day for everyone as family, friends, and staff gathered to bid them a fond farewell.

Thomas F. arrived at ASR in December 2005, addicted to drugs and running away constantly

from not only his family but from his problems as well. He continued running until he was sent to ASR. There he learned new strategies for coping with stress. He finally discovered that schoolwork was not that hard and finally he learned to let go of the drugs that had become his downfall. He will be going home to New York City to continue pursuing

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ASR ski trails were well used this winter!



Skiing is one of the favorite activities of winter and early spring in the hills of Western New England, and the campus cross-country trails were well groomed and extensively used this year.

You'll find more news of activities and events on page 6.

Counseling Update

Life Phases™ System Implemented



*Frank Bartolomeo
Director of
Counseling Services/
Interim
Executive Director*

On October 1, 2006, the Academy at Swift River officially implemented an individualized level system, which we have termed “**Life Phases.**” As part of this new clinical model, we offered “Team Parent Workshops.” Each month one of our five teams (Buffaloes, Cougars, Eagles, Mustangs, Wolves) holds a 1.5-day workshop that begins on Thursday morning and ends at midday on Friday. The overall objectives of these workshops are to provide an opportunity for parents to give and receive support to and from each other, and for parents to better come to know the staff assigned to each team: the teachers, mentors and residential

supervisors, and clinical counselors. Each Team has had a Parent Workshop, with a second round to begin in March. The feedback we have received from parents has been overwhelmingly positive. One of the most common benefits as reported by parents is the mutual aid they provide and receive from each other.

Mutual aid is a fundamental principle and “therapeutic factor” of modern group psychotherapy, social group work, and self-help support groups such as Alcoholic Anonymous. Mutual aid is linked to Joseph H. Pratt, a physician at what is now Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. In 1905, Dr. Pratt was treating patients with tuberculosis, those who could not afford treatment in a country-side sanatorium. To be able to see more patients in less time, Dr. Pratt began seeing his patients in weekly groups, or “classrooms,” where he would provide information about tuberculosis and hygienic instructions. Patients would also give “testimonials”—essentially sharing their experience of living with an illness. Dr. Pratt observed that these discussion groups had serendipitous effects in that patients reported

feeling more hopeful, less depressed, and less isolated when sharing their experiences with others who had similar problems. Thus, Dr. Pratt is considered one of the founding fathers of modern group treatment.

Parents also have reported that sharing their stories with parents who are “all in the same boat” has been very helpful and comforting. What distinguishes our Team Parent Workshops from our former Family Resolutions is that the Team workshops are comprised of parents of students who are at varying lengths of stay at ASR. This means that relatively new parents can interact with parents whose children are near completion of their program. In this way, new parents can find hope and “older” parents can see where they once were—each set of parents has something to give and receive.

The principle of mutual aid and the belief that we are all potential teachers is one that we try to instill in our students: that in giving to others we cannot help but receive as well.

We have incorporated these concepts into our transition seminars for graduating students and their parents. Under the

direction of Mike Valuski and PJ Kilfeather, we invited a small group of alumni (students and parents) to speak at the Transition Seminar for a group of students who graduated in February 2007. The graduating students and their parents found hearing about the successes, trials and tribulations after ASR enormously helpful (*see article on p. 5*). It is our intention to include alumni in all future Transition Seminars.

In January we held our first Family Seminar 1 where we brought our updated Family Handbook to life. We welcomed 15 family members for a day of information sharing with the leadership team and ended the day with an Adventure ASR group building exercise. We will have these workshops every 4 months to help new families overcome some of the anxieties of sending their child to a new program.

Finally, You may find it useful to have a quick-reference listing of support groups and resources that could be helpful both now and in the future. You will find such a list on the back cover of this edition of your *Swift River News*.

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From the Academic Director . . . Extra, Extra! Read All About It!

This past trimester marked the inauguration of ASR's student newspaper, The River. The project was undertaken by Michelle Towles' Creative Writing Class. Students in the class were looking for ways to expand their writing repertoire and styles and decided to try their hands at print journalism.

The paper reports on the day-to-day life and news at Swift River as well as from the world at large. Creative and editorial contributions were also included, as were interviews of students and staff.

This was a first at ASR, and response to the newspaper was phenomenal. Students and staff appreciated the time and effort

involved in getting such a publication off the ground, and the creative writing class appreciated the feedback that could lead to future improvements.

