

February 2, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the mother of a 15-yr-old daughter who has been enrolled in Spring Creek Lodge Academy (SCL) since April 2006. I'm writing this letter, because of my concerns over the types of regulations Montana might adopt that could prohibit SCL from continuing to run as it has been - as a safe haven for teenagers that provides an environment for assisting them towards discovering the magnificence of who they truly are.

Prior to enrolling our daughter at SCL, she was losing herself faster than we could help her hold on. She was making increasingly harmful choices that were spiraling our family into a desperate dark place. She was clearly emotionally distressed, but was completely uncooperative with traditional therapy. Our daughter is highly gifted intellectually, but was out of touch with her own emotional functioning. She could talk circles around therapists, teachers, and counselors. During the months preceding our daughter's enrollment at SCL, my husband and I were becoming increasingly desperate to find help for her. We found that help in SCL.

We visited the SCL campus prior to enrolling our daughter, and spoke with many of the staff and students. We found everybody to be open to all of our inquiries, including the students. We've been on campus several times (including a Parent/Child seminar), and have always been impressed with the high level of the staff's commitment to these teenagers. The staff we've worked with at SCL have demonstrated tremendous caring in supporting our daughter towards becoming a person that truly loves herself. We have been active participants in terms of working with a highly responsive staff on making any decisions concerning our daughter. My husband and I have also participated in four excellent seminars as part of the program SCL offers for parents.





Our daughter is currently on the leadership team at SCL, and is beginning to come into herself in some powerful ways. We are filled with tremendous joy about it. We spent Christmas with her, and it was wonderful. I am amazed with how much she is maturing and with how good our relationship has become. She has made huge strides in her ability to communicate, and we are having some excellent deep and honest conversations.

SCL has provided a safe structured environment with an emphasis on self-accountability, which has provided our daughter with the retreat she needed in which to explore her emotional functioning. She has graduated from two powerful self-esteem building seminars, and she feels they have helped her tremendously. She is working with an excellent therapist, and is also part of a terrific acupuncture program she feels helps her on a variety of levels. Additionally, she's doing excellent on an academic level (she was failing almost every class prior to attending SCL).

Again, I am deeply concerned about the State of Montana adopting regulations that would limit SCL's ability to run the unique program it offers. I am concerned that in the

future other families who need the help our child and family did will no longer be able to find it. SCL is a safe haven for at risk teenagers – teenagers at risk of losing themselves, their dreams, and their truest aspirations. I believe it is important for the State of Montana to work to support rather than hinder the program offered at SCL.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Dousset
113 Tahoe Dr.
Missoula MT 59803
(406) 251-6695

Date: Wed, 14 Feb 2007 21:36:46 -0600 
From: Linda Kierzek <chetlynn@comcast.net>   
To: support@blueslide.com
Subject: SCLA February 14, 2007

This is a letter of support for Spring Creek Lodge Academy from our family, which has been enriched by the experience of sending our son to Spring Creek. We have participated as parents in the seminars, have visited the school on several occasions, and were extremely satisfied with the school's staff, administrators, therapists, and other professionals we had the opportunity to have contact with in regard to our son's time at Spring Creek.

At Spring Creek, he learned accountability, responsibility, a work ethic, got his high school diploma (he had been expelled from our local high school and had numerous suspensions prior to that), and formulated a values system for his return to the home. He graduated the program on his 19th birthday.

These schools work because they focus on removing entitlement issues from the child's life by expecting performance based on earning levels and points. Many of these kids have pretty much thought they could get anything they wanted. That's not how life works. That's not how adulthood works. These schools prepare kids for not expecting others to bow down to them. Unfortunately, a large population of young people are struggling with these issues as they complete school, go to college, look for jobs, and are amazed to find out that things just don't get handed to them. What a surprise.

These schools prepare kids for the realities of adulthood and they do it with respect for the child's welfare. My son was well-fed, the campus and buildings are clean and safe, and the environment is warm and caring. His self-esteem grew.

I wish I could say that our local public school, which conforms to the general public's view that a child's right is violated if he or she has restrictions imposed on him, was that successful. Our son is very proud of his experience at Spring Creek Lodge Academy and it is our experience that he is using what he learned there in his adult life.

