Places for Struggling Teens™

Published by
Woodbury Reports, Inc.™

"It is more important to get it right, than to get it first."

July 2008 - Issue #167

WHAT ABOUT THE PARENTS?

By: Lon Woodbury



Parents have the primary responsibility for raising children in our society. This includes deciding which school or treatment facility the child should attend for whatever reasons the parent thinks are important. This responsibility is not absolute however since parents must conform to certain basic standards like mandatory school attendance laws and laws against abuse, neglect, abandonment, etc. The schools and programs they might choose must and should conform to these basic standards as well. However, for the most part our laws and the courts have protected this right and responsibility of parents to raise their children in the way the parents think best.

In general, the more options parents have to choose from, the better choices they are likely to make. This is part of what in this country we call freedom, that is, as some have stated in other issues, "Freedom is choice!"

Congressman Miller, in the first draft of his HR 5876, seems to be focusing on restricting parents' right to choose regarding when a child needs residential placement. This isn't stated in so many words of course, but the intent of the proposed legislation is to allow parents to choose only those schools and programs that have the stamp of approval from the federal government. How much restriction depends on the wording of the final legislation, the biases of the federal employee regulation writers, and the intentions of the federal regulators assigned to monitor conformity to the written regulations.

One possible outcome would be to virtually eliminate the existence of private parent-choice residential programs, which would force parents back into the bad old days before the network of private parent-choice residential schools and programs came into existence. That is, the choice of placement would be up to law enforcement or mental health professionals, leaving going along with what the officials decide being the only choice parents might have. In this worst-case scenario, parents would lose the options now provided from the parent-choice network, and in reality, would have almost no options in the matter of residential placement when needed for their own child. In this scenario, responsibility would be taken from parents and turned back to "professionals".

This worst-case scenario is plausible for a couple of reasons. First, the "Inside the Beltway mentality" in Washington DC seems to be heavily tilted to favor control freaks. The colossal egos common in DC truly believe they have better answers

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NEWSWEEK SEEKING PARENTS/ ALUMNI

(June 26, 2008) Jennie Yabroff, writing for Newsweek, is researching for an in-depth and fair story on wilderness programs and therapeutic boarding schools. She wants to focus on the experience of girls and their families. Jennie would like to talk to parents who are anywhere in the process and want to share their story. Nobody will be quoted without his or her express permission. Jennie can be contacted at Jennie.Yabroff@newsweek.com or 212-445-5788.

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