

## **Healing with Care and Professionalism NATSAP Sets the Standard for Quality Care**

The world of children and adolescents is growing increasingly complex. Drugs, pornography, divorce, dysfunctional family patterns, bio-psychiatric issues, learning differences, shifting values, and other factors add to the complexity of a child's landscape of everyday life. While outpatient and community-based interventions are invaluable in bringing about significant, positive change, in some cases these interventions are not sufficiently effective in reversing a child's path towards progressively maladaptive behavior. NATSAP is a leader in setting the standards for caregivers providing high quality, professional care for those children and families where less intense interventions were proven ineffective.

Q. With the growth of out of home placement settings, what is NATSAP doing to protect consumers from the potential inexperience of eager entrepreneurs entering the profession?

A. The majority of NATSAP programs that have achieved full membership have been in operation for two years, have provided evidence they are licensed or accredited by a national or regional accrediting agency and are in full compliance with the NATSAP standards. The small number of programs with full membership that are not licensed or accredited have been reviewed by a NATSAP Committee to obtain that status. New programs are allowed to join as provisional or associate members until they meet the criteria for full membership, thus providing the information and support to establish their program based on the NATSAP ethics, standards and philosophy.

NATSAP was recently successful in promoting legislation in the State of Utah requiring active owner/operators to demonstrate specific levels of experience and education as an ongoing licensing requirement. The legislation also requires minimum levels of training and experience for other supervisory staff. NATSAP is advocating for similar standards to be incorporated in all states. Additionally, NATSAP requires ongoing staff training of all staff of each program or school belonging to the organization.

Q. How does NATSAP educate member schools and programs about abusive practices?

A. All employees of NATSAP programs train staff about abuse/neglect issues and ensure that all staff personally sign "State Codes of Conduct", where available, that define abuse/neglect concerns, including institutional neglect, as well as the reporting responsibilities of each staff member.

Each year, NATSAP organizes regional conferences that augment a national conference where workshops, research papers, open forums, and keynote addresses focus on care issues. Regional conferences are offered at heavily reduced rates to allow a large number of direct care staff to attend where they can meet with peers,

regulators and professional experts to learn the most effective and safe strategies to support client change. NATSAP emphasizes a collegial exchange of information by prohibiting competitive marketing efforts such as the use of booths, program specific self promotion in presentations, and the encouragement of healthy sharing through a member website, a professional journal, and newsletters.

- Q. What is NATSAP's position in relation to interventions that involve practices such as the use of harsh and demeaning language, group confrontations, or staff confrontations designed to intimidate or "shame" a client into compliance?
- A. NATSAP demands that every member program adhere to a Code of Ethical Principles, as well as Practice Standards that prohibit emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of any client, family member, or employee. A major goal of NATSAP is to ensure quality care, while at the same time, providing support to regulatory bodies to eradicate the presence of substandard programs nationwide
- Q. What, if anything, do NATSAP Schools and Programs do to avoid "taking advantage" of consumers?
- A. NATSAP programs are aware that parents who use our schools and programs are particularly vulnerable to abuse and questionable practices. In order to protect parents we endorse ethical and practice principles that specifically insist on honesty and openness in marketing. In order to be a member of NATSAP a program must be licensed by an appropriate state regulatory agency when such licensure is available, or accredited by a national or regional accrediting agency. Also, NATSAP standards do not allow payments or "kickbacks" to referring professionals for client referrals.

NATSAP Programs and Schools encourage parents and referral sources to visit campuses or sites where youth are served before placement decisions are made. They want decision makers to see alternatives and make informed decisions. All NATSAP programs and schools provide open access to enrolled clients for the purpose of assessing the quality and safety of each setting

NATSAP programs must provide each participant and their family with a statement that clearly specifies student rights and grievance procedures. The participant rights statement describes access and any restrictions concerning communication with families.

Every NATSAP program must also have a clear process for a participant or parent to register a complaint concerning participant care or program practice. If the complaint cannot be resolved between the consumer and program it may be referred to the NATSAP Ethics Committee for review. The Ethics Committee will work with the program and complainant to attempt resolution of the complaint. Failure to respond to complaints or resolve ethical or practice issues can result in referral to regulatory agencies, sanctions, or removal of a program from membership in NATSAP.

Q. Do the schools and programs that belong to NATSAP provide any research related to the effectiveness of out of home treatment?

A. A majority of member schools and programs have conducted their own assessments of outcome with surveys and studies. The Outdoor Behavior Industry Council (OBHIC) (the majority of whom are NATSAP members) has pioneered a program of independent research assessment of program impact and effectiveness. These research results have been published in several scholarly journals ([www.obhic.com/research](http://www.obhic.com/research))

Beginning in 2005, NATSAP began to require more demographic data from members as part of the membership application and renewal process. In 2006, the Board of Directors of NATSAP launched the *Journal of Therapeutic Schools and Programs* to provide a forum for scholarly articles and research concerning residential care. The Board of NATSAP has also called for several "Research Summits" in 2006 in order to determine how best to support organization wide research related to out of home care.

Another large outcome research project, involving more than 10 NATSAP programs, is in its third year of data collection and analysis. Over one thousand former clients of out of home treatment settings are participating. NATSAP looks forward to supporting more research that is increasingly sophisticated and can be used to improve care for program participants and their families.