Bolstered by this support, Michelle Towles has expanded the newspaper project to its own full-fledged elective course, Print Journalism, this term. This course will explore the different elements involved in writing and editing a newspaper.

From the course description:

"In this class, we will put our imaginations to the test and explore the various ways our *personal voice* and our *reporting voice* can be exhibited. . .

Around the midterm date and at the end of the term, the students will release an issue of the ASR Student

Newspaper, The River. This newspaper will include articles on current events topics, issues and news around the school, facts from Aspen Education, important dates (1 year markers, birthdays, etc), and many student submissions. Editing will be done by the students and a copy will be given out to everyone in the school. These newspapers are really fun, but involve a lot of dedication and effort! Each student in the class must be invested into making these newspapers, as well as every assignment, a success!"

In other academic news, I am pleased to announce the addition of Joshua Wolk to our faculty. Josh will be teaching U.S. History, Global History, and Algebra this trimester, and will possibly add



Josh Becker, Director of
Education Services

some sections of English in future terms. We can look forward to an exciting array of electives from Josh as well: Political Science, philosophy... maybe even Greek! Josh comes to us having recently graduated from Amherst College, where he majored in Political Science and Independent Scholarship.

February Graduates. . .

(Continued from page 1)

his passions and preparing for college. He thanks everyone who has helped him on the way.

Sam G. arrived at ASR in January 2006. Angry about being sent away from home, he was lonely and depressed. A few months down the road, after some help from Mike Charnley and Gina Cunningham, he began to learn that he

needed help. After this realization things started to fall into place. Through work with his friends and family, Sam changed his life for the better. When he gets home he plans on getting a job from March to late August. His relationship with his family is at an all time high and he plans on going on to college in the fall.

John K. came to ASR in December 2005 after a 51-

day wilderness stay at Adirondack Leadership Expeditions in upstate New York. He was very angry and confused. After many long sessions with his therapist, Tanya Beecher, and Lifesteps one through three, John realized he had problems that needed to be dealt with and he faced them head-on. After graduating, John will enjoy spending time with his family and relaxing prior to starting Drivers Education

classes. After he turns 18 in April, John will get a summer job until he goes off to college in the fall.

Sad and confused, **Allie S.** turned to unhealthy friends and boys after her arrival at ASR in October 2005. Resorting to everything that made her comfortable she found herself on a long downward spiral, which led to multiple restrictions and encoun-

(Continued on page 5)

From the Assistant Director of Admissions... Struggles and Possibilities



*Paul Ravenscraft
Assistant Director
of Admissions*

Many of our students have struggled in recent years with their academics. In admissions it is their number one stated anxiety. They have often struggled with some mild to moderate learning differences, or other challenges such as ADHD. They don't see themselves as good students and their learning style has not

been supported. At Swift River students redefine themselves as learners. They re-integrate the role of "student" into their identity. Most importantly they reconnect with a sense a possibility for themselves. As we prepare once again this year to celebrate the 100% college acceptance for our seniors, we also celebrate their differences. We should be reminded that some of our greatest contributors in society got off to a rocky start with some learning differences of their own:

*Albert Einstein
Galileo
Mozart
Wright Brothers
Leonardo da Vinci
Cher
Bruce Jenner
Tom Cruise
Charles Schwab
Henry Winkler*

*Danny Glover
Walt Disney
John Lennon
Greg Louganis
Winston Churchill
Henry Ford
Stephen Hawkings
Jules Verne
Alexander Graham
Bell
Woodrow Wilson
Hans Christian
Anderson
Nelson Rockefeller
Thomas Edison
Gen. George Patton
Agatha Christie
John F. Kennedy
Whoopi Goldberg
Rodin
Thomas Thoreau
David H. Murdock
Dustin Hoffman
Pete Rose
Russell White
Jason Kidd
Russell Varian
Robin Williams
Louis Pasteur
Werner von Braun
Dwight D. Eisenhower*

*Robert Kennedy
Luci Baines Johnson
Nugent
George Bush's children
Prince Charles
Gen. Westmoreland
Eddie Rickenbacker
Gregory Boyington
Harry Belafonte
F. Scott Fitzgerald
Mariel Hemingway
Steve McQueen
George C. Scott
Tom Smothers
Suzanne Somers
Lindsay Wagner
George Bernard Shaw
Beethoven
Carl Lewis
Jackie Stewart
"Magic" Johnson
Weyerhauser family
Wrigley
John Corcoran
Sylvester Stallone*

Such an imposing list certainly proves the point that learning differences need not be a negative factor in life.