Sincerely,

Chester J. and Linda F. Kierzek
9410 S. 81st Avenue
Hickory Hills, IL 60457

Miki Scott
808 W. Pima Ave.
Coolidge, AZ 85228

February 1, 2007

Spring Creek Lodge Academy
76 Spring Creek Road
Thompson Falls, Montana 59873

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Miki Scott and I live in Arizona. I have a son enrolled as a student at Spring Creek Lodge Academy in Thompson Falls, Montana. Ten months ago my son was out of control due to his poor choices in his life. Once an "A" student, president of his high school class, earning the highest score possible on his AP English test, he began to earn very low grades and was loosing interest in life itself. He became disruptive in the home and was loosing trust with peers, teachers and his family.

My husband and I had done everything possible in our home to assist him but with no avail. We searched for a place with an environment that would have structure, teach values, encourage students to learn the worth of education, assist them in learning how to be accountable for their choices and the positive results they would achieve through working choices. There were no schools available in Arizona that we felt would suit his needs. After learning of Spring Creek Lodge Academy and inquiring from other parents who had success with their children at SCLA and the program it supported, we decided it would be in the best interest of our son to enroll him. We do not regret this decision in the least bit.

My experience with the staff and administration has been very positive. I commend them on their professionalism, their concern and care for my son and I have trusted all decisions they have made in assisting him to go forward in a healthy life for himself. The program that SCLA supports is one that involves the entire family. Not only has my son attended seminars but my husband, daughter and I have as well. We have grown tremendously in every aspect of our lives. Our relationships are on a healthy track. We have been able to visit our son and tour the facilities and feel very comfortable in they way it is structured.

Of his own free will my son is now accountable for every choice he makes. He has told us on many occasions that he is glad for this experience. He is now earning "A"s and "B"s and is looking forward to going to college. He works on a service team at the school and is showing that he can be a leader once again. He has values in his life and purpose. He is working towards earning his Eagle Scout award, which the school has been very helpful in allowing him to do so. He expresses his love for his family, for himself and is gaining self worth.

I support this school. I am grateful for such an opportunity to have participated in this program and I would recommend this school to any family that needs assistance in helping their teen get back on track academically and to be happy and whole.

Sincerely,

Miki Scott

February 10, 2007

Dear Sir or Madam

I am the parent of a 17 year-old boy. During the past year my son turned from being an outgoing, athletic star and Honor student to a boy who used drugs, skipped school and then dropped out, quit a great job, and was frequently picked up by the police. He even completed a Juvenile Diversion Program without needing to actually change anything in his behavior. We tried therapy (2 different therapists), medication, change to an alternative High School, and sending him out of state to do hard labor installing lockers. As he'd tell you—nothing "We" (he and I) tried even made a dent.

My son has only been at Spring Creek Lodge 2.5 months and already is becoming the young man I knew before a year ago. As he says, he has a lot of things to work through and is in no way ready to be out of there, but he now sees this as a joint effort between himself and me. I am convinced that if I had not found Spring Creek Lodge, he would possibly be dead, have killed someone else, or whatever. Now I no longer have to sit up every night wondering if the police or a hospital will call. I also don't set my alarm clock every couple of hours to see if he's still in the house and if he is, whether he's snuck other kids in also. I can't express what this program already means to myself and all of my family. My younger son no longer leaves the room because he can't stand to be around him and my daughter is so happy that we are getting him the needed help. Six months I would have said there was no hope for us ever being a family again. Now I know that with God's help and Spring Creek Lodge, we can be a stronger family than ever before.

I have not seen the school in person, but know many people who have and who have given me a peace of mind that this is a wonderful place. The staff is awesome. When I first was searching on the internet, I found no other program that seemed right. They were treatment centers focusing on withdrawal and therapy, a military school with the ability for kids "walk out", harsh schools, or entirely religious based (and I'm a strong Christian but didn't feel they were well-rounded enough). SCL was a God-send because it is result-based and not time-based. It is also a good mixture of therapy, education, life-skills, strictness with gradual privileges, and individualism.

One of the most impressive things was when I was just beginning to look at schools (8 months before I actually sent my son), I sent a list of about 15 questions. Within a day and a half they had responded in great detail to each question with unwavering honesty. Since then, I speak with staff at least once a week and have been kept completely updated with my son and his program. They have immediately contacted me when there were both negative as well as positive things I need to know about. At no time has the staff tried to sugarcoat anything, and I can't speak highly enough about this and similar programs. SCL has literally saved our lives.

