



**Volunteers  
of America®**

MINNESOTA

# Avanti Center for Girls

Newsletter

**Building a Life Worth Living**

Spring/Summer 2011 Edition

## Avanti Running Group

By Sara Boelman, MS, LMFT

As an avid runner, I have been looking for an opportunity to incorporate running into the work that I do at Avanti. Running is a great skill for me; it helps me release my emotions in a positive way and helps keep my emotions regulated. When leading DBT group, I often give examples of how I use running as a skill, so many residents were not surprised when I started a weekly running group this Spring here at Avanti. Many residents also identified that physical activity helps them keep their emotions from building up and often wanted to have more opportunities to physically work out in an intense manner.

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## Avanti Celebrates 3rd Annual Banquet

By Jennifer Barnett, MA, LMFT

This year, Avanti was fortunate to enjoy our third year of celebrating the hard work and successes of our current residents, as well as the successes of our many graduates from the past year. The girls' family members and support networks were invited to the annual banquet on August 12th celebrating these achievements.

The banquet opened with an introduction by the Program Director. Several residents (past and present) then gave speeches about how Avanti has changed their lives for the better. The family of a recent graduate gave a moving speech about how Avanti staff, learning DBT and the support received throughout her stay and post-graduation has helped their daughter change her behaviors and improve the quality of their lives for the better.

Attendees also made good use of a 'bouncy castle' (photo above), an ice cream cooler with many selections, and the wonderful Mexican-themed food that the kitchen staff organized for the occasion. There was also a cupcake walk, raffle prizes, and a penny-guessing game, as well as other activities.

We are so proud of our residents, both current and past. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to share in celebration with them on this special day. Thank you to all who participated and made this day possible.



Avanti Center for Girls | 10300 Flanders Street NE, Blaine, MN 55449 | ph. 763.230.7470

Office Hours | 8:00a.m.–4:00p.m. Monday–Friday | Located on 20 acres of wooded grounds, wetlands and paved walking paths.

Avanti Newsletter is published twice a year | Fall/Winter Edition | Spring/Summer Edition

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## Programming Components

### Comprehensive Intensive Therapeutic Services

- Mental Health Professionals develop and monitor treatment plans
- On-site Occupational Therapy Services
- Individual and Family Therapy
- DBT skills group
- Psychological Assessment and Testing
- Psychiatric Evaluation/  
Medication Management

### Education

- Collaborative effort between Avanti and local school district
- Full array of services including access to learning targets aligned to MN Comprehensive Assessment (MCA II)
- Spectrum of Special Education services

### Diversity and Spirituality

- Cultural diversity programming held on site
- Weekly spiritual values groups

### Community Integration

- Work Readiness Program on site builds employment skills
- Mentoring program connects youth with adult volunteers
- Volunteerism in the local community
- Collaboration with Macalester College to develop creative and interactive skills

### Aftercare Services

- Clinical staff provide youth and family support
- Promote integration into community
- Individual follow up for 6 months post discharge



## From the Program Director | Looking Forward

Mindfulness is a key component of DBT, the mode of treatment at Avanti. Mindfulness is increasing one's ability to focus on the present moment. We teach our clients that focusing on the now instead of the past or future will help to keep from getting overwhelmed by worries and difficult feelings. Mindfulness also helps to assist in building positive experiences and appreciating our present emotions, thoughts and sensations. This appreciation of the present can lead to acceptance of our circumstances and builds appreciation for life and all its nuances.

Life is far from easy for anyone at Avanti. Our residents' journeys are filled with hard, intense tasks while building a life they want to live. Our staff often struggle with feelings of compassion fatigue and frustration. Both staff and residents experience numerous ups and downs, feelings of intense happiness and pride, and also frustration and anxiety. To our staff and residents, taking moments to celebrate what we have now, to laugh, to cry a little and to simply appreciate what we have together is more than just a little important. It's crucial. So we make a habit of it.

Summer is all about celebration. We start in June by honoring the hard work of our employees with the Employee Appreciation Banquet and end in August by honoring the hard work of our residents with our Annual Child Celebration Banquet. Both events are times to reflect on events of the past year, enjoy each other and savor the present and then look forward to what is to come. We have fun at Avanti, from the songs made up while waiting for something, impromptu talent shows, Super Saturday outings, Valleyfair and horseback riding to the formal banquets, we all take the time to rest and celebrate. To appreciate our hard work, our successes, lessons learned from trials. Then we look forward.

