

Blog written by Deirdre Sugiuchi

I was five the year that Escuela Caribe, then known as Caribe Vista, was cited in U.S Senate Hearing on the Abuse and Neglect of Children in Institutions (1979). Children's advocate Kenneth Wooden, wanted to know why the State Department had done nothing to shut down Gordon Blossom's "boarding school," which he'd visited in 1974, noting abuses that included beating children with sticks, shaving them bald, and forced solitary confinement.

Nothing changed except the school's name. Caribe Vista became Escuela Caribe.

In 2011, after the publication of Julia Scheeres' New York Times best-selling memoir *Jesus Land*, and dozens of testimonials documenting abuse over the forty years of the facility's existence (beatings, forced exercise, solitary confinement, physical, sexual, spiritual and emotional abuse, rapes, etc.), New Horizons Youth Ministries and its D.R. branch Escuela Caribe closed shop. They were taken over by Lifeline Youth and Family Services. We alumni rejoiced. "Ding dong the witch is dead!" I emailed my peers.

We celebrated too soon. Because nothing changed. Many of the same staff remained employed. Escuela Caribe became Caribbean Mountain Academy.

Understand, I do not write this flippantly. I want to believe that people are good. That when people make promises they will fulfill them. That when an organization says they have changed they aren't lying. Maybe that desire to believe in people's best nature helped me survive Escuela Caribe- I'm not sure.

However, I can no longer ignore Caribbean Mountain Academy's warning signs (this links to a comprehensive list of warning signs of potentially abusive programs). It's a suspicion that has been building, but I'd planned to hold off publicizing until I visited myself. In October, Crosswinds sent personal letters inviting *Jesus Land* author Julia Scheeres, Kidnapped for Christ director Kate Logan, and me.

But then my favorite aunt died and I realized life is too short for me to waste it visiting Caribbean Mountain Academy on my own dime. Because it will end in the same place as it did in 2006 when I visited Escuela Caribe, me sitting in my hotel room writing "I want to believe" in my notebook but being unable to discount the facts- that at its inception, Caribbean Mountain Academy retained at least six Escuela Caribe staff members,* ensuring that the old methods of abusing kids would be remembered. Besides that- it bears too many hallmarks of an abusive program- it's located outside the jurisdiction of the United States, it restricts communication between its students and the rest of the world, it staffs its facility with former students, its staff is not required to have much experience working with children**, it has a level system, it does not allow students to follow a religion of their own choice, it is anti-gay. And all this is just me observing from the outside- I can't imagine what I would see if I went into the hive. And now I guess I will never know.

Instead, I'd rather encourage any parent who has their kid at Caribbean Mountain Academy or any long-term residential treatment program to withdraw, because you don't know what is happening, you can't, no matter what the staff tells you, and if you don't listen me now, years later most likely you end up like my father, thirty-five years after Wooden's warning, regretting ever sending your child away in the first place.

*These individuals were employed by an organization that professed that children must be broken in order to be fixed. They worked during a time when students, teenagers, were given swats and being sent to the Quiet Room (often for days) for minor violations, when students were being "slammed" against the wall for minor infractions. (Sugiuchi, *Unreformed* blog, 8/24/12).

**New hires are required to have a strong personal relationship with Christ, but only need a high school diploma or GED. The annual pay is only \$12,500, which leads one to assume that CMA's \$5000 monthly tuition is not being used to provide high quality staff. Unfortunately underpaid and untrained staff in an isolated environment will guarantee abuse...see the Stanford Prison Experiment if you need a case study. (Sugiuchi, Unreformed blog, 11/25/12).

***Doug Martin has extensively researched New Horizons Youth Ministries, Lifeline, and their political connections. You can read his latest report [here](#).

Response from Crosswinds

Deirdre,

I am very sorry to hear that you will not be taking the time to come visit the Caribbean Mountain Academy campus and see for yourself the program we are running that is vastly different from Escuela Caribe. I believe this trip would have been a positive time of healing for you in addition to gaining a clear understanding of our program for yourself, with your own eyes.

As you have never spoke to me or anyone at Crosswinds about our program or visited our program to see what we do in person, I would like to correct several blatantly false statements that you made in the post above, as well as explain the misleading statements made. I will first address the blatantly false statements:

/ it restricts communication between its students and the rest of the world

Unlike Escuela Caribe, Crosswinds allows anywhere from 10 minutes to half of each phone or video conference call with students-parents to be completely unmonitored and private. This gives our students the opportunity to speak openly with their parents and share things they may not feel comfortable sharing in front of staff. The remaining portion of the phone or video call is monitored as a crucial part of our therapeutic process. Families participating in our residential program are almost always struggling with serious communication issues. Whether it is poor communication skills on the part of the student, the parents, or both, one of the primary goals of our program is to help families learn how to communicate with each other in a healthy and effective way. Monitoring a portion of the phone calls allows our therapists to identify communication issues and then work through these issues with both the student and the family during their individual counseling sessions. As communication improves, less and less of the call or video are monitored, as it is no longer needed as part of treatment.

*/its staff is not required to have much experience working with children***

All of our in-house staff have extensive prior experience working with at-risk youth. In addition, we only employ licensed and qualified teachers, counselors, and other professionals. Our new Executive Director is coming to us with over 23 years of experience in the residential childcare industry.

/it does not allow students to follow a religion of their own choice

This is absolutely false. While our program is faith-based and we believe that Jesus Christ is the key to changing the lives of troubled teens, we are also respectful of each person's beliefs (as a matter of fact we currently have a Muslim student) and will never "shove our faith down someone's throat." In fact, we believe that does more harm than good to the healing of a child.

/it is anti-gay

This is absolutely false, Crosswinds does not judge on the basis of sexual orientation and has never and will never participate in or condone gay conversion therapy. This has nothing to do with our mission or goals. The source you cited is currently facing a class action lawsuit for writing misleading, false and defamatory content: <http://heal-online-exposed.org/>

| which leads one to assume that CMA's \$5000 monthly tuition

I am not sure where this number came from, because it is absolutely false. Our current posted tuition is \$2,500 per month. However, if a family is financially struggling we do whatever we can to subsidize this cost so they can afford treatment for their teen. The average monthly tuition paid by families currently in our care is \$1,250 per month.

I will now address the misleading statements:

/ it's located outside the jurisdiction of the United States

Although Caribbean Mountain Academy is located outside of the United States, both Crosswinds and Lifeline headquarters are not. We answer to a number of U.S.-based accrediting bodies, including COA and CSI. In addition, Lifeline is under stringent regulation and oversight from the state government.

/ it staffs its facility with former students

We have ONE former student working at our facility and he was given his position based on experience, character, and his incredible ability to help our students heal and learn. As a former student yourself, I am surprised that you would be an advocate of restricting a person in any way simply because their past includes time at a residential care program.

/ it has a level system

In order to be successful there must be a system. It could be called a "level system", a "grade" in schools, "belts" in karate. Regardless of the name of the structure of CMA's program, its philosophy and practice is completely different from that of New Horizons and it does not include a point system. Overall, the CMA system encourages and promotes positive behaviors and offers privileges for doing so.

I once again would like to express disappointment that you will not be joining us to visit Caribbean Mountain Academy and see our program for yourself. We love the students and families in our care and treat them with the utmost dignity and respect, something that we can tell you over and over again but without seeing it with your own eyes, you will not understand. Unfortunately, you continue to push parents away from a program that can truly benefit their family with NO firsthand information.