Yes, sending him was one of the hardest things I've ever done (Had to have him transported), but it is also one of the best. I highly support maintaining the PAARP Board and granting it additional authority to mandate registration and license programs. I oppose SB288 and hope you will look strongly at the needs of Spring Creek Lodge and other schools like it.

Kathy Fleshman
3180 W. Woodmen Rd
Colorado Springs, CO 80919
719-650-7589

Date: Thu, 01 Feb 2007 13:10:40 -0800 
From: "Brenda Holzke" <brenda@magenta-inc.com>   
Reply-to: <brenda@magenta-inc.com>
To: <support@blueslide.com>

Dear Legislative Board Members,

February 1,2007

In support of Spring Creek Lodge Academy and all of the families that want an opportunity to change their lives for the better, I wish to share my experience with you.

Our son was escorted to Spring Creek Lodge at 5am on October 15th 2005. It is a morning that I will never forget as long as I live. Sending our son from Los Angeles to Montana in the hands of strangers that day was a leap of faith--one that my husband and I took with tears in our eyes and pain in our hearts. Exhausting all of the choices at hand, we sought out another way to try and give our son another chance to turn his life around. Spring Creek looked like that chance.

For 2 years our son had made choices that put his life and future in jeopardy by using drugs, skipping school and hanging out with gang members. We worked with therapists and school counselors in hope of reaching our troubled son. When we exhausted all of our known options, I searched the internet in hope of finding another solution.

Spring Creek Lodge was that solution. In the 17 months that our son has been at SCL, our entire family has gained the tools and knowledge to heal and grow as a loving and open family. Our son has had the opportunity to once again make working choices in his life. As a once gifted honor roll student, he was able to re-connect with his goals of college and make up the lost classes and credits that he once tossed aside. He found that as he started to focus on who he was and what he really wanted his life to look like he was able to reach for the rewards that he had never thought that he deserved. By working with the Therapists, Family Reps, and other staff at SCL our son was given a second chance at life. Learning how to make choices that bring rewards and privileges instead of consequences is the core learning taught at the school. The seminars provide incredible introspection for the teens to look at how they affect the world around them.

Our entire family has been given a second chance. My husband , myself and our other teen son at home have attended the seminars also. As a result , our family functions with new communication skills and unity. At the end of February our son will graduate the program and come home. An angry, depressed and unsure teen has transformed into a mature, confident, honest and loving young man. He now shows leadership skills, communication skills and problem solving skills.

I will be forever grateful to the incredible staff at the school for their unconditional love and support shown to my family and especially my son. He has made lasting bonds and relationships in a beautiful pristine environment. We have all been given a gift. My wish is that schools like SCL be allowed to operate and continue giving the gift of LIFE and second chance to other families that are in desperate need as mine once was.

Thank you for listening.

Brenda Holzke

February 1, 2007

Spring Creek Lodge Academy

76 Spring Creek Road
Thompson Falls, Montana 59873

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Nina Lipschultz and I am the mother of a student enrolled at Spring Creek Lodge Academy in Thompson Falls, Montana. My son was transported to SCLA on May 22, 2006. My decision, along with my ex-husband's to send our son to a behavior modification program far from where we reside in San Diego, California was the most difficult decision any parent should have to be forced to make. However, this was also the best decision and the greatest gift that we could ever give to our teenage son and to our entire family.

We have been to the school on two occasions. The first was when we flew out to take a tour of the school, meet and speak with students at different levels, and meet with staff in order to make sure that the program and the school was the right one. The second trip was in early December of 2006 when we attended PC1 (Parent/Child Seminar) and had our first visit and working seminar with our son.

We were extremely impressed with the setup of the school, the beautiful area where the school is situated, but most importantly with our forty-five minute question/answer time that we had with the most amazing group of young men who were students at SCLA. Their levels ranged from level 1 to level 6. This gave us a great opportunity to hear first hand about some of the same issues that our own son was going through. We never heard negative comments from the boys about the school, the program or any of the staff members. They were encouraged to speak freely and honestly with us and they did. The upper level boys expressed their gratitude for having had the opportunity to make so many positive changes in their lives and were now very grateful to their parents for sending them to SCLA.

We enrolled our son in SCLA because this was our last chance at saving our son's life and saving our family as a whole. Our personal nightmare began about 3 years ago when our teenage son started his downhill spiral into depression, anger and the lack of will to live.

