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Redmond wilderness school suspends operations

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Lake County sheriff's deputies served search warrant Monday at SageWalk Wilderness School's Redmond office

State DHS, Lake County investigating teen's death on first hike; offices searched

From KTVZ.COM news sources

A Redmond-based wilderness school said Tuesday it has agreed to suspend operations amid state and Lake County investigations into the death of a 16-year-old Portland boy on his first hike with the school, in a remote area east of Bend late last month.



Sergey Blashchishen's mother said her son had asked to go into wilderness school for troubled teens

Word of the halt to operations came one day after Lake County sheriff's deputies traveled from Lakeview and executed a search warrant at the Redmond office of SageWalk Wilderness School, as part of its continuing investigation into the death of Sergey Blashchishen.

The school issued a statement Tuesday indicating it had learned the Oregon Department of Human Services' Office of Investigations and Training is looking into the Aug. 28 death about 60 miles east of Bend.

Results of an autopsy conducted by the Lake County medical examiner have not been released, so it's not known yet if a cause of death has been determined. The teen's mother said she was told her son vomited, collapsed and died, despite efforts to revive him.

Michael Bednarz, executive director of the school, declined to comment on-camera Tuesday to NewsChannel 21, but provided the following written statement:

A Statement from SageWalk

SageWalk Wilderness School has received notice of an investigation by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Investigations and Training due to the recent death of one of our students that occurred on August 28. DHS has requested that we remove all students from SageWalk until the investigation is complete, and we are cooperating with this request.

In addition, local law enforcement is conducting an investigation and has executed a search warrant. We have not seen the affidavit for the search warrant and are therefore not in a position to discuss any factual matters or further details.

We firmly believe there to be no basis for these actions. At this time, the exact details surrounding the student's death are still being determined and autopsy results are not yet available.

SageWalk considers student safety our number one priority and is confident in a positive resolution to this investigation. Over the course of our 12 year history, our program has adhered to the highest standards of care and we currently meet or exceed all industry and state standards. We were the first wilderness program to be individually accredited by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools, and we are licensed by the State of Oregon to work with

students who are experiencing issues with substance abuse and are also licensed by the State of Oregon as both an Outdoor Youth Program and Private School.

Due to the limited information available, this is all we are able to communicate at this time.

Mike Bednarz, MS, MBA
Executive Director
SageWalk Wilderness School



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