

CHERRY GULCH

Emmett, Idaho

Visit Report

Visit by [Dore Frances, M.A.](#), April 7, 2009

Cherry Gulch, a private boarding school, officially opened on August 14, 2006.

It is the collective effort of owners Dr. Andrew Sapp and Dr. Chris McRoberts. It has the development of a much longer running school, as everyone I met has years of experience and an extensive background in the therapeutic residential and wilderness industry.

Cherry Gulch was created to help young boys attain their full potential through early intervention of those struggling with such things as academics, adoption issues, anger, anxiety, cognitive-behavioral issues, depression, family relationship challenges, lack of respect and more clinical issues. Their focus is "Building Brighter Tomorrows for the Boys of Today."

It is a ranch-style, therapeutic boarding school designed for 20 boys, ages 10 to 14 years of age.

The typical student struggles with issues such as ADD/ADHD, Adoption Issues, Anger, Anxiety, Asperger's (Mild to Moderate), Authority Conflict, Bipolar Disorder, Bereavement Issues (Grief), Depression, Drug/Alcohol (Mild to Moderate), Family Conflict, Impulsivity, Lack of Respect, Learning Disabilities, Low Motivation, Low Self-Esteem, Lying, Manipulative, Negative Peer Association, Oppositional Defiant, Poor Coping Skills, Poor Social Skills, Reactive Attachment Disorder (Mild to Moderate), and Stealing. Cherry Gulch is well equipped to handle these issues.

A best fit student may be a 10-year-old boy who is somewhat mature for his age or at the end age range a 14-year-old relatively immature boy. The minimum length of stay is 6 months.

A boy with an IQ below 80, Adjudicated Youth, Actively Suicidal, Homicidal, or Psychotic, struggling with Anorexia, Bulimia, Arson, Sexual Offenders, Students who are dangerous and pose a risk to other students, Street smart gang members, would not be an appropriate student for Cherry Gulch.

After a 3 hour drive from Gooding, where I had been visiting another program, I arrived at Cherry Gulch, which is located just outside of Emmett, Idaho. Cherry Gulch is a true working ranch with horses, goats, rabbits and several dogs. I was met by Dr. Andy Sapp and we entered the beautiful main building lodge, which is approximately 8,000 sq. ft.

It is on top of a hill that overlooks a serene scene of the Black Canyon Reservoir and the winding Payette River.

It incorporates a dining hall for all meals and snack time, kitchen, library, board room, staff offices and an upstairs where there are bedrooms, a play room and full bath facilities for a group of boys. I was pleasantly surprised at the space and warmth of this beautiful building.

It felt very homey, inviting and warm with its rustic, Western décor. The students and staff were about to have lunch so I joined them. All meals are eaten family style, with the boys having various kitchen responsibilities such as clearing the table, doing the dishes and preparing the food. The homemade lunch consisted of sandwiches with bread from the local bakery, various cheese and meat choices, cottage cheese, fruit and chips. The boys chatted with me in an easy going and friendly manner and eagerly told me about their time at the school.

There were thirteen students present on my visit, with three who were on home visits at the time. One of the boys there is from a family I am assisting and he assured me that other than being the youngest boy right now he really likes being there. He asked me to send some more 10 year olds to the school, and said they would really like it. I was given a tour by three of the students, one of them being the very first boy that arrived at Cherry Gulch. When I asked the three boys what new students would like about Cherry Gulch, there was no shortage of answers. I heard about their experiences with the horses, the planting they had done, their community service work in town, the outdoor experiences and how great the staff is with them.

They all had high praise for the activities and unanimously agreed that one of their favorite people at Cherry Gulch was Dr. Andy Sapp.

Dr. Andrew Sapp, the Founder and President of Cherry Gulch, is the Clinical Director.

Dr. Sapp has worked as a therapist in a youth correctional facility, in a group home for foster boys and for the United States Navy. Dr. Sapp has also worked as a Field Supervisor and Therapist at a therapeutic wilderness program for 11 to 13 year old children. That is where I first met him. He is truly passionate about early intervention as a means of preventing a child from throwing away their future. There are 10 to 14 scheduled hours of therapeutic services each week. Therapy consists of two hours of group and equine therapy, an hour of family therapy, two to four hours of experiential therapy, an hour psychology class, an hour community meeting, two to four hours of recreation therapy, and one to two hours of individual therapy generally broken up into shorter time segments. Andy uses empirically-based, primary interventions that have been demonstrated to be effective either through scientific research and or clinical experience. Dr. Sapp explained that given the ages and attention span of the students, much of the therapy is accomplished in the moment when a student has an emotional response such as anger, frustration or sadness in his daily life.

Education is an important part of Cherry Gulch and they are equipped to handle very bright students as well as those with learning challenges. Each student has an individualized education plan that is comprised of on-line lessons, hands-on activities and small sized classes.

James Schreck is the full time, year round, Masters level head teacher that oversees the academics. James has extensive experience working in the therapeutic boarding school environment.

During my tour all the boys eagerly presented their work to me and boasted about their success in school. Something they all said they had not experienced before.

One young man proudly told me, "I can do algebra now!"

Another showed me the rocket he had built and explained in scientific terms what his thoughts were around what he built, where he went wrong the first time, why he did not feel discouraged and how he was supported. It was very apparent how proud he was of the end result.

The town of Emmett offers a variety of activities and lessons that are utilized by the school.

There is an 1100-acre reservoir in the vicinity that boasts many water related activities.

Nearby Boise has many museums, numerous cultural offerings and a variety of sports teams.

There are also three ski areas in short proximity to Cherry Gulch. Given what the school and surrounding area offers, each boy is afforded the opportunity to explore his personal interests.

Some boys have their guitars at the ranch and one even has his drum set.

Seeing the beautiful location, quality academics, well thought out therapeutics and the caring, compassionate and warm-natured staff, it's easy to understand why the students are so enthusiastic about Cherry Gulch. Cherry Gulch truly is the ideal combination of a therapeutic boarding school with well trained, experienced counselors and the beauties of the Old West.