



FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc.

An Overview

FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc., is a long-term residential, therapeutic, treatment program for individuals with chronic substance abuse problems. Addiction is a chronic, relapsing disease and is many times accompanied by mental and emotional difficulties and other behavioral problems that may or may not be the direct result of the addiction. The program's mission is to provide opportunity, guidance, and education to those with addictions and assist them to make positive life changes, in order to become responsible and productive members of society.

FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. has been in operation since 1991 and in 2005 became only the second licensed Therapeutic Community in the State of North Carolina. It is a non-profit organization governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The program is located east of Asheville in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. Situated on roughly three acres, the treatment campus is comprised of an administration building, a five story, sixty unit residential building with capacity for up to eighty-five men, a landscaped nature area with barbecue grill and benches, an auto mechanic shop and two half-way house cottages (for residents in the re-entry phase and for program graduates) providing an additional sixteen beds. Each Recovery Cottage is self-contained and provides the residents with washer, dryer, cable television with DVD/VHS, and local telephone, as well as being stocked with sodas and snacks. Residents of the Recovery Cottages also receive three meals a day in the cafeteria at the main building.

Additionally, residents in the construction related Business Training Schools built a Commercial/Residential Lawn Service shop, constructed a 24×40 ft block warehouse building with an 8" concrete slab foundation for storage, and renovated an additional two story, twelve room building which accommodate individual and group therapy, educational classes including GED, a computer lab, therapists offices, case management and vocational services, as well as providing a large meeting room for resident activities and onsite 12-step meetings.

This campus reflects FIRST at Blue Ridge's therapeutic philosophy that when treatment is provided in a confidential manner in a quiet, comfortable supportive environment, people do better in their personal, reflective and peer group treatment endeavors, and have more incentive to work toward a productive and healthy lifestyle.

FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. is a highly structured modified therapeutic community with a twelve-step focused clinical overlay. Applicants, (who are accepted through our Clinical department) are required to pay an admission fee upon entering the program however there are no additional fees to be a part of the community. Instead residents make a commitment to remain until they successfully complete all clinical curriculum and program requirements. The Clinical department requires residents to attend various groups on life skills and addiction such as: Anger Management, Addiction Awareness, Twelve Step study group, Relapse Prevention, as well as peer process groups and counseling sessions. The program requires active participation in the fellowships AA/NA as well as obtaining a sponsor, and if applicable obtaining their GED. This can be accomplished in twelve months depending on the individual's needs, progress, and commitment to living a productive life.

The scope of services offered by FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. includes vocational and basic education, rehabilitation and counseling in individual and group therapy sessions, referrals to intervention and prevention education for family members, access to off-site community based medical and mental health services and the opportunity for those residents who want to continue their education to enroll in local community and state colleges.

Whenever possible, treatment approaches are employed which strengthen the relationship between the resident's natural and extended families. Treatment interventions, techniques and modalities include, Behavioral Modification, Cognitive Behavioral, Motivational Interviewing and others recognized as "Best Practice" models. A full and comprehensive exploration of chemical dependency in a therapeutic setting invariably leads residents to consider the risks substance abuse poses to their lives: unemployment, homelessness, broken homes, loss of parental rights, impaired physical and mental health including the risks for HIV, HEP C and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as criminal activities, etc. Residents are also helped to understand the risks their chemical dependency poses to others: the destruction of a family does not just negatively or adversely affect the addict. Family, friends, co-workers, children, parents, siblings, partners and even innocent bystanders may have already been harmed by the addict's behavior. In some cases, the family and other relationships have been destroyed through years of substance abuse activities and may not be repaired even if the addict remains "clean and sober."

During their stay in our community, residents demonstrate their employability, learn marketable skills, and deal with the day-to-day issues that affect everyone. Being able to meet these challenges together helps residents develop self-respect and a sense of community. While they are working in the program, whether it is for an internal FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. training company or with a Vocational Training Partner, they learn job skills and work habits as well as providing a means for "earning" their way through the program. Additionally residents have the opportunity to establish a twelve month job history to add to their resumes.