**Improving Lives, One Youth at a time.**

**Julie Bluhm, MSW, LICSW**

**Program Director**

## Avanti Running Group

### Continued from cover

Each Thursday, 2-5 residents run the loop that circles the wooded area here at Avanti. Maya lead counselor Andi N. also often joins the group and Maya Unit Supervisor Michelle O. has also joined the group a couple of times. Residents that participate in the running group are at a variety of levels; some have run cross country or track in school and others are brand new to running. The goal of the group is to use physical activity to help manage emotions. As long as you are moving in the group, you cannot fail! Resident Courtney H., who has participated in the group since it was created, writes, "I love to run because I feel as if I'm pushing my problems away and I feel emotionally stronger when I'm finished. Running group is my best skill." Residents have utilized running as a skill outside the group and will ask to run a loop if they are feeling frustrated and are able to commit to being safe while being outside. My hope is that residents will discover another skill that they can use to let out emotions in a safe way and that they can incorporate running into their daily routine after leaving Avanti.

## Juneteenth

By Amber Pickett and Kristin Smlak,  
Residential Counselors

Juneteenth is the celebration of the ending of slavery in the United States. It is recognized throughout the United States by all races to truly celebrate and acknowledge the period in time that influenced our society today. Traditionally it is a time to gather families together, have picnics and listen to guest speakers.

Several residents from Avanti were able to celebrate Juneteenth in Minneapolis at the Mississippi Regional Park. The girls went canoeing, rock climbing, and were educated by the community. The girls enjoyed hearing speeches on several different topics and meeting the community members. The day was cut short by the rain and yet the girls continued to enjoy themselves and play in the water fountain.



## Program Options

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is an empirically researched psychotherapeutic treatment employing cognitive and behavioral principles. DBT is a form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy specifically designed to treat adolescents with patterns of emotional dysregulation.

DBT provides our youth with the skills to change their approach toward dealing with problems, to regulate and express their emotions, to make more responsible choices, and to form stable relationships.

- Components include: Core Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotional Modulation, Distress Tolerance Skills and Walking the Middle Path
- DBT skilled clinical staff on site
- Skills group three times per week
- Individual therapy with use of DBT
- DBT skills are intertwined throughout daily living

## Program Philosophy

**The Avanti Center is a residential facility 25 minutes from the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area that provides a continuum of treatment, evaluation and shelter services for females ages 12-18 with emotional and behavioral problems.**

**We assist our residents in gaining the skills necessary to improve their quality of life, the lives of those around them and to succeed as adults.**

## Evaluation Program

### Treatment Program

- Ages 12-18, IQ 75 and above
- Serious emotional and behavioral problems
- Department of Human Services licensed Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED) program
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) model

### Shelter Program

- Ages 12-18
- Youth in crisis or transition
- 90-day maximum length of stay
- Safe environment for stabilization of behaviors and life skill development

### Evaluation Program

- Ages 12-18
- Six week program (42 day stay)
- Medical screening
- Residential Behavior Assessment
- Psychological Assessment
- Psychiatric Assessment
- Developmental family history
- Chemical Health Assessment
- Treatment recommendations

## Avanti and Willows School Health Fair

By Sue Nokleby, RN

On June 13, 2011, Avanti Center for Girls and Willows School held their first Health Fair in the Fireside room at the Program Building on Avanti grounds. When the project was presented to the girls in May, they participated in a planning session with the teachers and myself. The girls came up with some great ideas for the Health Fair.

The girls attending summer school used the project as a major part of their summer academics. Health related topics were selected by the girls and approved by Wanda Hord (their current teacher) and myself. They researched their topics and designed poster boards to present their project. Girls not in summer school worked just as hard on their projects—researching their topics and assembling their posters. All of the girls participated, even a girl new to the program.

The topics included Hepatitis C, teen pregnancy, Fifth's Disease, yoga, Blooms Syndrome, skin care, pancreatic cancer, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, obesity, mental illness, premature babies, and a variety of other topics. The posters were well designed to highlight their topic and to educate others.



Learning at the Health Fair



Learning about Blooms Syndrome

Counselors, administration staff, school staff, residents, and some family members were able to visit with the girls about their projects and learn more about the topics. The girls were prepared to explain why they chose their topic and what they learned about it in the research. Some chose their topics because they or a family member had experience with the issue. Some chose their topic just to learn more about it themselves. Obviously, the girls were well prepared as they described their projects and answered questions. Everyone who attended learned something new.

With all the energy and success of this first Health Fair, it is very likely to become an annual event.

