



TIDINGS

Newsletter of the Penikese Island School

Volume 32, Number 1, Summer 2005

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Established 1973
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Penikese and the New Continuum

An integrated approach to working with high-risk teenage boys

DSS Sea Changes

Piloted by Commissioner Harry Spence, Massachusetts' Department of Social Services (DSS) is undergoing vast institutional reorganization. Commissioner Spence's changes include an emphasis on a new continuum of care for children in DSS custody, in which niche programs like Penikese will play an integral role.

Small private schools like Penikese customarily greet news of change in its bedfellow institutions with a mixture of apprehension and cynicism. Not this time. Commissioner Spence and his administration have been forthcoming, sincere, and deeply committed to making a fundamental difference. Although a bit early to tell exactly how Commissioner Spence's vision will shake out at street level, we applaud his efforts even as they force Penikese and fellow DSS treatment providers to reassess their missions.

The good news is that, provided Penikese doesn't sit still, it faces these changes from a positive vantage point.

DSS' new continuum

DSS' reorganization addresses two longstanding problems: children "stuck" too long in its system, and its dependency on residential programs to provide DSS services to these children. Without a doubt, a key element of Commissioner Spence's plan is to reduce the number of children in residential placements.

Continued on page 2



PENIKESE: A FULL SERVICE PROGRAM

- Specializing in working with older, difficult to place adolescent boys heading towards independent living.
- Short-term (7 to 9 month) island placement with contracted home passes, tracking and family/resource support.
- From Day One of placement, intensive preparation for community transition with emphasis on personal responsibility, life skills, academic education, strong work ethic and job preparation.
- 10 year's experience with relationship-based Aftercare for graduates, their families and collateral agencies.
- "Tune-up" return visits to the island and respite for former students.
- Since 2001, a 77% MCAS total success rate.
- Also serving the broader community through training, supervision and consultation.

**IN THIS
ISSUE:**

p. 3
Do it Anyway!

p. 5
**How to Make
a Referral**

p. 7
**DOE Program
Review**

p. 8
**Aftercare
Program**

p. 11
**All it Takes
is People!**

PENIKESE AND THE NEW CONTINUUM, cont.

But merely subtracting beds will accomplish nothing to achieve DSS' aims unless alternatives arise in their place. DSS itself has indicated that it can't afford to take *all* of its eggs out of the residential basket, but will be taking some. In other words, it plans to reduce its overall use of residential programs, while preserving residential placements as but one element of a continuum of care.

Penikese: A good fit

Penikese seems to fit DSS' new specifications quite well. Penikese has always been a small program emphasizing intensive and quality individual care, with relatively short term island placement (7 to 9 months) singularly focused on preparing its students for transition and stable functioning in their community. Best of all, Penikese's 10 years' experience with aftercare give the school a decided advantage, given Commissioner Spence's emphasis on community transition and support services.

The island will always be central to our mission, but Penikese ceased being just an island program years ago. Currently, Penikese devotes about a third of its time and resources to off-island endeavors providing graduate Aftercare and consultation and training to schools, agencies, and the public at-large.

Indeed, Penikese is a bigger school with a broader reach than first appears, and growing every year. Penikese is currently exploring a community mentoring project, "unbundling" and pricing its Aftercare services in order to bill them to those able to pay, and looking into other possible sources of revenue such as providing community-based adolescent and family counseling services.

Penikese's niche population

Commissioner Spence may be steering DSS in new directions, but that does not mean Penikese has to completely change course, too. In fact, now more than ever, Penikese needs to hold onto that which makes it Penikese and not just any old program. No, it's not the

island that is unique, but the kind of boys we work with: high-risk, older adolescents without reliable family resources, aging out of the system and needing Aftercare to support their first steps towards independent living and young adulthood.

Many such boys have been in DSS custody for years, moving from foster home to group home and so forth, over time growing from cute and adoption-attractive children into cranky and misbehaving teens, each the equivalent of a teenage hot potato. Because of their indigent status and lack of reliable family resources, most of these boys have no "community" to transition into. They are extremely difficult to care for, and at highest risk once they leave the system. Without intervention, almost half will end up in prison within three years!

Commissioner Spence addressed this issue in a recent article in the Boston Herald in which he says, "We are churning out – at large public expense and in some significant numbers – lost souls." Commissioner Spence is, of course, referring to our very own Penikese-type boys. He adds, "Children leave programs for the real world, and it all falls apart because life isn't an institution. It's messy."

