

School Helps Teens Reach New Horizons

Traci Goll and the team at Horizon High School help teens recovering from drug and alcohol addictions achieve success By Kim Dearth

For many young people, high school is a time of never-ending challenges. From academics to peer pressure to just trying to fit in, even the most self-confident, well-adjusted teen may feel overwhelmed.

But what about those teens who have already been overwhelmed by a drug or alcohol addiction? For teenagers like this, just getting out of bed in the morning can be a struggle, while going to school and eventually graduating can seem like an impossible goal.

Enter Horizon High School. This small, private, non-profit recovery school located at Neighborhood House, 29 S. Mills St. in Madison is a haven for kids who have undergone alcohol or drug rehabilitation. Teens who haven't responded to a traditional school setting are also welcome. And Traci Goll, Horizon's director, is an integral part of a team that includes an educator, a counselor and many volunteers who help these teens make achievement a reality.

A non-traditional school with traditional goals

The idea for Horizon High School began in March 2004, when current board member and addiction expert Shelly Dutch met with several educators and parents of addicted teens. These kids were in and out of school and in and out of treatment centers. The group struggled with how to break the cycle, and a recovery school was born.

The first students entered the school in January 2005, with the first graduating class of six donning cap and gown in June, five months later. To become a student, a teen must have completed Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) treatment or currently be in an AODA program and have been drug and/or alcohol-free for at least 30 days. Students must submit to a witnessed urine drug test within 10 days of entering the school and will undergo random urine tests on a weekly basis throughout the school year. In addition, students must sign a pledge to remain alcohol/drug free and be honest about it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, students must *want* to come to Horizon; no students will be accepted if they have been coerced by the court, their families, or another outside influence.

Currently, there are six students at Horizon and a staff consisting of half-time director Goll, half-time counselor Tim Bautch, and half-time certified teacher Ketrick Lehmann. All three play an active role in the students' learning experience.

While the academics at Horizon adhere to Wisconsin's academic standards, the teaching methods are anything but ordinary.

"The curriculum is all student-centered," explains Goll. "The kids come up with the topics they want to learn about, and interest groups are developed around those ideas. All interest groups, which last about four to six



Traci Goll, Horizon High School's director, makes sure students learn vital life skills as well as academics.

weeks, are interdisciplinary and touch on a wide range of necessary academics. For example, the kids wanted to learn about the Holocaust, so we devised an interest group on that subject that utilized geography, history, English, math, creative writing and poetry.

"The kids are learning the same things they would in a traditional school, but in a different way. And since they pick the topics, they are incredibly excited and enthused."

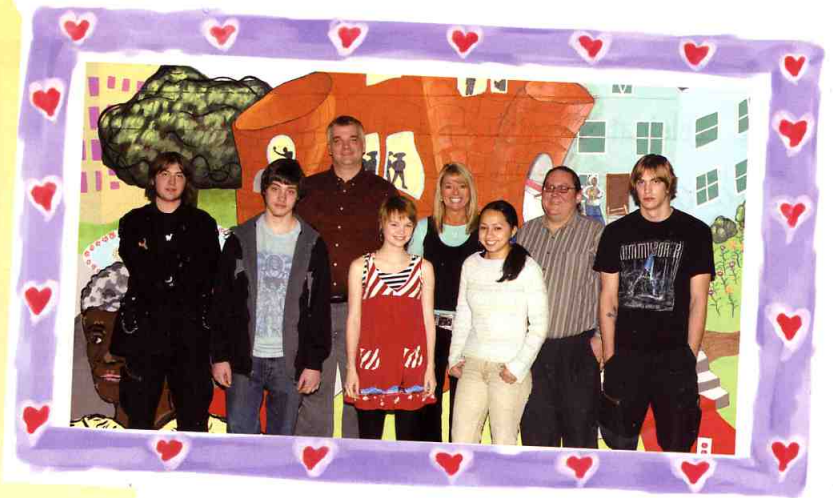
While Lehmann provides most of the teaching, volunteers from the community also donate their time and expertise. "The University donated human brains for us to dissect, enough so that each student had one," says Goll with amazement. "Most schools are lucky to be able to get sheep brains for dissection. We also had someone come in to talk to the students who brought actual stem cells.