He no longer had interest in school, his grades began dropping and we would get frequent calls from the school about his overall attitude. He seemed depressed and angry all the time. His blatant disrespect towards everyone was now the norm and worsened each day. He showed little to no remorse for the pain he caused himself and his family. His physical appearance was also changing and it just seemed as though he stopped caring about himself, his life, family and all of the things that were once important to him.

He progressively spiraled further and further out of control. He was arrested two times and laughed after the judge gave him nothing but a slap on the wrist. He was expelled from public school and placed in two separate continuation schools, ultimately failing 9th grade.

Today my son recognizes and is accountable for the choices that he has made and will make. Like all of us, he has good days and bad days; the biggest difference in him is that he now has pride and self-worth. He values his family and the life that he now knows he wants. He is almost complete with 9th grade and currently has a 3.5 GPA. He is drug free, and is addressing many of his personal issues.

I have attended the seminars that are offered to family members, a total of four with three remaining to complete all of them. They have given me such invaluable tools and along with the incredible support from our Family Representative and the entire staff at Spring Creek, we now know that our son and our family will be able to deal and heal and be able to become the best family and individuals that we can be!

I don't know where we would be today if not for Spring Creek Lodge Academy. We will be forever indebted to our Family Representative, members of the schools staff and the entire program for the incredible gift of life that they have given back to us all.

Sincerely,

Nina F. Lipschultz

-----Original Message-----

From: Allison Ford [mailto:allisonaford@hotmail.com]

Sent: Wednesday, November 22, 2006 2:11 PM

To: feedback@montanapbs.org

Subject: "Who's Watching the Kids?"

My sister, a Spring Creek Lodge graduate, sent me the link to the program "Who's Watching the Kids?" at montanapbs.org. I am disappointed by the negative press. It feels like there is consistently a bias when talking about programs and behavior modification schools, and it leans towards the negative. What about the families and kids who have successfully graduated the program? What about the kids who would be homeless crackheads completely alienated from their families without the intervention and assistance of the program? What about the kids who would be dead if it weren't for a behavior modification school?

I am a high school teacher and sister of a Spring Creek Lodge graduate. I have staffed many seminars associated with the program – for adults, for siblings, and for the students at the school. I have been to Spring Creek Lodge to staff seminars there and to visit my sister. I have even contemplated moving to Montana to work at Spring Creek Lodge. I am a firm believer in Spring Creek and the benefits that it has provided to me and my family. If my sister had not spent those two years at Spring Creek, she would most likely be dead of a drug overdose. Spring Creek Lodge saved my sister's life, and has enhanced the quality of life for our entire family.

We have learned life skills that have improved our relationships, communication, and family dynamics. I have yet to witness something that I would find questionable about Spring Creek and the way that the facility is run or operated. I am not familiar with many of the other programs, but I can, with firm confidence, say that I am thankful for Spring Creek and what it has done for my sister, me, and my family. I would recommend Spring Creek to any family that is having troubles with a teen, and wants to get help.

Our society is messed up, and that is a fact. As a high school teacher, I see it daily in the classroom. There are many students who have a blatant disregard and disrespect for authority.

Rules are not being enforced at home by the parents, or at school by some teachers and administrators, or even in the community by some law enforcement officers. A phone call home used to be feared because kids knew their parents would punish them if they were misbehaving at school. Now, some students mock the teacher saying, "Go ahead and call my parents, they won't care!" A referral to the Principal's office was a student's worst nightmare. Now some kids just laugh at a referral, because they know nothing bad will happen to them.

There are very few negative consequences for breaking rules, misbehaving, and being disrespectful to other students and to teachers. It's like adults fear giving children negative consequences because now we have so many laws and examples that most punishment will be misconstrued as child abuse. The children need to be taught how to behave somehow! They need negative consequences to teach them how to make choices that will be beneficial to them. I'm not saying beat kids or withhold food, or anything like that. They just need to have boundaries, and know that when boundaries are crossed, there will be negative consequences.

Spring Creek provides this by giving clear rules and boundaries, and the students know exactly what the consequence will be if they choose to break a rule or cross a boundary.

The consequences fit the choice. My sister had a card with all of the consequences for breaking a rule on it that she kept with her all the time on upper levels. There was no way she could say that a consequence wasn't fair or warranted. She had the rules, knew the consequences, and the staff followed through with these consequences. And the consequences weren't getting beaten, they were losing an appropriate amount of points or dropping levels. If we had this same system in society, we wouldn't need a behavior modification school to teach our children about choices and consequences. So until we get our society straightened out, and start teaching all of our children about boundaries and rules and enforcing consequences for breaking rules, we need behavior modification schools to teach our children how to survive in life.