Penikese: An integral link in the new continuum

Enter Penikese, a family-sized and relationship-intensive program singularly devoted to working with boys with these very needs. Much more than just a residential program, Penikese provides its students with treatment, education, job training and life skills while forming durable attachments upon which the students and Penikese later draw as they transition to adulthood.

With its first efforts to establish Aftercare 10 years ago, Penikese started down its own path of developing a treatment continuum in which the island is only the beginning. Today, Penikese and schools like it will play a more important role than ever before in DSS' new continuum of care, an integral link serving those with the greatest needs of all.



Do It Anyway!

Maintaining personal integrity and effective treatment

Traffic jams and troubled kids

“Do it anyway” has become a popular exhortation to do the right thing even if it gets you nothing in return. This phrase derives from the Paradoxical Commandments by Dr. Kent Keith, which were later revised as *Anyway* by Mother Theresa. One example of “Do it anyway” might be letting someone merge ahead of you in traffic, not because you will get a wave of thanks or earn a few instant traffic karma credits, but because it is the right thing to do. Some drivers are thoughtless and rude, but let them merge anyway.

Getting trapped in traffic with the surliest drivers pales against the personal injuries suffered when working with troubled teens. Adolescence, especially the early years, is often hallmarked by questionable peer attachments, a sudden belief that the world’s rules no longer apply, and an abrupt devaluation of parental currency without any commensurate decrease in expectation of their childhood entitlements. You remind yourself adolescence is a stage, they are still children and need you, and locked away deep within their metamorphosed selves, they probably even still love you. So, love them anyway.

Why bother?

Loving troubled teens anyway can sound hopelessly naive in the face of harsh reality. Rather than mere sullenness to deal with, you have disruptive and sometimes violent behavior for communication, openness and generosity taken as an opportunity for victimization, and the material things you share and give often trampled on so that you feel every bit as trashed. It’s enough to make you ask yourself, “Why am I doing this?”

Good question, because you can’t expect to work closely with troubled people of any age and emerge unscathed. Secondary traumatiza-



tion is not a possibility, but a virtual certainty in this line of work, especially when taking the close-quarters approach of the therapeutic relationship. Staff claiming that the work “doesn’t phase me,” are likely conducting relationships from too safe a distance to have much therapeutic effectiveness with the students.

Repeat after me: Supervision is key

No, we are not advocating that staff be carted away wriggling inside a straightjacket to prove they are earning their salt. Some will have significant reactions, but the most common symptoms of burnout include compassion fatigue and emotional withdrawal, sarcasm and sour attitude, and engaging in might-makes-right power struggles that exact control at the price of connection.

In any program working with troubled populations, attentive and regular clinical supervision is critical, especially so to preserve the integrity of the therapeutic relationship treatment model. Supervision not only helps counter staff burnout, but helps preserve treatment integrity. Otherwise, your beloved program with all its virtues and ideals is destined to begin an inexorable drift towards staff and students doing time together rather than treatment.

Continued on page 4

Do it Anyway, cont.



Who are you?

As is so common among those with a trauma history, Penikese boys are forever testing staff to gain some reliable sense of what they are all about. This behavior is not just a game to find out what they can get away with, but also about seeing if you can be trusted to uphold the standard and integrity of the program. Like children of any age and circumstance, Penikese boys seek a dependable standard of safety, structure and consistency from their “surrogate parents.”

Except for troubled children, the standard and need is even higher, inversely proportional to their unfortunate life experience.

Labor of love



Building therapeutic relationships with those who ordinarily wouldn't even want to be in a relationship to begin with is an artful, inexact and unpredictable labor of love from which the first “grab” of attachment and connection develops. However rudimentary, this connection becomes the engine powering treatment and its eventual successes later. The relationship is everything.

