

A success for RedCliff

Brittany is smiling. Her large, liquid brown eyes¹ shine but there is a certain sadness in them as well. You can barely see the scars on her arms.

"I was cutting myself," she admits matter-of-factly. "I guess that's why they sent me to RedCliff. I tried suicide twice."

Just 15-years-old, she grew up in an abusive home. An aunt stepped in and took Brittany to live with her. But the girl's problems persisted. She threatened her niece with wilderness intervention but Brittany, rebellious, depressed, and dabbling in drugs, never thought she'd follow through. Until the day when her aunt handed her over to two escorts and tearfully told her niece: "This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do."

Skills

Brittany spent more than four months in the harsh wilderness. She refused to pass off her course work because, as she explains: "I really thought the rest of my family would guilt trip my aunt into coming and getting me." Her aunt held fast.

Today Brittany is a student at Discovery Academy, a therapeutic boarding school located in Provo, Utah. She's working on her high school diploma, starting in the school play and continuing therapy.

Although many Discovery students have never experienced a wilderness program, the Academy serves as a transitional stage for students who are hoping to turn newfound understanding into practical life skills. It combines the best therapeutic intervention with academic programs specifically tailored to the child's needs.

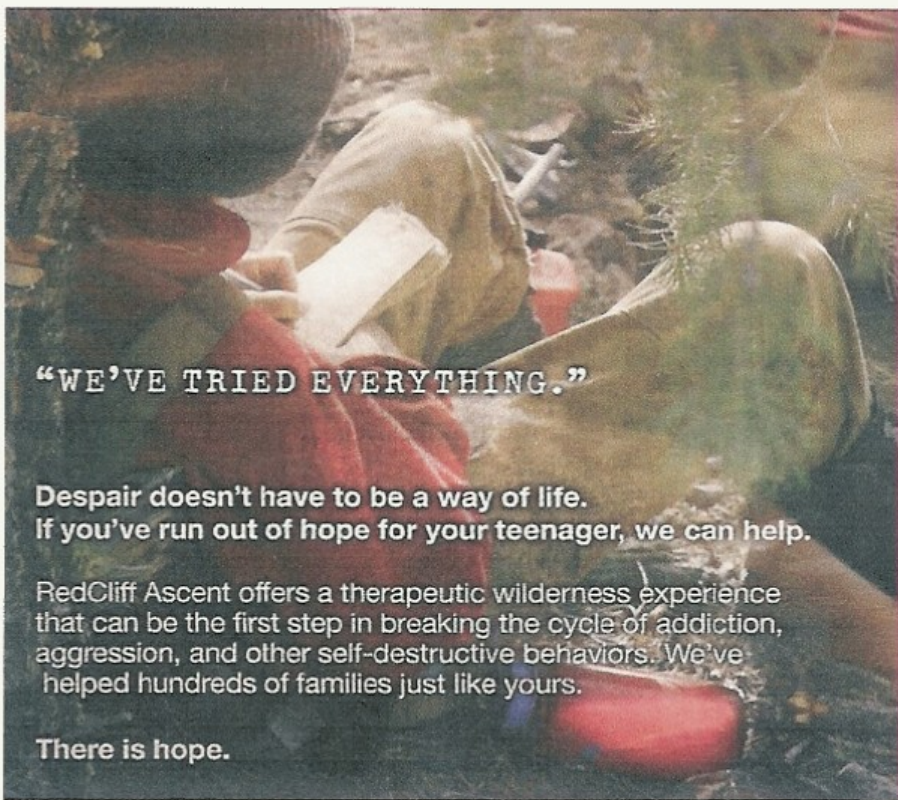
Students can earn high school credit as well as take advanced courses and college entrance exams.

DA's academic program is based on a holistic approach that combines competency-based learning with student directed progress goals and group learning activities.

Max Thomas, an English instructor, explains: "A lot of kids might have ADD, ADHD, problems focusing. They can come here and they deal with it, they learn to work around it. They walk out of here knowing how to study, how to not be distracted, and how to have some success."

Equine experiential therapy is another hallmark. Simply put, it means helping students understand through experience. Raoul Willard is a Discovery Academy Therapist and Equine Instructor. "What horses do very well is reflect the feelings of the people working with them. In the first one or two sessions the kids will almost always connect with a horse that is similar to them." Willard says Discovery students learn much more than horsemanship. "They learn about themselves. They learn about life."

"I'm a completely different person," Brittany says with conviction. "I have so many skills and talents I was just letting go to waste. Sometimes I still struggle with depression but I've learned how to be successful. People don't look at me now and say, 'She's a person that needs help.' Now they look at me and say, 'She's a person that's strong.' In a way, I guess I feel special. I'm glad my aunt thought I was worth saving."



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