I have taken what I've learned in the program and applied it to my classroom. It has made me a better teacher, and has lessened the discipline problems in my classroom – the students know there will be consequences for misbehaving.

I think that it is unfair to only show the negative about these programs, especially when most of the negative comments were about schools not even located in Montana. I disagree with editing the content to only show the negative and not the positive that can come out of behavior modification schools. Paulina and Kelly mentioned it in the short clips shown from their interviews, but then the positive aspects were never discussed or talked about. I am not saying that these programs are perfect, but I know that Spring Creek Lodge is a good program and provided a safe place for my sister to learn and grow.

Sincerely,

Allison Ford

February 3, 2007

Dear Montana Legislators,

We would like to share with you the reasons why we value Spring Creek Lodge Academy and the Premier Educational Seminars. We are a pretty average family, but when our son was about 16 years old he began acting-out. We found out that he had tried marijuana. He was punished; we thought it was just an experimental thing. Then it happened again and we became aware that he was having unprotected sex. He was grounded again. We went over using condoms and not doing drugs like we had for the last few years. We still thought we could handle it and get him turned back in the right direction. Then he was busted at school for being under the influence of marijuana. We realized that he had been smoking everyday and that he was addicted.





We pulled him out of school and put him on independent study. He went to a drug education program. He got a great job at the market. He was not allowed to spend time with drug friends. Things seemed like they might go in the right direction and they did for a short time. Before long he was lying about people he was spending time with. Come to find out they were the same friends, but he had renamed them. His paycheck was gone the same day he got it. He looked bad. He was distant and frankly, not a very nice person. We refused to drop him off in the middle of town anymore and he refused to show-up for pick-up. (Did I mention he had lost his license for a year.)

We went to the police with a report of a missing child just to send the message to the drug friends that we were not afraid to get the police involved. It only took one time for him to not show-up at the pick-up place and we were on the phone to another family that had used Teen Help. What a blessing. From the time I called to the time the escort service picked him up was 36 hours. We have never once felt guilty about sending him away to Spring Creek Lodge Academy. We love our son very much, and to have left him here in this condition would have meant eventual trouble with the law and jail time or worse, death. He was circling the drain very quickly and we were way over our heads. He needed an environment where he could be drug-free, safe, moving forward with his education, receiving therapy and gaining some character tools in order for him to be successful with his future. We are so thankful for Teen Help, Spring Creek Lodge Academy and the Premier Educational Seminars. Today our son is alive and moving towards a healthy future.

From the time we held our son in our arms we have imagined a wonderful future for him. Once we were aware that he was self-destructing it was our job, as a parents, to intervene. We did that by sending him to a school where he not only would get an education but also come away with some major tools that will help him to be successful in his future endeavors. This school/program has been a huge help to our family. We have been afforded a very necessary support system. We have a team of people who are just as interested in our son's success as we are. Our entire family is participating in the educational seminars. We have staffed a seminar and are looking forward to staffing at the Youth Camp, which is offered for siblings of students at the school. We have experienced encouragement, support and a lot of very tangible help from the administration and staff at Spring Creek Lodge Academy and Premier. For this we are very thankful.

We truly believe that the existence of Spring Creek Lodge Academy and Premier have saved our family. Participating in this program has stretched our family mentally, physically, emotionally and financially; however, it has been well worth every ounce of energy that we have invested. We now have a solid hope for a whole and healthy family!

Sincerely,
Jim and Jody Wolfe
Son Kirk/Camas Ranch

Date: Thu, 15 Feb 2007 06:25:56 -0800 (PST) 
From: Terie Cardella <teriesue3@yahoo.com>   
To: anna.rau@msu.umt.edu, feedback@montanapbs.org
CC: support@blueslide.com
Subject: Who's watching the Kids

I was curious to watch the broadcast "Who's watching the Kids?"

We parents of these kids, both satisfied and not, are always curious to see what the press is going to do. This show DID show two satisfied "customers" but certainly emphasized the suspicious and unsatisfied. The kids of these unsatisfied customers were not interviewed. Why not?

