

“When the Moon Hits Your Eyes like a Great Pizza Pie, That’s Amore” Placing the right child in the right facility for right reason

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Throughout most of my professional career, I have been involved in residential care, ranging from foster homes to psychiatric hospitalization and all the garden variety in-between. A mixture of providence and fate afforded me the incredible opportunity to be involved in the creation and formulation of a variety of programs, both day-treatment and residential based.

As part of this process, innumerable hours were spent in writing policies and procedure. However, the most critical thinking and writing was always devoted to the *core* aspect of the program which included such topics as a mission statement, the service philosophy, the goal and objective of the program, the theoretical foundation of the treatment, a description of the population served, an exclusion and a discharge criteria and rational and delineation of core therapeutic services upon which the change process is pivoting. All other policies and procedures flowed from this core. Such aspects as the staffing pattern, the admission procedure, the behavioral management techniques, and many others had to “wash” with the core. Everything flowed from the core. The core represents that which defines a program. If the program is a family, the core represents the parents. As it were, the core is mother earth, the planet.

Many programs, as a value added feature, offer adjunct programming. This may include such things as spiritual discovery or value clarification, equestrian programming, volunteer work and community involvement, specific sport and recreation activities, technology and vocational programming or exotic excursions abroad. All such activities are adjunctive in nature. They do not represent the core. They embellish the core. They may provide a platform for some to the core to unfold. However, they are not the core. If the core represents the planet, the adjunctive program represents the moon circling the planet.

Yet, some people look at the moon and fall in love. Such romance is well and good if the child has been placed for the core program offerings. However, such love can turn to a Shakespearian tragedy if the child is placed in the program, simply because the adjunctive program is so appealing. Clinical placement decision should take place on the core consideration and not the attractiveness of the moon. The core of a program must meet the child’s fundamental clinical needs. Whether a program has a ballet program, an equestrian or a particular sports program, can in no wise be the decisive factor in the placement decision.

Is it possible for such “moon struck” placements to occur? Absolutely. There are a number of scenarios under which a placement occurs for the wrong reason. Some parents feel guilty of sending the child away from home. Trying to “ease the pain”, they are selling themselves and the child on the notion that Johnny can be on the lacrosse team, or Susie can travel abroad as part of her foreign language curriculum offered at the program.

In the minds of such parents, the plated is tangential to its moon and hence, if Johnny is unable to play on the lacrosse team because of inappropriate behavior, the fault is placed at the feet of the program while Johnny is absolved of any wrongdoing.

Others bank on the hope that a value added program component will be the magic potion that will propel Susie in the change process. While this is entirely possible, to place a child for that reason alone is riddled with thinking errors. Long before value added programming becomes part of the placement decision, the core of a program must meet the core issues of the differentiated diagnosis of the child.

Referring professional can be invaluable in preventing parents from getting “mood struck.” Conversely, programs and schools have an ethical obligation to communicate the core of the program long before showcasing the equestrian, sports, spirituality component, or other such moons.