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## Expressions—Resident Corner

Residents at Avanti are encouraged to expand and grow in all facets of their lives. In addition to learning new behaviors, they work on expanding their interests and learning ways to express themselves. Included here are some submissions from our very talented girls.



Congratulations to Erika from Maya Hall for her winning submission, pictured above. Also, thank you to everyone for sharing your work with us. Other submissions pictured below.



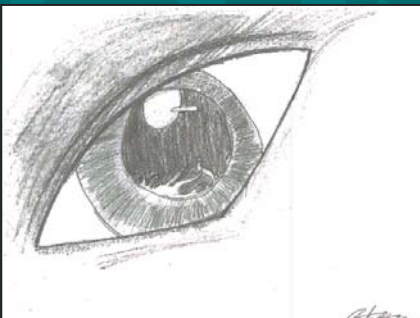
Catherine – Catori Hall



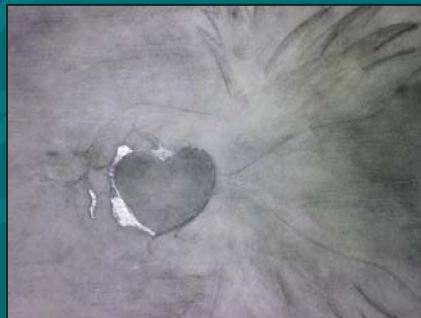
Erika – Maya Hall



Erika – Maya Hall



Tess – Catori Hall



Erika – Maya Hall



Abby – Maya Hall

## Opportunities for growth at Avanti

**By Christina Brasel, Unit Supervisor**

At Avanti we are fortunate to have many volunteers from the community helping to make our program even better. In March one such volunteer joined our organization to help enhance what we could offer our residents on the Work Readiness Program. This volunteer is Ms. Lynn, and she leads the Work Readiness Program Group about once a month. The residents choose projects according to what they are interested in, offering opportunities to learn how to do woodworking, sew, cook, do repairs, decorate, and many other projects around agency. They have already created decorative stepping stones that create a path for the Program Building parking lot, strawberry freezer jam to share with all of the residents at Avanti, inspirational pillows for the living unit couches, and a wooden bench for the Avanti grounds. This group is a great opportunity for the residents to work on the “building mastery” skill in DBT.

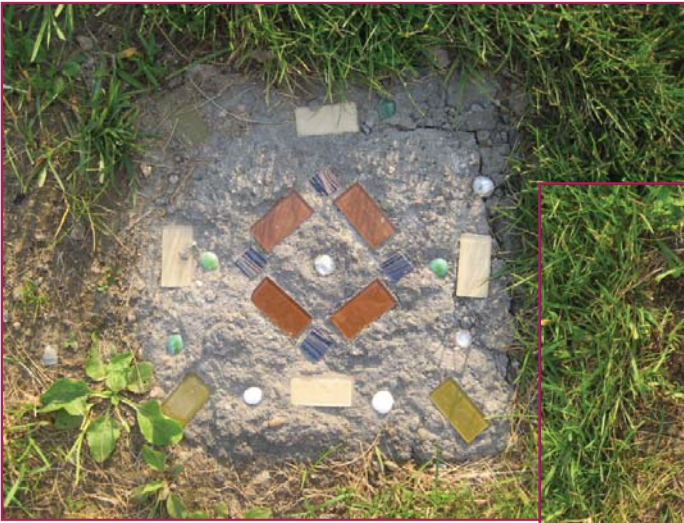


**Ms. Lynn and Gabriella sewing**



**Ms. Lynn and the handcrafted WRP bench**





**Creative stepping stones beautify the Avanti grounds**



### **Hard at work making homemade jam**

This skill involves doing something that makes you feel competent and confident. It helps with emotion regulation and builds self-esteem, and this is exactly what is seen with the girls that have been a part of this group. They are excited to explore different topics/projects and are able to share their knowledge and expertise with each other and learn new things. The girls are proud of their projects thus far and take the time to show them off to visitors. Expanding their skills and giving them opportunities they may not have gotten through any other program has truly made a difference in each girl's treatment. Future project ideas include doing needle arts, refinishing agency furniture and building shelving units. It is the hope that Avanti residents get to explore new things and expand their skills through the Work Readiness Program Group, and that they can also help make Avanti the best it can be in the process.



## Wish List Items

- Hand weights
- Workout DVD's
- Yoga mats
- Jump ropes
- Resistance bands
- Exercise balls
- Snowshoes
- Board Games
- Craft Items



**More Photos from Avanti's  
3rd Annual Banquet**



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