My story: I was not able to keep my daughter in control. I feared for her safety, my sanity, and the wellbeing of the health of the rest of my family. Cross Creek took her. She was there 15 months, and left a few months after turning 18. We took her back, disappointed that she hadn't completed the program, but what we got back was a loving, respectful, and interesting young lady, who respects herself and has much to offer. Her self-esteem issues had been addressed, and her attitude had changed dramatically. By being taken out of the family, she had a chance to reflect on and appreciate her life. We were able to reclaim our love in letters and phone calls. After a month, phone calls are every other week with the child and the alternate week with the family rep to give us updates on her progress (including school progress). In the meantime, my husband and I were able to heal our marriage which had suffered from years of turmoil. The program helps parents turn their lives around as well. The seminar program for parents is phenomenal and would help everyone.

This daughter had been difficult from a very young age. Psychiatrists and psychologists (very accredited ones) did nothing. I was never allowed to know how it was going. I just paid the bill. She let me know on a daily basis how she looked forward to my death. The situation spiraled downward to the point where I felt I needed to send her away. I sent her to Cross Creek, and do not regret it for a second. What is regarded as torture to some is a chance for a kid to change, for a family to heal.





Lots of these kids are really difficult to care for, and sympathy is not the way. Their attitudes of entitlement block them from development, and can be hurtful to those around them. I was lucky to find a safe harbor for her that helped her through these times. On the other hand, I sometimes wondered about the qualifications of staff members. I wondered what was this WWASP organization: rumors in the media, etc. But the times I visited the school, and the other parents, kids and staff members graduates I came in contact with made me realize that it was good. The media will always want to sell their wares.

The title of the show was very appropos, because my daughter's program watched my daughter. Certainly these days, with kids driving around in cars, drugs and alcohol use

out of control, parties without parents, and open campus schools, nobody else is watching the kids. Thank God the schools are - every minute of the day.

As far as suicide goes, it is rampant in our society today. If, on occasion, there is a suicide at the school, it's not the school to blame. It takes courage and guts to take these kids on. Thank God there are people who care enough about these kids to do it.

Sincerely,
A Happy Mom

Date: Wed, 14 Feb 2007 11:07:51 -0800 
From: JoAnn Ricks <jricks@earthlink.net>   
To: Anna.Rau@mso.umt.edu, feedback@montanapbs.org, support@blueslide.com
Subject: ATTENTION: ANNA RAU AND AARON PRUITT

This letter is in response to your PBS special Who's Watching Our Kids.

I agree that there are some schools of this nature that go overboard and make the good schools look bad. Spring Creek Lodge in Montana and Cross Creek Manor in Utah are wonderful schools that have helped so many children. I run a support group for the parents of these children. Not once have I seen or heard of any abuse or of any complaints from the hundreds of parents who send their out-of-control children. My own daughter attended Cross Creek Manor three years ago and she tells us all the time that we SAVED her life by sending her to this program. I would like to tell you our story; and believe me, our story is just one of the many parents and children whose lives have been changed by these programs.

Our daughter Danielle E. Joyce is currently 19 years old. She entered Cross Creek Manor when she was 14 years old. She graduated from the Therapeutic-Emotional growth program in February, 2004. We chose to stay for all levels and completed PC III. Danielle went on to graduate from Notre Dame High School in San Jose California. We are so excited that she has chosen to attend Oregon State University in 2007.

Prior to us choosing to place her in a program she was experiencing deep depression, suicidal attempts, running away, sexually active and extreme defiance. We were scared Danielle would kill herself or she would run away with a boy who was five years older and was a drug addict. She was into witchcraft, skipping school, stealing, smoking and drinking.

This program changed our lives forever. Our family became closer and when we did all the seminars, we learned so much about ourselves. We also received tools that have helped our other child and our complete family. This is an amazing program and I feel that it works because the child is not the only one who learns. If we hadn't participated in all the seminars, we wouldn't have been able to make the changes needed for Danielle's recovery and homecoming. I believe this program helps the whole family while giving the teenager a new purpose in life that includes goals and values.

Knowing what we now know we would certainly do it again. We have a 12 year old and if she needs this program, we wouldn't hesitate to send her to Cross Creek. In fact, I think all teenagers need to attend the leadership camps where they will experience the seminars and be able to set goals, have values, and have a lifetime purpose for their lives. Our younger daughter will be attending the leadership camps in 2007.

