

# **Site Review**

## **Renewal - Tutorial**

### **Independent School Review Report**

#### **Mountainside House Tutorial**

#### **General Education**

**Site Review Conducted – March 30, 2022**

Submitted by Independent School Review Team:

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## **Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose**

Mountainside House is an approved tutorial with locations in Ludlow and Proctorsville, Vermont. This report will address Mountainside House's renewal for youth who require short term crisis stabilization and emergency housing. This report does not include a review of the residential portion of Mountainside House's approved tutorial at Proctorsville and Ludlow. Residential dorms and programming are under legal authority of the Department of Children and Families and the Agency of Human Services. The Agency of Education is solely responsible with review of the academic/tutorial portion of the program.

## **General Education**

The AOE's independent school review team met with Mountainside House's executive director, education director, and an assistant to the education director on March 30, 2022 at the tutorial's location at 6 Mill Street in Ludlow, Vermont.

## **Tutorial Context**

A tutorial program means that education is provided to a pupil placed in a short-term program that is not administered by a school district. "The purpose of the program is to provide evaluation and/or treatment and to mitigate learning loss during the duration of a student's stay for assessment and placement in an appropriate program. This does not include home based tutorials, programs operated by a public school or an independent school that has been approved under 16 V.S.A. §166. The average length of stay for students in a tutorial program is generally three to six months that may be extended, by the Department for Children and Families, for up to nine or more months, depending upon treatment and placement considerations of each child." (State Board Rule Series 2200)

The executive director of Mountainside House has managed the tutorial's program successfully for the past twenty-five years. The current education director has worked for the tutorial for the past twenty years and established meaningful, productive, and collaborative relationships with placing entities: LEAs, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Mental Health. The assistant to the education director has provided effective educational and behavioral supports for students for the past four years.

## **Educational Objectives**

*State Board of Education Rule 2225.2, 2225.5*

As stated in the application, "the goal of the tutorial program is to best meet the individual needs of the residents of Mountainside House.... In most cases, this means helping those students to stay current with their assignments from their sending schools. For others, it may mean working towards obtaining their G.E.D., or acquiring skills that will be useful in the world of work."

“One of our objectives is to establish and maintain contact with each resident’s sending school to ensure as seamless a transition as possible-both, from their school to Windsor County Youth Services (WCYS).” Mountainside House staff work to support and assist DCF or the Department of Mental Health to ensure, when appropriate, [youth] are ready to return to sending schools. Mountainside House’s tutorial services focus on meeting the individual educational needs of each learner “while also meeting the health and safety needs of the residents, as a whole.” (Source: *Mountainside House Licensing Application, Rule 2230.2.1*)

## **Enrollment**

16 V.S.A. §828, State Board of Education Vermont Rule 2230.2.1,

Mountainside House tutorial’s population includes youths in seventh through twelfth grades who may reside in either the tutorial’s residential dorms or may be living at Windsor County Youth Services’ residential facility.

The non-profit Windsor County Youth Service (WCYS) was founded by Viola Wynne in October of 1993 after personally seeing many dislocated youths 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.

Many of Mountainside House’s youth are in the custody of the Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF); however, youth may also be publicly placed by an LEA student’s supervisory union/district team. Additionally, youth may self-refer, be referred to Mountainside House by Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) or individual mental health professionals, or brought to the program by local law enforcement agencies. It is important to note that due to COVID-19 Mountainside House’s approved shelter program has been temporarily closed due to lack of staff available to provide required student supervision. The shelter intends to reopen once staff shortages and pandemic driven health and safety requirements have abated.

Occasionally, Mountainside House students are homeless/runaway youths from other states who are taken into custody and remain in temporary DCF custody while waiting to be returned to their home state.

Mountainside House currently has appropriate number of staff and sufficient facilities to ensure the safety of all youth placed in the tutorial. The executive director of Mountainside House reports that students, “over the course of a year, is usually evenly split according to gender.” The tutorial is currently approved to serve a maximum of twelve residents; however, the Department of Children and Families—the facility’s licensing authority—has temporarily reduced capacity to six beds due to staffing shortages and pandemic pressures.