Discharge planning begins at admission. FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. residents begin the program as "Preppies" and during that time the clinical team and the case management department assess their needs as well as their life and work skills. This is also the most intense period as far as treatment. They are in didactic/group sessions twice weekly, receive an individual session twice monthly, attend in-house AA/NA meetings, participate in team building and self esteem building activities, receive orientation to the program, and begin to work on securing their driver's

licenses, birth certificates, ID cards and other documents which may be required as well as finding solutions to any legal issues that they may have.

After the “Preppie” phase the resident is assigned to a Vocational Training Partner or, depending on the skills of the individual, they may be placed on one of FIRST at Blue Ridge’s internal crews. It is during this phase that the resident begins to demonstrate their ability to follow directions, and their desire to work the program is assessed and monitored. There is a senior resident who acts as a team leader at each site and who submits a report on the behavior of the resident and how they conduct themselves on the job. Work skills development occurs during this period and depending on the individual, a resident may be moved through several of the training sites. During this time residents should have already secured a sponsor from AA/NA with whom they are working the twelve steps.

At ten months a resident may apply for “re-entry.” There are specific requirements which must be completed in order for the resident to be eligible and approved for re-entry. In this phase residents begin preparing a resume and seek gainful employment in the community. This allows them to begin to accumulate the necessary funds for rent, utilities etc., which will allow them to re-integrate back into society. For those residents who have child support, probation fees, or restitution, the paying of these debts begins in order to minimize their financial impact prior to completing the program.

For those who are interested in running their own business they will be referred to the local community college where they will take courses on starting one’s own business as well as work with FIRST at Blue Ridge staff for additional training, support, and assistance. Those interested also develop business skills and receive leadership skills training.

Once a resident is approved for re-entry, after thirty days of employment the resident is eligible to apply for admission to the Recovery Cottage. All applicants to the Recovery Cottages are interviewed by the residents of those cottages. These residents make the determination as to who they will accept into “their” house. If accepted into the Recovery Cottage the resident may remain for up to a period of two years to allow them to establish a firm foundation before transitioning to completely independent living in the community. Upon graduation from the program, residents are encouraged to continue to avail themselves of the benefits of the Recovery Cottages and continue to reside there. This allows them not only a familiar safe environment, but the ability to save money and build resources and strength in their recovery much quicker than if they moved off site. Residents are eligible for graduation after completing all of the core curriculum, all assignments and other clinical activities deemed necessary by the clinical staff, obtaining and maintaining a twelve-step sponsor, have a working knowledge of Step Five in Narcotics or Alcoholics Anonymous, and the maintaining of continuous gainful employment or college or trade school enrollment.

FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. is funded mostly through its Business Training Schools run by FIRST at Blue Ridge residents and through contracts with local employers who act as Vocational Training Partners. FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. has also received some additional support from grants and foundations and is always seeking new opportunities to develop funding streams. However it is in the contracts and the internal business schools where the residents learn and prove their ability to hold down a job and develop the work ethic needed to succeed in life as well as in the job market. The Business Training Schools include operations such as landscaping

(FIRST Bloom), local delivery services (FIRST Movers), painting (FIRST Coat), flooring and tile (FIRST Floor), general handyman services (FIRST Hand) and commercial janitorial and custodial services (FIRST Impressions).

FIRST at Blue Ridge, Inc. strives to admit only those who are committed to making positive changes in their lives. These individuals come from all walks of life and are referred by many sources including family members, friends, former graduates, other treatment programs, the judicial system, and probation and parole. However, they all have two things in common, the knowledge that they cannot go on using drugs and alcohol and the desire to get help. That journey to recovery begins with the FIRST step and we are here to help.

FIRST at Blue Ridge Creed

Honesty

I will promote the Truth.

I will not lie, cheat or steal

I will move toward recovery through fair and honest means

Open-minded

I will listen with the intention of learning

I will accept the fact that my best thinking got me here.

Willing

I will attempt those things I was unwilling to try before. And I will give them an honest effort.

Respect

I will treat others only as I would like to be treated, with respect and dignity

Unity

I will base my decisions on what is best for this house.

What is best for this house is best for me at any given moment.

Remember...

I can't, but..... WEcan !