Below is an article I wrote to share our entire experience:

I would like to recommend the Cross Creek programs to any parent who has an out of control child. Our experience began five years ago. We have a daughter who began running away from home. She was out of control and hanging out with other children who were using drugs and alcohol. We found out that she was about to run away again and this time she was planning to go to the state of Washington to join a witchcraft cult. We didn't know where to turn. We talked to other people who had sent their children to Cross Creek and they had very good results.

We sent Danielle and have never regretted our decision. She graduated the program on February 29, 2004. She has come so far. Danielle is actually our grand daughter. We have had legal custody of her and her little sister for over 10 years. Her parents are both drug addicts and she was very resentful that we stepped in to help her and her sister. Since being in the program she has learned that being a victim of her parents caused her to go through uncontrollable depression, anger and deceit.

We agree with Danielle and truly believe that this program saved her life. She is now a very wonderful nineteen-year-old. She started the first ever Teen Alanon group at Cross Creek. She is standing in her integrity and is a very accountable young lady.

If we had to make a choice to send her sister to a program, we would not hesitate to choose Cross Creek Manor. I have never seen anything at the Cross Creek facility that wasn't absolutely appropriate. I have staffed a seminar with Cross Creek children and was amazed at how much they seemed to appreciate the help they were getting at the school. Our daughter has been home for almost three years and she has never told us anything negative about this program. I've asked her if she ever saw any abuse and she said that was ridiculous.

I highly recommend the programs at Cross Creek for any child. It has saved so many children. The most important thing that this program does is to provide seminars for parents. It is very important that the parents learn the same skills that their children learn. That way everyone is on the same page when the child comes home. This program is very unique in that it includes the whole family. I've seen divorced parents who never talked to each other come together as they completed the parent seminars. I am so committed to this program that I have staffed nine parent seminars, volunteering more than 600 hours in the last five years. I am also a family support group leader for the San Jose Support Group. I don't think any other program offers these valuable tools for the parents.

If you would like to contact me in person, please feel free to call me at (408) 244-6757. My email address is jricks@earthlink.net

Sincerely,
JoAnn Ricks
Cross Creek Parent
Retired High School English Teacher

Kathleen Zebzda
2 Woodbine Drive
Highland Mills, NY 10930
February 19, 2007

Anna Rau, Producer
Aaron Pruitt, Director
Montana PBS
via email

Dear Ms. Rau and Mr. Pruitt,

I viewed your documentary Who's Watching the Kids. I take issue with some of the content. I do not feel your program gave a true picture of the kind of students that are sent to the schools. The pictures of the students were nicely dressed, smiling in pictures. My question is: why did the families in your show choose to send their children away from home to a locked facility? Students in these schools are not your average acting-out teenagers. Many, like my son, had been to psychiatrists, counselors, therapists, educational tutors, special education, and the courts and the probation department. None of the typical interventions worked. My son was on the fringe of a gang, was doing drugs, was beginning to commit crimes and was on the road to death or prison. I chose to send him to a school, not because I couldn't handle him. I sent him away to save his life. I love him too much to stand by and allow him destroy himself.

Your program focused on a few unfortunate events. Suicide and death are never OK. No one can justify neglect or mistreatment of children who are placed in their care. I believe it was the intent of the editors to make it seem like there are numerous instances of abuse and mistreatment that are occurring on a regular basis. Further, it was implied that the schools, specifically Spring Creek Lodge, are hiding behind the local law enforcement that have been paid to look the other way by administrators. I believe this is tremendously inflammatory and grossly untrue. The reality is that the program schools do a great job with many difficult children. They do not tolerate abuse. Accidents and unfortunate incidents are very rare. I am curious why the incidents of abuse that were raised occurred in facilities that are no longer in operation, some closed for many years.

Over and over, the narrator used the phrase "sworn testimony" when introducing many of the accusations against some of the Program Schools. Because someone stands up and swears that something is true, does not make it so. I also believe that things can be other than they appear to be. In the one case at Cross Creek, could a student place tape over her own mouth to stop herself from speaking? Could it have been done as a joke between girls? It was an observation, interpreted by a parent across a room and through a door. Yet, his interpretation that this was a punishment was presented as the truth. It is his truth, because it is his belief. None of that makes it factual.

To be fair and to give a balanced picture, there are questions that could have been asked. How many staff in program schools was fired for such offenses? How many had a history of violence before entering the program? How many students had previously dropped out of school? How many students graduate High School each year? How many go on to college?