## **Governance**

State Board of Education Rule 2230.1

Windsor County Youth Services (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 as part of WCYS's educational objectives.

### **Tutorial Course of Study & Required Assessments**

16 V.S.A. §166(b), State Board of Education Rule 2230.2.1,

Tutorial program administrators and teaching staff have worked to develop evidence-based, best practice instruction methods for high needs students in concert with implementing any LEA required curricula forwarded to program teaching staff. Mountainside House's program "is in session for ten months out of the year, from the beginning of September until the end of June."

After enrollment, the education director administers reading and math assessments to identify each youth's grade level academic skills. Youth participate in core instruction from 9:00 – 11:00, and 1:00 – 3:00 daily for a total of twenty-five hours, per week. Physical education classes are held daily from 11:00 – 11:30. Ample time is provided for students to access individualized academic supports to ensure assignment completion or receive special education services, as required.

Students engage in a six-week summer program for additional core academic instruction. Two days a week youth may engage in social-emotional, therapeutic, and high interest activities such as historical field trips, gardening, hands-on projects, or outdoor sporting activities.

Evidence-based curriculum and assessments are supported by Mountainside House's educational director and assistant to the director to ensure youth access individualized student programming. Additionally, instructional staff are trained to ensure successful adaptations to curriculum that integrates trauma informed support programming. Mountainside House's application states:

"These methods include direct instruction, team teaching, cooperative learning, guided independent study, demonstration/performance, discussion, and the use of graphic organizers and tactile objects. The tutorial program staff uses the method suggested by the sending school. If no method is suggested by the sending school, the tutorial staff decides on a method based on the size of the group, the length of the lesson, the subject itself, and the individual learning style of the student."

Adaptations include alternate setting (for testing or classwork), alternate schedule, part-time or full-time one-on-one instruction, use of graphic organizers or tactile objects, preferential seating, and an alternate curriculum. Evaluation and assessment strategies are the responsibility of the placing entity and LEA of residence. Mountainside House staff utilize individual learning plans and best practices to ensure students access educational opportunities in core instruction and specialized instruction services, as required by IEPs or 504 Plans. As included in the renewal application, Mountainside House "uses two different assessments for incoming residents. One is a Reading-Level indicator created by American Guidance Service. It is

designed to quickly provide a reading grade-level. The other assessment is the *Shaw-Hiehle Test of Computation Skills* – 60 items covering whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and percent. These assessments provide the tutorial staff with a basic idea of an individual’s math and reading skills, even if contact with a sending school is not possible.”

Supportive technology is available for students to access Google classroom to receive assignment directions and submit completed assignments to their sending LEAs.

AOE representatives verified that Mountainside House’s youth records and electronic filing system meets State and Federal confidentiality requirement standards. Client Education records and other related documentation are kept in a secure, locked cabinet. Youth files are digitized and shared with LEAs using confidential file-share platforms approved by DCF and DMH. Youth files are well organized and thorough and include relevant information on academic progress, DCF required services, immunization records and behavioral data. Furthermore, attendance records are included in each youth’s file and completed by program staff daily.

Youth referrals are processed by Mountainside House’s designated in-take program director. Once the admissions process is complete, the education director forwards referral packets to the LEA of residence. Included in the referral packet is an Agreement to Services form requiring a signature from a parent, guardian, or custodial adult to grant staff access to pertinent student files and information such as IEPs, recent comprehensive evaluation, and medical history. Additionally, all consent forms, permission slips, and initial admission or in-take paperwork are included in the secure primary student file.

Mountainside House’s education director meets regularly with each student’s LEA to review student academic and behavioral progress. Adjustments to both educational and behavioral interventions are made in collaboration with LEAs or DCF case managers, as needed.

Youth attending Mountainside House with either individualized education plans (IEPs) or 504 Plans receive push-in specialized instruction from the LEA of residence. Mountainside House’s educational support staff follow service delivery plans to ensure all students access learning opportunities while either in the short-term residential program or as a day student residing off campus at a DCF run facility.

