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2 U.S.-Affiliated Academies Abroad Are Shut Down

By TIM WEINER

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The overseas programs of one of America's largest behavior modification associations for teenagers were shuttered yesterday after authorities closed one program in Mexico holding more than 500 youths and Hurricane Ivan struck a second in Jamaica, with 300 youths.

The Casa by the Sea program in Ensenada, Mexico, and Tranquility Bay, in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, were two of the largest and most profitable programs of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, or Wwasps, of St. George, Utah.

Mexican immigration officials said teenagers at Casa by the Sea showed signs of mistreatment in an inspection on Friday.

Teenagers at Tranquility Bay, on Jamaica's southern coast, were sent to a hotel nearby after the guests had been evacuated as the hurricane approached.

In interviews with The New York Times last year, scores of teenagers and many of their parents said the techniques Wwasps used in Mexico and Jamaica included physical abuse, long solitary confinement and little professional treatment.

Program officials in Mexico and Jamaica, who could not be reached for comment over the weekend, said last year that the programs were tough but not abusive.

Casa by the Sea, which opened in 1998, and Tranquility Bay, founded in 1996, were the overseas flagships of Wwasps.

A program in Costa Rica closed last year after a government inspection led to a revolt by teenagers against the administration.

The Wwasps overseas programs paid less, charged lower fees - roughly $35,000 a year - and faced lower licensing and legal hurdles than similar programs in the United States. Several thousand American teenagers had been enrolled in the overseas programs in the last eight years. Wwasps says it is one of the fastest-growing groups of its kind.

Casa by the Sea, which is housed in a hotel 60 miles south of San Diego, had nearly 600 youths enrolled last year.

Mexican officials who closed it after a surprise inspection on Friday could not be reached by telephone.

Some children were picked up by their parents in Ensenada and Tijuana, Mexico, and others were being taken to a hotel in San Diego, parents said. Many may be transferred to Wwasps affiliates in Utah, Montana, New York, California, Iowa and South Carolina, which have a total of about 1,500 youths.

Tranquility Bay, also housed in an old hotel by the sea, was struck by Hurricane Ivan hours after the raid in Mexico.

Parents said they were told that the 300 children there would be moved to another hotel nearby.



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