Decision...

(Continued from page 1)

difficult decision for me and for my family. I have really enjoyed the past almost 2 ½ years here at ASR, and I will always have fond memories of my time here. Being a part of a winning team and high quality organization, and the resulting recognition that goes along with that, has been the most rewarding experience I have ever had. This highly satisfying position, combined

with the knowledge of the 200+ families we have helped and are helping to navigate their own personal and emotional "turn-arounds," make my experience here something I know will be hard to beat.

While I am excited about the new opportunities and challenges I will have with my new job, I am saddened when I think of how much I will miss the team here. I am comforted by the fact that I

leave ASR in a great place: financially sound, programmatically strong, and a place with incredibly caring professionals who are committed to ensuring success for our students and families.

Thank you for your trust and involvement. I know ASR will continue to be a great place for adolescents and families to restore their relationships, rediscover academic success, and prepare for future challenges.

If you have any thoughts, questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to contact Frank or Bo (bturner@aspeneducation.com) directly.

Sincerely,
Don Vardell

[Editor's Note] The staff expressed their appreciation for Don's years of leadership with a gathering at the home of Lisa DeLisle, where he was presented with a framed, aerial photograph of the ASR campus that had hung on the wall of his office.

From the Associate Director of Counseling... Transitioning Seminar Offered

We were pleased to offer our February 2007 graduates a Transitioning Seminar, which provided time for both socializing and serious discussion. Held at the Hotel Northampton on February 22, the Seminar attendees included staff, graduating students and their families, and some very special guests: six alumni students and their families returned to share their experiences and insights with those about to graduate.

Breakfast provided time to meet and mingle, and the day included relaxing breaks for informal conversation. After breakfast the day's agenda began with an open forum that gave graduating students and their families an opportunity to discuss their feelings about graduating

and to express and process any fears or anxieties about leaving our controlled, safe campus environment. In addition, staff members were on hand to remind families of the support available to them in the future from Alumni Services. After this session the parents of graduating students met with the alumni students, who were able to offer helpful advice for handling various specific situations that might arise. Graduating and alumni parents later met together and appreciated the opportunity to share experiences.

The afternoon focus was on our graduating students in order to help them process saying their goodbyes and offer assistance with expressing any additional thoughts to

their families before going home. Dinner provided more time for relaxation, informal conversation and sharing.

Everyone agreed that the day was highly successful. The graduating families appreciated having a chance to talk to the alumni students and their families, hearing what they experienced and how they managed various situations. Alumni families felt the day reinforced their reconnection with the experiences, lessons and skills they learned at ASR. Additionally, the seminar helped to forge strong ties between all participating families, who agreed that the future support this offered was most helpful for transition.

We would like to express



*Mike Valuski
Associate Director
of Counseling*

our deep appreciation to our alumni and their families who returned for this Transitioning Seminar: Juan M., Zach K., Emily K., Evan S., Evans L., Mark L. Sharing what your first six months away from ASR were like was a valuable gift to all of us—thank you!

Graduates...

(Continued from page 3)

ters with the "not so fun" side of ASR. After hitting rock bottom, she found herself in a sticky situation with the choice to stay or go. She chose to buckle down and get to work. After stepping up and taking a stand in her life, all seemed to come together

after her third Lifestep. Though it was still a bumpy road, with the support of her family, friends and therapist, she has finally found her place. After ASR she plans on returning home to spend time with her family, get a job, and participate in a summer music program at Berklee College of Music. Allie is scheduled to start

college in the fall.

Dave S. came to ASR almost sixteen months ago. He was mean to his peers and staff around him. He had no intentions of making friends or trusting his program—he thought he already knew everything. He eventually began wanting friends but didn't know how to make them.

He spent his first couple of months feeling lonely and not cared about. After his third Lifestep he started showing everyone the fun and loving person he truly is. His Personal Challenge (PC) helped him reconnect with his family. After graduating, he will start to find a balance between his new job, his new friends, and his family.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES!

