

Senate Committee On Human Services, Mental Health, and Recovery,

Thank you so much for your efforts in working with survivors of the troubled teen industry.

We wanted to bring to your attention an organization called **Family Help and Wellness** (FHW) that is headquartered in **Salem, Oregon** that currently manages 21 wilderness therapy programs, residential treatment centers, and transition programs for adolescents and young adults in Utah, Arizona, North Carolina, Idaho, and Colorado.

Background About Family Help and Wellness

Family Help and Wellness manages Wingate Wilderness, Trails Carolina, Solstice RTC (formerly Samaya RTC), Asheville Academy for Girls (formerly Willow Glen Academy), Journey Home, Solstice East, Blue Fire Wilderness, blueFire Pulsar, Elevations RTC (formerly Island View RTC), Viewpoint Center (formerly Aspen Institute for Behavioral Health), Discover Seven Stars, Red Mountain Sedona, Journey Home East, Journey Home Young Adult, Foundations House, Equinox RTC, Trails Momentum, Uinta Academy, New Focus Academy, Sandhill Center (formerly Berlin Child Development Center, and Red Mountain Colorado (formerly Kokua Recovery).

In addition to offering business management services for the programs listed above, FHW operates an online admissions department that refers families to programs within their network. However, it is our understanding that calls are forwarded to them directly from the program's website, rather than going directly to the admissions departments at programs. This means that they identify themselves as working for specific programs, rather than as employees of FHW. This accounts for a lack of transparency in describing programs to parents, as they operate as third-party consultants and often refer parents to other programs in their network that they feel may be a better fit. For example, most parents are referred to wilderness programs in the network when they call to inquire about residential treatment centers owned by the same parent company.

Family Help and Wellness and its programs have relationships with and frequently receive referrals from educational consultants. The programs and consultants often encourage parents to use teen transport or escort services to transport their teens to the out-of-state programs.

FHW programs have also been accused of using deceptive marketing practices and false advertising. Many FHW programs are seemingly paying reputation management companies for fake google reviews from persons potentially in other countries like

Pakistan who are posing as parents. Their programs have also rebranded after lawsuits and now tout that they do not have histories of abuse, or do not disclose past lawsuits or investigations.

History of Program Affiliations and State Actions in Oregon

FHW was founded by Tim Dupell, the former Executive Vice President and CFO of Aspen Education Group, which was based in Cerritos, California. FHW is financially backed by Tim Dupell's Holding Company, Opal Creek Capital, and partners with private equity investors, Trinity Hunt Partners. Their portfolio management team includes former Bain Capital employees who worked on the Aspen Education Group project.

In 2009, the state of Oregon shut down two teen programs run by Aspen Education Group, including Mount Bachelor Academy after allegations of sexual roleplay and public humiliation and SageWalk Wilderness therapy after the death of a client. Other closed Oregon programs include North Star Center and Wellspring Oregon. Only New Leaf Academy remains open, as the school's original owners assumed responsibility for continued operation shortly after Aspen Education Group announced plans to close the program in 2011.

In the following years, most Aspen Education Group programs closed, citing "low enrollment"; however, many reopened with the same staff members under different program names with financial backing from FHW. This includes Elevations RTC (rebranded from Island View RTC), Viewpoint Center (rebranded from Aspen Institute for Behavioral Health), Asheville Academy for Girls (started by New Leaf Academy of Carolinas staff), and now-closed programs Copper Canyon Academy (which rebranded as Sedona Sky Academy and the boys' program Ash Creek Academy under new ownership), and Talisman Camps.

Tim Dupell and current FHW CEO, Steve Stradley, were also involved with the elder care industry, through the organization SunWest Management Services based in Salem, Oregon. The company declared bankruptcy in 2008, the same year that FHW was formed under the name "Wilderness Training and Consulting LLC".

While FHW is based in Oregon, they do not have a history of operating treatment programs in the state, although many individuals on their leadership team represented the Aspen Education Group programs shut down by the State of Oregon.

How This Applies to SB 749

Oregon continues to set precedents in responding to allegations of abuse at programs, adapting state regulations to protect young people, and ensuring that young people

involved in the child welfare system have the opportunity to remain in-state before considering out-of-state treatment options. However, parent companies located in Oregon that do not operate programs in the state are able to get away with not following state law by identifying themselves as a business corporation rather than residential care consultants or behavioral healthcare management organizations in corporate filings.

Currently, FHW is registered under the name “Wilderness Training and Consulting” as a Limited Liability Company in the state of Oregon and a foreign LLC in several other states. They identify themselves as a business consulting service in their records, while their website states they are a provider of behavioral healthcare programs. For the purpose of this bill, they should be obligated to register as residential care consultants with the Department of Human Services and to comply with the proposed standards.

Requiring consultants to provide parents with information about the license and abuse history of facilities, as well as about the names and educational background of people employed by the facilities would help parents make more informed decisions about appropriate placements for their child by taking into account the allegations of abuse against programs under the parent company. This information is seldom made publicly available.

Below are several links regarding the practices at some of the programs under the FHW umbrella:

Island View/Elevations RTC

<https://testkitchen.huffingtonpost.com/island-view/#troubled-teen-industry/>

Island View/Elevations RTC

<https://www.kuer.org/health-science-environment/2020-12-17/utah-has-seen-abuse-in-troubled-teen-programs-for-decades-now-momentum-slowly-builds-for-change>

Elevations RTC:

https://beta.documentcloud.org/documents/20428544-201211_officeoflicensing_islandviewelevations_investigations-inspections-compliance-history

Elevations RTC:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/490020026/Complaint-Against-Elevations-RTC>

Equinox RTC <https://info.ncdhhs.gov/dhsr/mhlcs/sods/2019/20190627-160430.pdf>

Solstice East <https://info.ncdhhs.gov/dhsr/mhlcs/sods/2020/20201223-011296.pdf>

Solstice East <https://info.ncdhhs.gov/dhsr/mhlcs/sods/2019/20190703-011296.pdf>

Solstice East

<https://law.justia.com/cases/north-carolina/court-of-appeals/2019/18-1158.html>

Solstice East:

<https://wlos.com/news/local/alleged-survivors-of-solstice-east-decry-abuse-neglect-in-protest-call-for-facility-closure?fbclid=IwAR27gnwgPkiEBqP17FCrP3F5At0NdyymN6g5SUK89ulh-nPGiuDC5Yi7Oa0>

Solstice East:

<https://www.thetimesnews.com/story/news/2021/03/04/solstice-east-teen-abuse-allegations-arise-state-former-clients/6868303002/>

Asheville Academy for Girls

<https://www.casemine.com/judgement/us/5914f16eadd7b0493497b2a6>

Trails Carolina

<https://www.blueridgenow.com/article/NC/20141201/News/606019477/HT>

Thank you,

Family Help and Wellness Program Survivors