

Residential Education: A Topic for Consideration in Alternative Education.

By Ray Morley

CORE (Coalition for Residential Education) founded in 1994 has a mission which has many implications for education-the education of our most challenged children. CORE is centered at the following address: 888 16th St. NW, Ste. 300, Washington, DC 20006 www.residentialeducation.org.

Mission: Promote residential education for youth whose homes or communities cannot meet their needs, and to strengthen both individual programs and the field of residential education.

To accomplish its mission, CORE is:

Enhancing and sharing professional practices and standards by running an association of residential education programs.

Leading a national advocacy movement to develop policies supportive of residential education programs.

Increasing public awareness of this educational alternative.

Stimulating and assisting the development of new residential education programs and children's homes across the country.

Residential Education Definition:

Residential education is the umbrella term for community-like environments where youth both live and learn, outside their own family homes. Whether called a boarding school, preparatory academy, children's home, youth village, or residential charter school, all share a common mission—to provide safety, nurturing, structure, and stability (ideally two years or more) in an education-focused setting. Residential education programs strive to maintain family connections whenever possible. Long recognized as desirable for youth from wealthy homes, residential education programs can effectively serve children and youth from disadvantaged, neglectful, or abusive homes and neighborhoods as well.

Why residential education?

Homelessness and unstable families exist across America. The clear point is that recent studies confirm that the number of persons experiencing homelessness is very large across the United States. Source: American Homelessness, 3rd edition , 2001. Studies in Iowa confirm homelessness in all counties and runaway youth on our streets and living in unstable conditions. Source: Nowhere to Grow, Les Whitbeck and Dan Hoyte, 1999 to present ongoing studies in the Midwest. Some alternative schools in Iowa have reported numbers of homeless making up over 20% of the population in the school.

A special study of middle school children in Iowa indicates that more than four thousand young adolescents are in need of an alternative stable housing situation in order to improve school performance. Source: Alternative Residence Needs Assessment for Middle/Junior High School Students, John R. Grubb and Zelda Grubb Foundation, 2001-2002.

The estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States is \$94 billion per year. Source: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2001. Iowa has child abuse and neglect at all age levels.

Existing options are not meeting the needs of all youth. Foster care is experiencing a decrease in available foster care homes and a huge increase in children needing care. Iowa has passed legislation to create children's centers but has not developed guidelines to help establish the centers. Source: Senate File 275, Iowa Code (1999).

Residential education is approximately half the cost of residential treatment centers, where many of these youth will end up because an "Out-of-home" placement is needed. Treatment centers normally limit stays to six months or less and focus primarily on children's problems, rather than their futures. A long-term focus on education is lacking.

The No Child Left Behind Legislation at the federal level establishes a vision for everyone to consider---that no child be left behind. However, the reality is that children are being left behind. We have strong initiatives in Iowa to assist schools and teachers to be exemplary in education. However, we lack long-term stable living environments for thousands of children and youth who require stability to perform better in school.

Starting a Program:

The CORE center has a list of residential programs that remain members of the organization. The programs can be accessed on the web at the address given above. Members can be contacted for information on how they started. As well, the organization has members who will consult with you to develop a program. The members have expertise in models and up-to-date information on many effective practices in residential education.