

## Angela Smith

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**From:** "HEAL" <heal@heal-online.org>  
**To:** <angela@heal-online.org>  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 22, 2009 6:18 PM  
**Subject:** Fw: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information  
 (We've updated the exchange to include Mr. Church's last message on the matter. As you can see, he continues to refuse to provide fact-based information regarding his program. He makes blanket claims about success and non-abuse that are standard in the deceptive marketing practices of the industry. He has reneged his invitation for HEAL to visit the program because we had the nerve to request some assurances of access to all areas of the program, to speak privately with the kids, and to bring legal representation/private security and/or the media to insure our safety given the nature of things in Utah as explained in our e-mails. Please read from the bottom up. It is apparent what transpired here.)

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

**From:** [Brian Church](#)  
**To:** 'HEAL'  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 19, 2009 10:50 PM  
**Subject:** RE: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

Dear Ms. Smith,

The fact that my program happens to be based in Utah, does not make it a bad or abusive program. Your whole line of thinking is erroneous and sad. Your tactics, assumptions and arrogance is doing much more harm than good. It's too bad your efforts aren't being used in a productive way which could actually weed out the bad programs. Once again, you are painting all programs in the same light as a few bad apples. We don't do dog-and-pony shows (using this negative connotation really shows your true intentions of slamming all programs when you don't have a clue what you are talking about), and we don't have "employee only" areas --maybe some places do. Every other professional that is serious about learning about a program goes out and visits the program --often multiple times, some even spend a couple of days in the field. Your comment saying "...your unreasonable invitation to visit your program," is laughable. What should make you nervous is those programs who will not allow you to visit. Incredible. Yes, we always invite guests (and there are many) to spend as long as they want with kids --without staff in ear shot so the kids can converse freely. We invite kids to answer questions freely and honestly. Our students do so without the fear of retribution --that's not who we are. Again, we are not a punitive program and we do not have a level system. It sounds like the dog-and-pony show would be on your end with lawyers and security and such --unbelievable.

Ken was correct in saying that parents should do their research before sending kids to any program. I think any parent who loves their child should do the best they can to find a safe place for their child. I cannot comment on the rest of his remarks as I don't have the full text or the full context of such. I cannot speak for Utah licensing and how they react to parents reports. We do not have any experience there as we are not an abusive facility. All I can tell you there is that they are thorough with their licensing and safety procedures with us (Ken Stettler is not our direct licensor). It sounds to me as though your efforts should be directed at the schools you list below, if that is where the reports are coming from --I wouldn't know.

No need to respond as it is obvious that a productive conversation cannot take place. You don't believe a thing I write, you won't come and visit with us like adults, and you simply site cases that have absolutely nothing to do with our programs. Unfortunate. For the record, I am not trying to convince you of anything at this point. I don't need to defend my program to you. We change kids lives for the better and that is what it is all about. We certainly don't need your stamp of approval --we get that from the families who participate in our programs.

I am terribly, terribly sorry for whatever real life experience you or your volunteers may have experienced in a program as a parent of child. Abuse in any form is sickening and wrong.

Have a nice evening.

**Brian Church**  
 Vice President, Business Development  
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**From:** HEAL [<mailto:heal@heal-online.org>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 19, 2009 6:43 PM  
**To:** Brian Church  
**Subject:** Re: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

(This exchange is best understood if read from bottom to top. The purpose of this parenthetical is to alert bcc'd HEAL volunteers as well as website visitors regarding this exchange and advise that the first message below is the last message sent in the exchange as of 5:40pm, November 19th, 2009.)

Dear Mr. Church,

HEAL has much reason not to trust the licensing or regulation agencies of Utah. Ken Stettler told one mother that "Parents should really do their research before sending their children to Utah." This was after the mother had wished to file a complaint regarding abuse her daughter suffered at a Utah-based program. There are countless other examples from our experience with Utah authorities including the "pass the buck" mentality of the so-called accrediting agencies and the licensing department itself. It is apparent that accusations and redirection are the method for dealing with problems in Utah and this is irresponsible. John Ortiz refused to return the calls of countless families defrauded by Provo Canyon School in early 2009. In his report, he cited that "bad ranch dressing" was the primary complaint at Provo Canyon School, however, we are working with families right now who have reported rape of girls by staff, sexual abuse, negligence, physical abuse, and psychological abuse. And, the Department of Licensing doesn't want to hear anything "negative" about any program they license. This is not regulation and certainly doesn't provide a basis for confidence in your statements about your program.

