

# Tough-love, American style



*peter mcdermott  
pure and uncut*

A RECENT article in the Scotsman quotes Janice Jess, a former coordinator of the Grampian Addiction Problem Service as saying that proposed drug courts will fail without the introduction of US-style residential rehabilitation facilities. Just how much does Janice Jess and her allies actually know about drug treatment in the USA?

Over the last ten years, almost all in-patient and residential drug treatment has come to a grinding halt, following years of over-charging by an industry that was feather-bedded because in-patient treatment was covered by medical insurance. With the introduction of the new Managed Care system though, insurance companies get to choose the type of treatment that patients can receive, and the lack of any evidence supporting better outcomes for in-patient treatment means that the industry has been decimated.

One area *has* seen phenomenal growth. Behaviour modification programmes for young people have undergone dramatic expansion over the last ten years. There are around 400 such programmes within the USA, some styled as boot camps or wilderness programmes. Others are locked door facilities, a cross between rehab and approved school or borstal.

For a mere \$4000 a month, you can send your child to such a facility where they run a programme based firmly in the tradition of the old US concept-house rehabs like Synanon and Straight.

Of course, getting your child to such a school might be something of a problem. They advise you to tell your child that you're taking a family trip to Disneyland. Alternatively, if your child is slightly less gullible, parents are encouraged to hire an approved team of 'escorts' – effectively hired kidnappers – who will accompany the child to their new home.

Once the child actually arrives in the school, parents are unable to visit them while they are in phase one of the programme – a period that is rarely shorter than three months, but can last an almost indefinite period, depending upon how defiant or oppositional the child is.

In order to keep down costs and avoid hiring trained medical staff, these facilities describe themselves as schools. To avoid regulation by the state, there has been an

increasing tendency to locate themselves outside the boundaries of the USA, with some of these schools being established in places like The Philippines, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Eastern Europe. Like the US prison building industry, these 'schools' may be the only economic opportunity in that particular area – a fact that makes it easier for the people to justify engaging in the process of brainwashing and torture which is the real commodity these schools are selling.

There is a growing movement of advocacy against these schools in the USA, and one of the websites, <http://www.teenadvocatesusa.homestead.com>, lists twelve children who have died in these 'schools' over the last few years – as a direct result of either negligence or downright abuse.

Earlier this year, the child protection authorities in Costa Rica entered a school that is a part of the Utah-based World Wide Association of Speciality Programmes. The school was closed over allegations of torture and child abuse and the director of the programme was arrested and is currently facing charges. Nevertheless, so persuasive are these organizations in their ability to scare parents, that many of the children were simply shipped off to the closest sister facility in Jamaica with parental consent.

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Whenever there have been attempts made by state agencies to enquire into the systematic patterns of abuse in these children's treatment facilities, senior officials tend to get mysterious phone calls and the investigation has been quietly dropped. Although these incidents have been investigated, the outcomes have been 'inconclusive'.

Could it have anything to do with the links between the major providers and donations to Republican Party Funds?

And can anyone seriously be suggesting that this is a model of 'treatment' we should import? ■

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