Now, with apologies to Kent Keith and Mother Theresa, here are a few examples of Do It Anyway Penikese-style, meant only to be a helpful guide and not a definitive list:

- If you let students know they are getting under your skin or tell them how their behavior makes you feel, they will keep hitting your buttons, and call you too sensitive. They need to know where they stand to feel safe, so **tell them how their behavior makes you feel anyway.**
- If you admit you made a mistake, they will jump all over you and question your authority. You are human and a model of reasonable authority, so **admit your mistakes anyway.**
- If you give students certain choices, you will lose control and the students will run the show. Might doesn't always make right, so **frame interventions as a choice anyway.**
- You can't really hold students accountable to home passes, so don't sweat the small stuff like missed curfews and phone checks. Small stuff can add up to big stuff, so **hold them accountable to their “contracts” anyway.**
- Offering extra support, redemption, and second chances often results in their flubbing – if not trashing – the opportunity. **Offer redemption and second chances anyway.**
- Failing to follow through on appointments and promises with students, especially graduates, isn't a big deal because they never follow through themselves. **Follow through anyway.**
- Giving your best to the most troublesome students is a waste of time. They will probably get thrown out or end up in jail anyway, and there are other students more deserving of your time. Especially to those needing it the most, **give your best anyway.**

How to Make a Referral

Interested in making a referral? Penikese admits students on a rolling basis throughout the year, depending on the availability of current or imminent openings. If you are not already familiar with the school, please visit our website at www.penikese.org for a thorough description, including a frequently asked questions link that provides an overview of the referral process.

We often tell students that they might not feel as if they have much control over their lives, but they do have some control over whether or not they choose Penikese.

We encourage all those exploring the possibility of a referral to Penikese to call the school to discuss the student in question, rule out for any obvious contraindications (such as chronic fire-setting behavior), and kick around suggestions and ideas for framing placement. Often, treatment begins before we even meet the student by framing his treatment choices, coaxing stray or resistant family members on board to support placement, or briefing collaterals such as attorneys and probation officers about the school.

Once it appears the boy in question and Penikese make an appropriate match, the next step is for Penikese to completely review the referral package, especially his most recent psychosocial, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and any treatment or psychological evaluation. There may be additional questions requiring an answer, but in either case, the next step is arranging a student interview. Where these interviews take place varies tremendously according to the boy's circumstances, but our experience shows it is preferable to conduct them at our onshore office in Woods Hole rather than at home, detention, or some other program. Boys tend to relax and give a more genuine presentation when they have some sense of what Penikese is all about, something they are less apt to give from lock-up.

The interview itself is a rather straightforward process of explaining to the boy what and where Penikese is and how the program works, and exploring his understanding of his circumstances, cause and effect, and what goals – if any – he might have to work on while in the program. We often tell students that they might not feel as if they have much control over their lives, but they do have some control over whether or not they choose Penikese.



Continued on page 6

How to Make a Referral, cont.

Generally, experience proves that the better the interview, the stronger the placement, but there are exceptions. Dud interviews can always be rescheduled, and Penikese also can arrange for balky students, their parents, caseworkers and advocates to visit the island before deciding, if requested.

We believe that true treatment begins with a choice, so we encourage the shaping of his placement to be his choice as much as possible and practical, including asking the boy to call Penikese and ask to attend. This can be quite a big step given the “treatment and life is what happens to me” experience of many of our students, but to whatever extent we can accomplish this step usually reaps later rewards. To complete the placement process, the student must complete and fax in a Student Agreement Form on which he explains his circumstances as he understands them, why he chose Penikese, what he hopes to gain from the program, and what might happen should he quit or be expelled from Penikese.



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This form often comes in quite handy later on when students inevitably encounter their core conflicts and suddenly “forget” all their lofty aspirations at the time of interview!

If the above process sounds like too much, don’t despair, Penikese works hard to support and facilitate the referral process.



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A note to our readers: Pam Brighton, Penikese’s Clinical Director since 1996, will be stepping down from her position on July 30, 2005 to move to Vermont. Taking over the reigns of Penikese’s treatment programs will be Kerri O’Malley, with Pam continuing her association in a reduced role as Clinical Consultant. Please join us in wishing Pam the very best as she pulls up stakes and heads off for adventures unknown. Although her career on Penikese Island may (for the large part) be over, her legacy as one of the school’s most memorable and influential people will endure for years to come!



Penikese Department of Education Program Review

Penikese has always claimed that it is an outstanding school, and now has the approbation to prove it!

In 2004, Penikese completed its Department of Education Program Review, passing with flying colors and earning several commendations in the process.

To oversee the review, Penikese enlisted the capable and energetic help of Administrative Assistant Dori Mebane to begin sorting and sifting through the mountainous regulations and ensuing paperwork. Eventually, Dori had over 500 documents on her computer, and the very night before was in the office making final preparations until the wee hours of the morning.

All the extra work and hustle paid off handsomely as the review went smoothly, impressing the DOE liaisons not just with the school's administrative organization and preparation, but with the substance and quality of the program as well.