Nowhere on our website do we state that your employees are abusive. We suspect your program of being abusive. And, we have shared the basis of those suspicions in previous messages. We have also given you the opportunity to submit information on your program to us to review so we will have additional information that may alleviate our suspicions in regard to your program. However, you refuse, and like most controlling program staff, you try to redirect with an unreasonable invitation to visit your program. We are all too familiar with the tactics of Utah programs and authorities. In 2003, a mother went to visit her son at a Utah program. The program gave her copies of her son's information and told her it was her copy. She took this copy with her and before reaching her hotel was arrested. The program had reported that she stole confidential documents. She spent 24 hours in jail and the charges were subsequently dropped. Another parent went to rescue his son from a program in Utah and he was threatened by program staff that he and his wife appeared intoxicated and that they would be arrested for public drunkenness and trespassing if they did not leave immediately without their child. Luckily, I was available and able to advise the parents to call the FBI and begin proceedings for kidnapping charges. The program backed down, but, not without these drastic measures. The fact that other abuses and intolerance are commonplace in Utah are all legitimate reasons to avoid visiting your program or your state.

If we were to consider your invitation, we would need some assurances and safeguards. Is this invitation extended to me or any representative of my organization? May we bring legal representation and/or the media? Will we have access to speak privately with children in the program? And, will we be permitted to bring private security for our own protection and safety? Will we have access to your entire program, including "employee

only" areas?

However, we would still wish to do a preliminary review of your materials as specified in prior messages and would require that such be provided with an additional written invitation from the owner/director of the program providing all included and permitted terms as requested above.

At this point, your evasive efforts to avoid questions or providing concrete information to persuade us regarding how your program is not like other programs in the industry have created a barrier to helpful dialogue. You should also know that your end note confidentiality disclaimer is not legally effective and may be unconscionable. See the following article: <http://www.slate.com/id/2101561>.

You may be familiar with the Government Accountability Office and the multiple findings of deceptive marketing by those in your industry. It is unreasonable to expect an advocacy organization to take unsupported claims by programs seriously. It is also unreasonable to expect an advocacy organization that has already experienced and witnessed the level of corruption and number of the "disappeared" in Utah to accept an invitation to Utah without assurances of safety and transparency. We are far too busy helping others to travel to Utah for a "dog and pony show". And, based on your e-mail responses, that is all we could likely expect to get for our efforts.

We have reasonable basis for our concerns regarding your program. Following are some questions we have about your program generated from your statements:

What is the success rate of your program and how is it determined?

If a child is not "helped" by your program, do you refer them to a longer program?

If you refer to longer stay programs, which ones do you refer to?

Thank you.

Angela Smith  
HEAL Coordinator

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

**From:** [Brian Church](#)

**To:** 'HEAL'

**Sent:** Thursday, November 19, 2009 12:43 PM

**Subject:** RE: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

Angela,

Once again, I appreciate your taking the time to respond and understand your good intentions. We are licensed by the state and follow the laws exactly as given to us --usually exceeding their expectations. The licensure process is stringent and detailed. While we understand that certain aspects of the laws don't go far enough, we welcome increased oversight and support additional work on that front.

Degrading people and basically saying specific employees are abusers because you have suspicions that a former employer may have had a case (or more) of abuse is just not right. Those employees may have no knowledge of the specific event. Hidden Lake Academy was a fairly large company with lots and lots of employees. I have known the named employees for many, many years and know their heart. Having said that, I understand that people can sometimes be fooled. This is why we do not and would not tolerate abuse in any form --if those mentioned employees were a party to anything remotely resembling abuse, they would be terminated. As a business owner, why would I tolerate abuse in any form which may be the downfall, or contribute to the closing of my business? The side benefit of not tolerating abuse is that we don't have to worry about our business from that perspective. From the human side (which is the most important thing) we don't tolerate abuse,

because it is WRONG. Our purpose is to heal children, not add to the problem. We have no interest whatsoever in that type of behavior. The named people do not "torture" others and it does hurt your credibility to make such claims.

