

**AGENCY OF EDUCATION**

**Barre, Vermont**

**TEAM:** School Finance

**ITEM:** Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of tutorial approval to Mountainside House in Ludlow, VT, to serve a maximum of twelve male and female youth, 13-18 years of age, who are in need of crisis stabilization?

**ACTING SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of tutorial approval to Mountainside House in Ludlow, VT, to serve a maximum of twelve male and female youth, 13-18 years of age, who are in need of crisis stabilization. This approval is for a two-year term through June 30, 2020.

That the tutorial program reports within five days to the Agency of Education whenever changes occur in the program's policies, facilities, staffing, and administration, during the period of approval.

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 16 V.S.A. § 11 & § 828  
State Board Rule 2230

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

1. A tutorial program means education provided to a pupil who is placed in a short-term program that is not administered by a school district. The purposes of the program is to provide evaluation and/or treatment. This does not include home based tutorials, programs operated by a public school or collaborative, or a program of an independent school that has been approved under 16 V.S.A. §166. The average length of stay for students in a tutorial program shall be not more than six months.
2. The State Board of Education shall approve a tutorial program if it complies with the Board's rules for tutorial programs, promulgated as Series 2230 (State Board Rules for Tutorial Programs). A school district shall not pay the tuition of a pupil except to a public or independent school or tutorial program approved by the State Board.
3. Mountainside House is seeking tutorial program renewal.
4. On behalf of the Secretary, Pat Pallas Gray and Ernie Wheeler visited the tutorial on November 10, 2017.
5. Mountainside House serves both male and female youth, ages 13-18, in the tutorial program.

## Mountainside House Tutorial Review Report

Mountainside House Tutorial Program is a required part of the residential crisis stabilization and emergency shelter operated by Windsor County Youth Service (WCYS). The tutorial program operates year-round, providing a minimum of 25 hours per week of age-appropriate instruction, which is coordinated with the participant's responsible school district. Potential residents are required to sign an agreement to take part in both the treatment and the educational components before admission to the program. Treatment is provided for crisis stabilization through individual, family and group counseling.

Mountainside House is licensed by the Department for Children and Families (DCF) as a Residential Treatment Program for a maximum of six (6) male youth 13-18 years of age and for a maximum of six (6) female youth 13-18 years of age. The average length of stay in the shelter program is two to three weeks. DCF also licenses Mountainside House for an Independent Living Apartment for two (2) male youths 16 up to 22 years of age, and an independent living apartment for two (2) female youths 16 up to 22 years of age. The Independent Living Program generally serves an older, voluntary population and the length of stay is significantly longer, up to 18 months.

The non-profit Windsor County Youth Service (WCYS) was founded by Viola Wynne in October of 1993, after personally seeing many dislocated youth without basic shelter. Ms. Wynne set forth on creating shelters with the goal of providing a place for youth who had nowhere else to go with supportive programs within them. WCYS is governed by a six-member board of directors. The mission of the board is to explore, develop and implement crisis prevention and early intervention programs for youth as well as to promote awareness of new and existing resources for healthier lifestyles and decision-making for youth and their families. WCYS provides trauma informed care through family reunification, psychotherapy, trauma informed activities, therapeutic drumming, and horticulture/therapeutic farming. An Executive Director is responsible for overseeing Mountainside House. Each one of the two shelter sites has a program coordinator and a case manager. A doctorate level licensed social worker is available to provide mental health screenings, comprehensive evaluations, psychotherapy for youth, as well as overseeing treatment plans for all residents.

WCYS owns two buildings. The Mountainside House Tutorial Program's classroom and common area is located in a large, three-story, traditional wood-framed house on a dead end street in an older residential neighborhood in Ludlow. The residential living space for the male students is also in this building. Another large, wood-framed house in the Village of Proctorville provides residential living space for the female students. Both houses have "hard-wired" sprinkler systems throughout, which are inspected annually. The heating systems in both buildings are inspected annually. Both facilities meet state and federal health and safety regulations, and are adequate to meet the needs of the tutorial program participants. On file at the AOE is a copy of the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) issued by the Division of Fire Safety for the two facilities.

Mountainside House requires all youth under the age of 16 to enroll in a public school, even if they have not been attending school for quite some time. Mountainside House immediately

contacts the last public school the youth attended to receive pertinent educational information. Those youth under the age of 16 at Mountainside House work on curriculum provided by the Educational Coordinator until the sending school provides assignments, and this curriculum is designed to earn the youth academic credit in his/her school. Some youth at Mountainside House have chosen to continue their education at Black River High School or Springfield High School. In the summer, the youth go on field trips for community enrichment activities and learn/work on life skills with the Education Coordinator. The youth in DCF custody come from various counties throughout Vermont. Those youth not in DCF custody come from Windsor County. Youth can self-refer, be referred by Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont (HCRS), schools, police, or mental health professionals.

