



Students of Summit Preparatory School near Kalispell sit on the lawn during a therapy session. The school opened in 2003 and it serves students from around the United States.

a class OF ITS OWN

How a small high school in the mountains helps students reach new heights

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVE REESE

NATALIE'S LIFE, AT AGE 15, WAS SPIRALING DOWN IN A SERIES OF BAD RELATIONSHIPS AND DRUG ABUSE. SHE WAS A SMART PERSON, THOUGH, AND HER PARENTS KNEW THAT — AND THEY WANTED TO FIND A LIGHT THAT WOULD OPEN HER HEART TO A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE.

THEY FOUND IT AT SUMMIT PREPARATORY SCHOOL IN KALISPELL.

SET IN THE MOUNTAINS west of Kalispell near Ashley Lake, Summit Preparatory School offers teenagers an alternative, college-preparatory high school that focuses on academics and therapeutic counseling.

Driving up the long, dirt road west of Kalispell, through small farms and open fields, you see a country setting that is remote but idyllic. When you first see Summit Prep, it almost looks like a bed and breakfast or high-end private home. The lodge style buildings are centered around a courtyard, including a spacious dining area accented by a tall, river rock fireplace. At one end of the campus is a gymnasium and large swimming pool. Just up the road are both boys and girls dormitories. At Summit Prep, students are mentored in personal issues but also given a solid academic foundation for college study. It is not a boot camp, by any means, and the structure of the program is designed to promote positive personal introspection through the limiting of cell phones; Internet sites such as My Space; and sexual relationships.

The non-profit school was founded by Alex Habib, Mark
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Two students at Summit Preparatory School practice rock climbing on the indoor climbing wall.