As I said before, we are an open book. I have invited you to come out and witness for yourself what we do at Aspiro and our other related programs. If we were a company that was abusing children in any way, shape or form, do you think we would be inviting parents to come spend time (days, not hours) with their students while in our program? We also have a 2-3 day parent workshop at the mid-point (not at the end, like many) of our programs --this includes a great deal of student interaction with parents.

I guess I just don't understand why your organization doesn't specifically go after those programs/schools that have an obvious pattern of actual abuse --and help rid the world of bad people who do bad things. We want to help kids and their families to heal, learn and grow in a safe environment. Again, I believe this is what you want as well.

I know the history of our industry. My father was one of the original three partners that started the SUWS program before it was purchased by Aspen. I personally never heard of or witnessed abuse in any form while I was involved. CEDU was the originator of therapeutic boarding schools, and obviously there are throngs of former employees who have started programs in subsequent years (pre and post closure). Some of the same terms would obviously be used. We don't have any history dating back to CEDU roots --and don't believe in Behavior Modification as mentioned prior. If there was abuse at their facilities, and people were not terminated --if procedures were not changed to solve the problem, they should be closed down. I don't know --I was not there and was not involved with the legal action.

I know we can bat this back and forth --I do appreciate your desire to help educate parents. When they are searching for programs, they are often in a desperate place --that is not conducive to asking the right questions and being thorough. I worry for those families who end up in the wrong place. I will not bother you further...

Best wishes in your endeavors,

Brian

**Brian Church**

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**From:** HEAL [mailto:heal@heal-online.org]

**Sent:** Wednesday, November 18, 2009 12:10 AM

**To:** Brian Church

**Subject:** Re: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

(I am blind-copying some of our volunteers on this response to give an example of how to respond to an e-mail message such as yours. We've included the previous sentence only to notify those volunteers of the reason for

their receiving this message.)

Dear Mr. Church,

Thank you for contacting HEAL. We are extending this invitation to Aspiro Wilderness Program.

HEAL is not an unreasonable organization. What we require, in order to appease our minds in regards to your program, is as follows:

1. We require a signed letter from the director of your individual program stating that all information provided to us by said program is true to your program and accurate and complete in detail.
2. A blank copy of all waivers, contracts, and program rules and regulations as told to parents/required for parents to sign as well as those given to children enrolled in the program.

If upon receiving and reading such information our organization finds that the children in your program are not being abused, meaning there are no red flags or warning signs matching in word or spirit those as can be found at [www.heal-online.org/warn.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/warn.htm) or [www.isaccorp.com](http://www.isaccorp.com), we will remove your qualifying program from our site and in its place we will put up an apology to your program for judging the program erroneously for one month's time. However, if upon receiving the requested documents we find that your program continues to raise red flags for us, we will continue to exercise our rights to free speech and tell the world exactly what we think of your program based on the information we currently have and any further information we gather based on materials provided. In addition, we will not remove any program listed as confirmedly abusive from our website. This offer is extended only to unknown or suspect programs.

Our number one goal as an organization is to protect children from harm. When we suspect an organization or facility to be causing harm to children, we post them as suspect. If we have even one survivor of the program contact us with their story of abuse, we list the program as confirmedly abusive.

We have given you the opportunity to correct this matter. If in fact your program does not violate civil or human rights guaranteed, even to children, under the US Constitution and the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and does not meet the criteria as described above of an abusive program, we will take the actions stated. We believe this is fair and just. Our goal is to protect children and families from unscrupulous programs that make money by abusing children.

You may send the requested materials enumerated above to: HEAL, 126 SW 148th St., Suite C100-422, Seattle, WA 98166-1984.

This is a reasonable means of settling the matter. There are multiple reasons our organization prefers not to visit Utah. I'm sure if you are familiar with the abuses and corruption in the state of Utah, that you will understand our concerns and why handling the matter in the form you are invited so to do above is the best course of action.

Q: how can you indict employees based on the fact that they once worked for a program who you claim is abusive (without any proof)?

A: Hidden Lake Academy is confirmedly abusive. Brad Carpenter and Josh Watson include Hidden Lake in their histories. <http://www.heal-online.org/hiddenlake.htm> Hidden Lake followed the same or similar methods of CEDU. CEDU was based on a cult called Synanon. For information on CEDU, see <http://www.heal-online.org/cedu.htm> and links. You, Brian, worked for SUWS prior to and after the Aspen Education Group takeover. Aspen Education Group is well known for using coercive and abusive methods and has recently seen deaths and allegations of abuse and negligence at multiple facilities.