Best of all, Penikese earned commendations for its innovative Vocational and Work program, the Communication Without Violence program, its efforts to establish therapeutic alliances with parents and student home pass monitoring, its exemplary Aftercare graduate transition program, the school library, and its health and safety policies and procedures.

This report is posted for public viewing on the DOE web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/psr/reports/default.html>.

"Since I have been the Out of District Coordinator at Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School, we have had 3 students at Penikese Island and all three made significant progress. One student left prematurely but the other two went on to complete high school and pursue higher education. All three students grew in maturity and self-awareness and described their stay at Penikese as a life changing experience. Professionally, I have enjoyed working with Penikese staff that are universally caring and committed. I would not hesitate to refer another student to this program."

— Lynn Carlson, School Psychologist and Out of District Coordinator, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School

AFTERCARE

Penikese Aftercare: Structured and Evolving

As this issue's lead article makes clear, transitional services will play an increasingly integral role in DSS' efforts to establish a broader continuum of care for children in its custody. The following information, excerpted from a report to the Clowes Fund of Indianapolis, Indiana and written by Development Director Patty Peal, illustrates that Penikese's Aftercare Program is not just about hanging out and having a slice of pizza, but a structured program, closely tied into Penikese's ongoing process of self assessment and evaluation.



1) What does the Aftercare Program entail?

Aftercare is an outreach program that maintains a relationship of guidance and support between staff and students during transitions back to home, school, work and peer environments, pre and post graduation. The program is designed to keep students and graduates from returning to old, destructive habits by providing a continuous and stable force in their still young lives. The world that our students came from did not change while they were on Penikese Island; but they did. If they are to stay on track Aftercare services must be maintained until their individual success is identifiable and measurable. Among the challenges and problems being addressed by Aftercare include:

- Easing transition from public assistance (DSS) to Penikese to "Real World" participation and self-sufficiency
- Establishing a reliable support system where family, foster or public resources may be lacking
- Reducing feelings of isolation and creating a sense of "I matter" to others
- Strengthening graduate Life-Skills and social development
- Continuing the "I am responsible for my own decisions" attitude learned at Penikese
- Deterring drifting, homelessness and substance abuse
- Offering a safe place (Penikese Island) to come back to for strength and renewal

2) What are staff roles and expectation in Aftercare?

All staff participate in some informal way, whether it is taking a phone call that comes in from a graduate or by volunteering to visit one during off-island time. The Aftercare Coordinator is responsible for keeping track of this informal arrangement and filling in the gaps with visits and calls to students.

A computer database of interactions with students and grads helps track and record individual student/graduate life status. Aftercare staff activities include:

- Assessing student/graduate's strengths and deficits in social skills in order to develop realistic and strengths-based discharge plans
- Maintaining constant phone contact
- Traveling to visit graduates in their own environments and offering individual problem assistance
- Guiding graduates to seek additional services if needed and recommending re-visit to the Island when appropriate
- Continuing Life-Skills education within real world demands and applications
- Maintaining contact with educators, employers, landlords and family
- Offering graduates representation and company at important life events

- Coordinating meetings with staff, student, family and professionals when necessary
- Recording graduate-school interaction for statistical analysis
- Measuring and analyzing graduate and program success through pre-selected criteria

3) How does Penikese measure and assess Aftercare's impact?

Measuring and assessing graduate success is a continual process taking place on several levels. For instance, staff on assignment in the community are in daily contact with the clinical team, relaying new information and checking in to ensure adherence to the treatment plan. All staff members participate in supervision and treatment planning sessions, twice monthly, to assess student/graduate progress, and when necessary, craft interventions.

The criteria for treatment progress—or success—vary from concrete measures such as relapse into old behaviors (acts of crime, going AWOL from programs, or substance use) or to more subtle but no less important indications of improvement in decision-making or length of time holding a job.

4) The Aftercare Database

Integral to Aftercare's structural evolution is the ongoing development of the Aftercare Database. Penikese is in the process of taking existing information on staff and student interactions and transforming it into dynamic and interrelated data fields that can be used to set up a custom computer program that can produce measurement



statistics for success. Good set-up and management of this information will facilitate frequent and timely updates and reporting, essential to any ongoing assessment process.

We are often asked for results measuring our impact, and many staff-hours are put into an annual compilation of data to manually retrieve student/grad-



uate status. The creation of a custom Aftercare database will keep database administrative tasks to a reasonable level and increase capacity to develop result reporting. If used to its full potential, Penikese will be able to use information to assess overall treatment model effectiveness, identify which elements are key to its success, and indicate whatever revisions or improvements are necessary to strengthen the school.