I am the parent of a program graduate. I feel truly blessed for having found the WWASP schools and the parent education that is part of the school program. I know that my son gave me a gift when his behaviors led him to a program school. I know that because of the school he was able to graduate high school. He was able to attend college, and is now gainfully employed full time as a manager of a busy restaurant. He would be the first to own his anger at me for sending him away, and then at the school for holding him accountable for his actions. He would also be the first to thank the program for giving him life tools, skills he uses every day to deal with frustration and disappointment; tools for standing up for himself and for learning how to respect authority. He would also be the first to tell you that he needed to be sent to a program and that his mother loved him enough to not accept anything less than his excellence.

New parents to the program, like the students, go through a process of learning to be accountable. We learn to identify and live by our values. We learn to be true to our word. We learn what it is to have a whole and healthy family, and that we don't have to settle for less from ourselves or from our children. New parents are in a period of grieving the absence of their child, the memory of the child as an innocent youngster. In this state, children can easily manipulate the truth to vulnerable parents. My son will tell you how he tried to push every button I had in an attempt to again be in control and get his way. I was grateful for a period of time without direct communication, because I needed time to regroup and begin to establish my control of my home.

I appreciate the interviews with program graduates. However, the excerpted portions of the interviews left a feeling of indoctrination and brainwashing. I am sure the participants did not agree with the way they were presented.

I understand the purpose of a documentary is to present information, but there is usually an agenda. The agenda of this documentary is clear: Program Schools are bad; Montana needs to wake up to stop the organized abuse of children and political power. I contend that this is not the case. Program schools serve a much needed purpose. The schools do not tolerate abuse. The schools know what is needed to assure a standard of excellence of care. The state does not need a drastic change in laws, as the current laws with minor revisions could continue the level of care that benefited my son and the children of innumerable other parents across the nation.

Dear Ms. Rau and Mr. Pruit,

I am writing this letter as a program parent of a child who is about to graduate a Premier school in Keokuk, Iowa (Midwest Academy) and as someone who has come in contact with a number of parents who have had, or do have students, at Spring Creek Lodge. I was asked to comment on your program so that a perspective on the situation is obtained.

My child was placed in a Premier school at age 17 after trying numerous avenues of treatment to assist her to function. She was unable to get up in the morning and go to school, when she was at school was not functioning well, stealing, lying, beginning experimentation with drugs and becoming alarmingly sexually active. We had run out of solutions at home after trying many. We discovered the Premier system, did our due diligence, and escorted our daughter to the school in July, 2005. If she had not gone willingly we would have had professional escorts assist in the transfer. They would have come in the middle of the night, using the element of surprise, and whisked her away. I was not excited about this option but definitely would have used it, and would recommend it to anyone who could not escort their child to the school directly. For us this needed to happen.

The Premier schools perform an essential function and any legislation that would impede their abilities to perform it would be very sad. I believe a Premier school would probably not be allowed in Wisconsin, and I think that is a black mark on my state. Considering that the students (some might call them juvenile delinquents or drug addicts) come from families that have broken down, and that in almost every instance (I am sure you can always find exceptions) local options have been exhausted. They work with a difficult, manipulative and troubled class of client. I think they do it amazingly effectively. There is also no doubt that there are considerable issues that all the parents have to deal with and many parents with considerable issues themselves, some more than others.

Your video discusses a case of a girl who may have had sexual abuse at home and makes it appear that the parents sent her to Montana to hide her from the authorities. It implies that the Montana authorities allowed her to be held, shall we say, captive at Spring Creek. This may all be true in this case. Having had experience with the police and child protective authorities in my state I am not sure that her being returned to Michigan would have magically fixed all her problems. I, like any concerned parent, am never ceased to be amazed at the cruelty to children that parents can provide. I also am aware of instances when the system saw, or should have seen that cruelty, and let the events unfold until disaster occurred, washing their hands of the situation in the end. Indeed, for that girl at that time in her life, being away at Spring Creek in a supportive, caring environment may have been the best option.

I am sure the government and public school authorities would love to get their hands on regulations to control these schools and expand their power. I would point out that many of these students are often the result of those environments and have failed them. Alternatives are necessary and useful. Different perspectives are needed.

I could go on for a considerable period of time discussing the situations, but I will end this letter here. I implore you to be very careful at 'fixing' a school that appears to be working well. If you would like further information from me or to interview my daughter please feel free to contact me. Sincerely,

Joseph S. Bernstein,MD
PO Box 138
Oostburg, WI 53070
920-564-2536
jsbernstein@gmail.com