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NATSAP Responds To CWLA

Contact:

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The following is a letter from NATSAP to Shay Bilchik, President and CEO, Child Welfare League of America, 440 First Street NW, Washington, DC 20001.

Dear Mr. Bilchik,

The National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs and our members are concerned about your letter of August 11, 2005 to the Members of Congress regarding therapeutic boarding schools. While we appreciate the intent of your letter, we are concerned of the impact it may have on those programs and schools who are doing excellent work.

Your letter to the editor of the Boston Globe on "brat camps" states your call to action does not question "the safety or therapeutic effectiveness of hundreds of topnotch programs that abide by state licensing and accreditation standards guiding residential and therapeutic services for children."

Both letters place emphasis on the recent "Brat Camp" television show and the influence it may have on parents placing their child in an unlicensed residential program and camp. We appreciate this concern, but feel an important piece of information was overlooked following that statement. We believe it would have been important to note that the program featured on "Brat Camp" is licensed by the State of Oregon Department of Health and Human Services to operate a wilderness therapy program. This license regulates health, safety and operation at the program and is reviewed by mental health professionals as well as officials from that state.

The majority of the programs that serve young people are regulated and overseen by a licensing or accrediting agency, and all one hundred and fifty programs that are members of NATSAP ascribe to codes of ethics and practice standards that place the utmost importance on quality treatment and child welfare. Your focus on the small minority of programs that are not overseen is harmful, not only to the regulated programs, but to the parents seeking a real solution for a child that needs help beyond that which they can provide.

Troubled children and families have profound and meaningful issues and the children frequently engage in very risky behaviors. They need the longer term residential services offered by our member programs. These troubled adolescents are not being whimsically placed in programs by irresponsible parents, but rather are being placed in our programs because the solutions offered by public education and managed psychiatric care are grossly inadequate and failing.

Recent articles have appeared stating that the private residential care of adolescents has become a multi-billion dollar industry. We do not have the financial facts to substantiate these statements, but even if it is true, this emphasis detracts from the real need for providing social services and education to reduce the necessity to send a child to one of our member's program.

Since we were founded in 1999, our primary focus has been to establish Ethical Principles and Principles of Good Practice that we expect our members to follow. We continue to add to and review these principles and recently ratified principles of good practice for therapeutic boarding schools that focuses on standards of academics. We are continuing to expand on the standards for academics as they apply to residential treatment centers, outdoor therapeutic programs, etc. Also ratified were the Behavioral Support Management Guidelines for Therapeutic Schools, Therapeutic Programs and Outdoor Behavioral Health Programs. These standards can be reviewed on our [website](#) where they are

listed. While we have not reviewed the Child Welfare League's Standards of Excellence for Residential Services in detail, we believe you will find the majority of your standards embedded in our standards.

We also inform our members as new guidelines are developed by other organizations and recently advised our members of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA), National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems (NAPHS), and the American Hospital Association (AHA) Section for Psychiatric and Substance Abuse Services publication on Success Stories and Ideas for Reducing Restraint/Seclusion.

Our members are licensed or accredited either by a state licensing board or by a national or regional accreditation agency. The national accrediting agencies include the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), and the Council on Accreditation (COA).

The staff consists of psychiatrists and licensed psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, clinical social workers, etc. most of whom hold either a doctorate or masters in their field.

As you can see there has been, and will continue to be, a commitment to strengthen the integrity, ethics and principles in this industry. We are not "boot camps", but a group of educated, committed and caring individuals that are dedicated to providing a safe environment for young people to heal and to prepare them for leading happy, healthy and productive lives.

Sincerely,

Jan Moss
Executive Director

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