Q: Have those employees been convicted of something? Background checks are unreliable as the criminal justice systems nationwide do not have a shared database. See: <http://www.spontaneous-insight.com/resources/12506/privacy,-reliability-issues-put-background-checks-on-trial:-associated-press-dec-2005.php> and <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7467732/>. In addition, having worked for an abusive institution like Hidden Lake Academy, it is surprising that they would use that to elevate themselves career-wise by listing it as a reference. This suggests a support of the methods used at Hidden Lake Academy which are known to be

abusive, torturous, and based on the cult practices of Synanon/CEDU. For some recent information on CEDU, visit <http://www.heal-online.org/cedu111209.pdf>.

Q: How can you possibly know if they did not leave a particular company because they suspected something bad might be going on?

A: If they suspected something bad was going on, why didn't they report it to authorities? And, if they knew something bad was going on, why would they use that facility as a way to promote their career since an informed facility would know that the former employer was an abusive facility and such a reference should hurt their chances of future employment especially if it suggests that they are willing to ignore abuses and avoid taking responsibility as is required by law when dealing with a child abuse situation? Someone willing to cover up for an abusive facility is as guilty as the direct perpetrator. This is why independent regulation of your industry is so important.

Q: Do you understand that often times employees simply change jobs to gain a different perspective or experience --or to be promoted in their responsibilities as anyone would do in any line of work?

A: We do not believe it is appropriate to torture others to gain a different experience or perspective and that doing such for the purpose of learning more about human nature is lacking merit in a post-Nuremberg era democracy.

Regarding the HEAL website:

Our Coordinators and Work History/Experience

[www.heal-online.org/help.thm](http://www.heal-online.org/help.thm)

The News Articles Exposing Your Industry

[www.heal-online.org/news.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/news.htm)

[www.heal-online.org/newsarchive.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/newsarchive.htm)

Some Lawsuits

[www.heal-online.org/provocases.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/provocases.htm)

[www.heal-online.org/bethelsuits.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/bethelsuits.htm)

<http://www.heal-online.org/slsclass.htm>

For more, visit [www.heal-online.org](http://www.heal-online.org) and use the Search Box to look up terms such as "abuse" or "lawsuit".

Legislation

HR 911: <http://www.heal-online.org/hr911problems.pdf> (This document explicates on the experiences and qualifications of most of our volunteers/coordinators.)

I-999 (2008): <http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/text/i999.pdf> for an initiative we filed in Washington state in 2008.

Government Hearings

[www.beyondbusiness.net/congress.htm](http://www.beyondbusiness.net/congress.htm) (part 2 linked on this page, it takes a while to load)

HEAL's Guest Lecture at the University of Washington

[www.heal-online.org/uwlecture.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/uwlecture.htm)

Some of our coordinator's survivor statements and actions:

<http://www.heal-online.org/provocanyon.htm> also see [www.provotruthexposed.com](http://www.provotruthexposed.com) for video and more. (HEAL HQ & HEAL-CA-formerly)

<http://www.heal-online.org/kids.htm> (HEAL-KY)

<http://www.heal-online.org/swiftriver.htm> and <http://www.heal-online.org/adirondack.htm> (HEAL-NY)

[www.heal-online.org/turnwinds.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/turnwinds.htm) (HEAL-IL)

If you review the above links, you will see that your argument that our statements and opinions are baseless are completely erroneous. We've answered your questions and shown where the answers are available through our website. We have also given you an opportunity to have your program removed by following the instructions at the beginning of this message. Attacking our organization because you disapprove of our methods of dispersing information is unprofessional. You've been given an opportunity to provide us with information to clear up any misunderstandings regarding your practices. Attempting to undermine our confidence in the courts, any government investigations, media research, and our own personal experiences is very manipulative and suggests a redirection instead of a move towards honesty, integrity, and transparency. We look forward to reviewing your materials. Please make sure all items requested are included or we will not consider your program for review.