Mountainside House Tutorial Program is staffed by an Educational Coordinator and a support staff member. The Education Coordinator started working at Mountainside House in January of 2002, and is qualified to teach in the core subject areas—English, math, social studies, and science. The Education Coordinator is also a VT licensed special educator. The tutorial staff works in collaboration with the two program directors, case managers, and residential staff to provide a continuum of services for the youth through their stay at Mountainside House. All the staff at Mountainside House hold CPR and first aid certification, have received de-escalation trauma informed training, and are restraint trained. There never has been a need for a restraint at Mountainside House. On the day of the visit there were four (4) male youth and five (5) female youth at Mountainside House.

Mountainside House Tutorial Program implements policies and procedures around confidentiality and the maintenance of educational records. The tutorial maintains a register of daily attendance for each student and reports the attendance to the responsible school district. There are policies and procedures in place to maintain a safe environment, and these are discussed in the everyday “group” sessions, which are led by the 3-11:00 staff overseen by the clinical supervisors. Fire drills are regularly scheduled and conducted at random times either during the day, in the evening, or during the night.

Mountainside House provided a copy of its independent auditor’s report from Wisehart, Wimette & Associates for the year ending June 30, 2017; and a profit & loss statement detailing income and expenses for July 2017 through March 2018. As with all residential treatment programs licensed by DCF, Mountainside House has its rate set for room and board, residential treatment, and education set through the Private Non-Medical Institution (PNMI) process at the Agency of Human Services.

Mountainside House Tutorial Program was visited on behalf of the Secretary of Education by Pat Pallas Gray and Ernest Wheeler on November 10, 2017.

# Tutorial Program Special Education Review Report

**REPORT**

November 9,  
2017

Mountainside House

Submitted by  
Special Education Review Team



## **Approval Recommendation**

Two year special education approval in all disability categories is recommended. In addition, Mountainside House is lauded for its attention to detailed record keeping and correspondence with Local Education Agencies (LEAs). These efforts ensure students receive current classroom work and are provided credit within their LEAs for schoolwork completed while in temporary attendance at the Mountainside House program.

## **Rationale**

Based on the rules for Special Education Approval, Mountainside House adequately met expectations because they have been appropriately providing tutorial services students with disabilities. The Agency finds that policies and procedures implemented by the Mountainside House tutorial program enable students to remain in good academic standing with their LEAs despite experiencing various degrees of personal trauma.

## **School Description**

Mountainside House is seeking re-approval for all areas of disabilities. The students receive strong evidence-based services from appropriately trained staff, either directly from a full-time, licensed special educator or an educational assistant, under the supervision of the licensed special educator.

## **Review Description**

Mountainside House, located in Ludlow, Vermont, was visited by Agency of Education staff on 11/9/2017. During the visit, the Agency employee interviewed staff, toured facilities, observed staff/student interactions and reviewed student files and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities. Comprehensive file reviews were conducted for all five Vermont students with disabilities currently attending the tutorial program. The student files reviewed qualified for special education services under the disability categories of emotional disturbance (4), and specific learning disability (1). All student files were found to have up to date annual reviews for their IEPs and triennial reviews for special education eligibility.

## **Review Findings**

2230.3.1 – Mountainside House provided evidence that the instruction methods of instruction are age and ability level appropriate to the students with a disability currently in attendance at the program and are coordinated with the student’s responsible LEA.

2230.3.2 – Mountainside House has sufficient facilities and materials or access to other facilities and materials as necessary to provide an appropriate education.

2230.3.3 – Mountainside House facilities and operation comply with local, state and federal requirements pertaining to the health and safety of students.

2230.3.4 – Mountainside House employs an adequate number of professional staff for the population served and these staff members are qualified by training and experience in the areas in which they are assigned.

2230.3.5 – Mountainside House teachers providing or supervising the provision of special education have licensure and endorsement as would be required for the equivalent work in a Vermont public school.

2230.3.6 – Mountainside House professional staff has relevant experience and/or training in the duties to which they are assigned.

2230.3.7 Mountainside House maintains a register of the daily attendance of each of its pupils and reports this attendance to the responsible LEA of the student.

2230.3.8 Mountainside House maintains an operating schedule that includes instruction for no less than 10 hours per week unless inconsistent with medical and/or educational recommendations, The operating schedule is sufficient enough to ensure that the instructional services address the individual needs of the students with disabilities and are consistent with the student’s IEP.

2230.3.9 Mountainside House has the financial capacity to carry out its educational purposes for the period of approval.

2230.3.10 Mountainside House coordinates educational services with the responsible LEA, including documentation for the purpose of obtaining high school credit for coursework completed. Mountainside House also coordinates, where appropriate, with other responsible agencies, such as the Department for Children and Families, Community Mental health Centers, and Family Parent Child Centers.

### **Note on Evidence**

Based on a review of five IEPs, school documentation of schedules, staffing, and contract services, the following recommendation is offered.

The AOE recommends that the following be corrected through the IEP process:

- A. Any student that remains in the tutorial program for more than ten (10) school days must have an IEP that reflects the change of placement to the tutorial program. As the average stay for most students in the tutorial program is 2-3 weeks, AOE is aware that this recommendation would not be appropriate for all students.

**Questions:** Contact Ernest Wheeler at [ernest.wheeler@vermont.gov](mailto:ernest.wheeler@vermont.gov)

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:** none

**STAFF AVAILABLE:**

Cassandra Ryan, Fiscal and Regulatory Compliance Coordinator