Residential Life Update

Unseasonably mild temperatures had us a little worried about the ski season, but our prayers were answered! The “Valentines Day Blizzard” brought us about a foot of powdery snow, and the snow just kept on coming. The ski/snowboard club has made numerous visits to Jiminy Peak Ski Resort for day trips. A two-night ski trip to Okemo Mountain was also planned for eligible students. The many campus cross-country ski trails that we restored last fall were beautifully groomed and already well trekked.



Since our last newsletter we have had three Alternative Curriculum Weeks (ACWs). Some of the highlights in November included a butterfly and bug presentation by “Magic Wings” Butterfly Conservatory, a photo scavenger hunt, a bounce house, and the annual ASR Turkey Bowl. This



year the students dominated the staff with a score too embarrassing to report! A formal dinner was served on Thanksgiving Day.

During the December break many students had home visits, but those on campus enjoyed trips to Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory and Dr. Spooky’s Animal Museum, the Springfield museum quadrangle, and an all-school bowling trip. Christmas was observed with a reading of “The Night before Christmas” on Christmas Eve and a very relaxing Christmas Day (including the unwrapping of a new Air Hockey Table for the Great Room!). A formal dinner was also served on Christmas Day. Some other events of the winter break included an evening of group activities led by “Trevor the Games Man,” a dance hosted by DJ Minty Fresh (a.k.a. Academic Mentor and Wolves Team member Nathan Loux), and a performance by the rock band SDRUM. Hay rides were the highlight of New Years Eve, followed by a dance and

Dick Clark’s Rockin’ New Years Eve TV special.

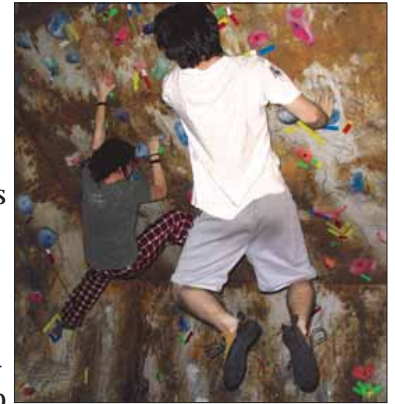
February’s Alternative Curriculum Week featured

Graduation Day, performances by several singer/songwriters, and a Birds of Prey presentation. Music teacher Dave Bartley brought his jazz band to campus, and a student from Hampshire College presented a thought provoking video and discussion about her recent trip to Ghana.

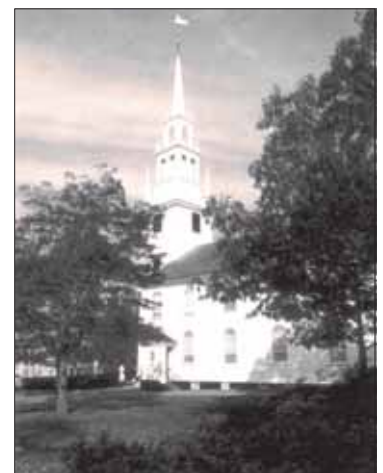
This term many diverse clubs were offered on Wednesday nights by our wonderful Residential Mentor staff. Bob Demerjian (Eagle) led a Guitar Club. A Film Making Club was again offered by Mark Piaget (Buffalo). Mike Kilfeather (Cougar) heads up the Epicurean Club – and they continue to provide yummy treats for the school! Former Residential Supervisor Alex Bartlett returns to us on Wednesday nights to lead a Yoga Club. Kami Trushaw (Buffalo) and Traci Gould (Wolf) ran a jewelry making club. An Arts and Clay Club was run by Carrie Maguire (Mustang) and Jason Pronovost (Wolf). Jen Goselin (Mustang) and Jesslyn Rodney (Cougar) ran a Free Writing Club, and a Politics in Film Club was run by Justin Staller (Eagle).

The weekends have been active with special offerings like a Saturday Basketball Tournament, a

Anne Colacarro



four week Theater Workshop, and regular offerings by Adventure ASR such as indoor rock climbing trips. Many students have discovered an interest in knitting and crocheting. We recently purchased three sewing machines and Residential Supervisor Jocelyn Steiner has been teaching several students to sew. A student-based weekend activity planning committee was recently formed and we expect great new ideas for weekend fun.



We have been very fortunate to find some local clergy who have committed to coming to

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Adventure ASR

Incredibly, after many had given up all hope of a real winter here in New England, we got snowed in on Valentine's Day and got over a foot of the stuff all over! The Cross-country skiing on our trails has been superb ever since and many students have taken advantage of this opportunity to get some outdoor exercise and enjoy the beauty of our situation.