The tutorial’s staff begin student transition process planning, implementation, and coordination of services as required under the placement directions of an LEA or DCF case manager. Each student’s treatment team—composed of case workers, placing educational entity, Mountainside House executive director, education program director, and assistant to program director—monitors student progress towards transition dates. Individualized youth academic progress, behavioral plans, and evaluations inform each phase of a youth’s tutorial stay and transition. Some Mountainside House youth must wait for DCF to procure an appropriate residential placement resulting in an extended placement due to availability.

## **Professional Staff**

### *State Board of Education Rule 2230.3.4*

Mountainside House Tutorial staff is qualified by education and training. Office staff and one-on-one support staff are properly trained to work with students that come from trauma informed backgrounds or are in DCF custody. The education director collaborates with

academic and special education staff from each student's LEA of residence to ensure transition plans are effectively developed in accordance with IEP goals.

In addition to maintaining relevant licensure, tutorial staff members (including support personnel) are expected to participate in professional development to address the following IEP, general education, and special education program area goals:

- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention
- ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) training
- Trauma informed educational practices and PBIS
- Differentiated Instruction, MTSS, and instruction in content area best practice pedagogy
- Effective development of individualized learn plans
- Behavioral interventions and crisis de-escalation methods

### **Staffing Safeguards:**

All staff at Mountainside House have undergone fingerprint background checks as well as the child and adult abuse registry. Documentation is on file and available upon request.

### **Mandatory Reporting Procedures:**

Mountainside House staff all receive annual mandatory reporting updates during in-service at the beginning of each school year. Staff are reminded of what situations require reporting and on how to report each incident.

### **Facilities**

State Board of Education Rule 2230.3.2, 2230.3.3

Mountainside House's Tutorial is in a quiet, mixed residential and small business neighborhood in Ludlow. The building is well maintained and secure. A main office is located at the primary entrance to the building and requires visitors to identify themselves prior to entrance. Security cameras are posted outside and inside the building to ensure student and staff safety, as well as to monitor student participation in the program.

The residential facility in Proctorsville is an older, stick built structure in the center of the village. Both buildings have hard-wired sprinkler systems. Certificates of Occupancy (CO) have been granted for both buildings and are filed with the Agency of Education. Both buildings meet requirements pertaining to use as an educational facility. The Ludlow location meets Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for access to the first floor of the building. Youths with mobility issues can be served on the first floor.

### **Health & Safety**

Safety information including location maps, fire extinguishers, and emergency contact numbers are prominently posted in multiple, highly visible areas. Emergency directions and other pertinent information includes graphic, easily understood information.

First Aid and other life-saving equipment is visible and meets health and safety code requirements. Mountainside tutorial staff and students participate regularly in scheduled fire

drills and other required crisis response interventions with local area police and emergency response departments.

### **Emergency Services:**

Mountainside staff members are required to attend First Aid and emergency response specialized training during August in-service each year. Annual staff training includes proper dispensing of student medications, blood borne pathogen response, and crisis intervention. All medications are locked in a secure cabinet in the locked main office.

### **Nursing Services, Medications and Immunization Records:**

Mountainside House does not employ a nurse. If an emergency requiring medical intervention develops, tutorial staff contact local emergency personnel to administer proper medical attention. Student immunization records are complete and included in each student's confidential tutorial program file.

### **Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies**

Mountainside House have policies that address hazing, harassment, and bullying for staff and students and align with current model policies. Additionally, Mountainside House's program is required to meet DCF policies on hazing, harassment, and bullying that addresses after-hour, residential youth programming.

### **Tutorial Financial Capacity**

*State Board of Education Rule 2230.3.9*

Mountainside House residential and day rates are set by the Agency of Human Services with a daily rate scheduled, monitored, and supported through the Private Non-Medical Insurance (PNMI) rate setting process.

Mountainside House provided a copy of its independent auditor's report from Wisehart, Wimette, & Associates for the year ending June 30, 2022 and a profit & loss statement detailing income and expenses for July 2021 through March 2022. 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.

**Approval Recommendation**

The Agency of Education's Independent School review team recommends granting maximum tutorial renewal of two years to Mountainside House. The tutorial's academic and support programming is of high quality and all personnel have established a reputable history of collaboration with the Department of Children and Families, Agency of Human Services, Department of Mental Health, the Agency of Education, and LEAs.