"In addition to volunteers who help with interest groups, we have a volunteer who comes in every Friday to teach math. We have kids who are at all different skill levels — one is just learning beginning algebra while another is on advanced trigonometry — and our volunteer can address all these levels."

Ongoing recovery

While academics are vital, ongoing support in each teen's recovery effort is just as important.

"Every day the kids meet with Tim for 'group,'" explains Goll. "In group they talk about all their problems — a lot comes out. Tim has long hair, tattoos — the kids really feel like they can relate to him. Everything talked about stays private; Ketrick and I aren't allowed in there. This is a really important part of their day."



Students at Horizon are educated and inspired by teacher Ketrick Lehmann, Goll and counselor Tim Bautch (back row).

Bautch says Horizon's environment is crucial to keeping kids on track in their recovery. "In a small school like ours kids can't fall through the cracks," he notes. "If kids are using in a big school, they can kind of sink into the woodwork and not be noticed. At Horizon there is such a personal relationship and we develop such trust between the kids and the staff — it makes them accountable, and they're more likely to come to us when they do have doubts about whether they can continue staying drug- or alcohol-free. One of the big things we really bring is the human relationship, the positive connection between these kids and trusted adults."

Teaching at Horizon is project-based, and the kids learn not only academics but how to apply what they learn to life in the real world. For example, each day begins with current events; the students all read the newspaper then report to each other about articles that interest them. They also take a life skills class with Goll, which addresses

everything from banking to finding an apartment, looking for a job and cooking. Goll says while some of these topics may seem basic, they teach skills that many of the students have never been exposed to.

"For example, we cook every Friday," says Goll. "The kids come up with a menu and are given a budget, then we go to the grocery store and shop. I know it sounds so simple but many of these kids are so scared and beaten down. They have such low self-esteem, and to be able to do these types of things on their own really gives them confidence."

Goll makes sure the kids get out to take part in a variety of experiences. They've visited MATC, toured radio stations and done a variety of volunteer work, including ringing Salvation Army bells during the holidays at Hilldale, answering phones for radio station WORT's fund drive and assisting at a Red Cross blood drive. Goll also has

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es Goll. "We only pay \$5 per hour for the kids to work out. They can do anything, from racquetball to swimming to weight training. The students love it. One of our students had never learned to ride a bike, so we're working on that."

The job of a lifetime

When Horizon started, Goll was working at UW-Madison, teaching and supervising student teachers. A woman she knew at the university approached her about a possible job opening at Horizon High School; her son attended, and the woman felt Goll would be perfect for the job.

"Horizon has helped me get along with my parents, get me off dope, and has given me a better outlook on life."

ANDREW, ON THE IMPACT
HORIZON HIGH SCHOOL HAS HAD ON HIS LIFE.

It was the toughest job interview of my life," Goll remembers. "The kids interviewed me! Talk about being drilled — they asked me about anything and everything. But they were amazing. That's the thing about these kids — they give back much more than I give them."

Goll taught for 17 years prior to coming to Horizon, working in various special education/special needs environments. "I've always worked with kids who are experiencing special challenges — I'm really drawn to them."

Goll feels she has truly found her calling. But with children of her own (daughter Cassidi, 11, and son Noah, 8), how does she deal with the challenges of both her job and her own family day after day? "A sense of humor is the biggest positive way I cope and help the kids learn to cope as well," she says. "For example, one day we went to the Union and I jumped onto a Dance Revolution game and was just being goofy. They all laughed at me. But one by one, after checking to make sure no one was watching, they all tried it too. Some of these kids are so afraid to do

always tell the kids, 'healthy mind, healthy body, healthy person.'"

Finally, her calm, composed demeanor sets an example to the students of how to hold it together during challenging times. "I had to go to court with a student to get a restraining order against her boyfriend. We had to go three separate times and she, understandably, was really scared. But I'm so

own to school, do their best, go to their after-school jobs, and don't drink or do drugs is a success story," she stresses. "If they stay drug and alcohol free, they'll each have a great future." ☀

For more information about Horizon High School, contact Traci Goll at (608) 442-0935.