Imagine, this is hugely popular with students and helps the staff stay in shape trying to keep up with these kids! We have a weekend trip to Okemo



Downhill skiing and snowboarding have been underway since January with trips every Wednesday afternoon. As you can

Mountain in the works as well, and that looks to be one we will talk about for months. On the indoor adventure

scene, we've had kayak rolling in a pool going on each Saturday in February and indoor climbing at our

own bouldering wall and at the gym in Northampton. The kayak sessions teach basics of paddling and introduce the technique for bringing the boat right side up after a spill and are a great

warm-up for the whitewater river sessions we'll be running in the spring. Indoor climbing is a great challenge in its own right



and also builds strength and technique for outdoor climbing when the weather permits.

It's been a busy winter already and with the late snow, who knows what future weeks will bring?

Residential Life...

(Continued from page 6)

ASR for regular visits. Rev. Liza Neal from the Cummington Congregational Church has already come in several times over the past few



A SCAVENGER HUNT??? It may not look like one, but we promise, it is!



months to lead group discussions and to meet with students individually. A Rabbi from Northampton will begin monthly visits starting in March. Recently we took six students to Ash Wednesday service at a local Catholic Church, and we will be arranging regular visits with a Catholic priest.

I am very excited to announce the arrival of the

newest members of the Residential Life team: Kirsten Drummond (Cougar), Mark Green (Wolf), Kevin Coleman (Mustang), and Rebecca Foskett (Eagle). I am also very proud to announce that Jocelyn Steiner has been promoted to Residential Supervisor of the Buffalo team.

So what is coming up this spring? New clubs will be announced very soon.

There will also be a special emphasis on community service and service learning. Watch for more updates on this exciting new focus to our programming.

The Residential Life team takes great pride in providing quality programming and activities to our students. We also work very hard to enforce the rules and to provide first response to students

in crisis. The Residential Supervisors and Residential Mentors are here working at ASR 365 days a year regardless of sunshine or blizzards. Every

day I am so thankful to be working with such a dedicated group of individuals, who truly care deeply about helping ASR students reach their potential.

I would love to hear from you! Please feel free to contact Anne Colacarro at x125 or at: acolacarro@swiftriver.com if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions.



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Please contact Anne Strader, Editor,
at annestradsbcglobal.net
with any suggestions or information
you would like to see in the next
newsletter.

Alumni News... Missing!

Regrettably, we have no Alumni News feature in this edition of your *Swift River News*.

Many of you have told me over the years that the Alumni News is the page you turn to first when you receive your newsletter. It is also the feature I most enjoy printing. But the fact is that unless **you**, the alumni students and families, send your news in, we don't have it to print.

There are several ways you can do this. You can communicate with Mike Valuski, who is in charge of Alumni Services now, either by e-mail: mvaluski@swiftriver.com

or phone: just dial campus **1-800-258-1770** and ask for him. Ask him to forward your news to me.

OR...

E-mail me directly at annestradsbcglobal.net.

You remain in the hearts and minds of the ASR staff; we really want to know how you are and what you're doing—and so do your friends.

We hope you'll e-mail or call in, but ultimately, it is up to you. If you want this feature to continue, get in touch. Otherwise, there will no longer be an Alumni News feature.

Anne Strader, Editor

Support Groups List

- Al-Anon (schedule can be found at www.kornet.org/alanon/meetlist.html)
- Families Anonymous www.familiesanonymous.org
- CoDA (Codependents Anonymous) www.codependents.org/coda/searchmeetings.asp
- ASAP (Adoption Support and Preservation) <http://tnasap.org/asapservices.htm> (provides a variety of services to any child adopted through the Department of Children's Services) 888-848-2727
- AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) – www.aa.org
- NA (Narcotics Anonymous) – www.na.org
- Emotions Anonymous – www.emotionsanonymous.org (a 12 step program for people working towards recovery from emotional difficulties)
- Overeaters Anonymous – www.oa.org (for all eating disorders)
- NAMI – (National Alliance on Mental Illness) www.nami.org
- DRA (Dual Recovery Anonymous) – www.draonline.org
- National Mental Health Association – www.nmha.org
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance www.dbsalliance.org