For more information about development trends and projects in Aftercare, contact Kerri O'Malley (pictured above, left), Director of Programs at komalley@penikese.org.

Tidings
is available on-line

Past issues of *Tidings* are available on-line at Penikese's web site, <www.penikese.org>. You will find all of Penikese's recent publications archived in the Almanac section ready to download using Adobe Acrobat Reader. If you don't have Acrobat, our site provides a link to download the software right on the same page - one stop shopping for our valued customers and friends!

BACK ISSUES WITH THEIR LEAD ARTICLES:

- Fall 2004: "Calling Penikese" – A Guide to Finding Services For Your Child In Need
- Summer 2004: "Touch and Go" — *Buying Time to Gain Relationship Traction*
- Fall 2003: "Can You hear Me Now?" — *Tips on Maintaining the Therapeutic Relationship*
- Spring 2003: "Emotional Nearsightedness" — *Tips on Helping Students Better Recognize Social and Emotional Cues*
- Fall 2002: "Core Themes and Communication" — *Understanding the Basic Motivations of Problematic Behavior*

ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ARE THE FOLLOWING PENIKESE ISLAND SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORTS:

- FY 2004 *Full Ahead* (which includes a spotlight on Penikese's island staff and a brief article on Success)
- FY 2003 *Over the Bar* (which celebrates Penikese's 30th anniversary and includes the lengthy Clinical Spotlight "Working With Choices.")
- FY 2002 *Gaining Stride*



PENIKESE ISLAND SCHOOL STAFF

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- James Burraston, Special Education Instructor
- Abigail Chapman, Shift Leader
- Corey Clark, Island Staff and Direct Care
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- David Dersham, Island Staff and Direct Care
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- Michelle Bosch: Page 6 (bottom right, of Pam)
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- Ed Stimpson: Page 11 (the two bottom on left and the top right)

TIDINGS

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All it Takes is.... PEOPLE!

Pictured on this page are some of the people who help to make our fundraising efforts a success. It would be impossible to picture all of the people who help us along our way.



It takes 8 committees, 22 employees, 25 Foundations, 50 volunteers, and 995 individual donations to advance our mission from year to year; all people who believe in helping their fellow man (in our case teenagers about to become men).

The envelope provided in this newsletter is your opportunity to volunteer and become one of the people who makes Penikese Island School stand out as a leader in treatment and education for At-Risk-Youth. Your compassion and support goes a long way.



Fundraising makes it possible for us to maintain our high level of commitment to the students, graduates, families and staff of Penikese Island School. Every Program is supported in some way by fundraising. Below are a few examples of how Penikese uses grants and donations to further our message, mission and commitment.



For information about Penikese's development program, contact Patty Peal (pictured in the top right photo with Penikese Board Chair, Fred Greenman) at ppeal@penikese.org or 508-548-7276, x207.



The Penikese Island School is a non-profit organization created to educate and rehabilitate troubled teenage boys in a remote family setting, preparing them for law-abiding and productive lives with the help of graduate Aftercare, and to share our experience and resources with the community at large.

Island Education Program Full staffing for a ratio of 2 to 1, student to staff

Island Literacy Program Paperbacks to feed new reading appetites

Mainland Aftercare Program Student and Graduate transitional outreach

Island Behavioral Program Students learn Life skills and earn allowances

Clinical Rehabilitation Program Communication Without Violence Group Therapy

Community Services Program Consultations and Trainings to concerned groups

Career Development Updated Tools for safe, hands-on work opportunities

Staff Recruitment Benefits that attract and keep hardworking, able staff

Island Stewardship Tours on history of the Island and role of our School

Facilities & Equipment Boat maintenance for transportation to/from the island

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Penikese maintains a firm policy in favor of equal employment opportunity. Qualified applicants for employment and all employees will receive fair and equal treatment regardless of race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, veteran status, sexual orientation, or disability. This policy covers all employment activities in areas such as recruiting, hiring, placement, promotion, training, compensation, benefits administration, discipline, layoff, and termination.

An Invitation to Visit...



REMAINING SUMMER
2005 VISITORS' TRIPS:

August 21
September 18

To reserve your spot,
contact Patty Peal at
508.548.7276, x207,
or e-mail: ppeal@penikese.org.