Sincerely,

Angela Smith  
HEAL Coordinator

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

**From:** [Brian Church](#)

**To:** 'HEAL'

**Sent:** Tuesday, November 17, 2009 9:36 PM

**Subject:** RE: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

Ms. Smith,

Thank you for such a quick response. While I completely respect your wishes to protect children -- and I agree totally with your right to free speech, I am saddened by your approach. If you truly believed in your mission, I would think you would take me up on my offer to have you come visit our program and interact with our clinical staff and observe our activities. Your claim that there are no good programs is simply untrue, and an extremely sad outlook on our world... especially when there are sincere people who have invested their entire life (such as myself) in this undertaking. You and your organization cannot understand the heart of every person who is in this line of work. I agree that there are many programs that are not good, that may be abusive, that should even be closed down. Many of those on your list of closed programs are better off that way.

We welcome additional oversight. Programs that are doing good work with kids and families should welcome the opportunity to improve and become more safe. Are you suggesting that every program in the country should simply close their doors? Given the state of things these days, that would be a colossal disaster. Frankly, I don't care if we are listed on your website or not. The fact that you have many programs listed on your website that I know well --and know the people extremely well. I know that if you did any kind of personal research (i.e. in person, on site), some of these programs would not be listed. We have never had an issue of abuse arise --I would invite you to show me that evidence if it is out there. One more thing: as a business owner, I would never tolerate anyone being on our staff who was convicted of any type of abuse. If there were a pattern of any kind

(convicted or not) --we would not have that person remain as an employee. I can tell you sincerely that we recently terminated an employee over issues that do not even come close to being "abuse" (this is how strongly we believe in this issue). I actually left a job a number of years ago because I wasn't comfortable with things. Our referral sources would cease to send families our way if there was even the first sniff of abuse going on. This alone would virtually end our program. If you knew our leadership team, you would understand that tolerating abuse in any form is simply unacceptable. I don't suppose you will ever know us, so I suppose this argument is futile.

Finally, and I bring this up simply for my own understanding, how can you indict employees based on the fact that they once worked for a program who you claim is abusive (without any proof)? Have those employees been convicted of something? How can you possibly know if they did not leave a particular company because they suspected something bad might be going on? Do you understand that often times employees simply change jobs to gain a different perspective or experience --or to be promoted in their responsibilities as anyone would do in any line of work?

I have looked through your website and can see no personal information on anyone running your site. I would like to know the story behind what precipitated the beginnings of this site. The fact that your site is not based on any kind of evidence gives it little credibility, and I think most people see it as such. It is not my intention to antagonize or upset anyone, I simply wish you would focus your attention and go after those where very REAL problems may exist. Again, I think many, many programs should be scrutinized closely and some shut down altogether --in fact, I would support you in that effort. The difference is that I would go out and get the evidence before painting with such broad strokes. There is an incredible need out there for quality programs --we only hope that parents can sift through the maze to find the ones that really are in it to help children and families. I found your advice to parents, "At this time, we recommend you seek local solutions, primarily family therapy," to be extremely naive. Most parents that have reached the point of needing our type of intervention have been doing just what you suggest for years... with no success. Parents who love their children will go to any length to find something that works for them. Again, we all hope their find somewhere safe and productive where healing can take place.

It is not my expectation that you will take our program off your website. I am just trying to get a better understanding of what it is you are trying to do here. I think you (your group) and I are really trying to achieve the same goal here and that is to help teens and families live happy, productive, fulfilled and healthy lives.

Respectfully,

Brian

p.s. we are not a boot camp, we are not a behavior modification program and we do not use a level system --we don't believe in them --nor do we believe they are necessary with the students we work with. To differentiate ourselves, we say we are a "Wilderness Adventure Therapy" (WAT) program. We are not a typical wilderness program --big difference. Of course there are a very few students who, in the end do not gain lasting growth from having been with us --we are a very short term program. The vast majority, however, appreciate what they have accomplished and often they ask to come back a second time. Many even ask to come back to do internships, etc.

**Brian Church**

Vice President, Business Development

**Aspiro Group**

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[www.aspiroprograms.com](http://www.aspiroprograms.com)

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**From:** HEAL [mailto:heal@heal-online.org]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 17, 2009 5:18 PM  
**To:** Brian Church  
**Subject:** Re: Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

Dear Mr. Church,

Thank you for contacting HEAL. If you believe your program is listed on our site in error, please follow the directions for review at [www.heal-online.org/helpteen.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/helpteen.htm). Many of your staff come from abusive facilities. And, since Utah allows the industry to be self-regulated, we recommend against any parent subjecting a child to a program in Utah as there is no proper assurance of protection for children in Utah programs.

If after submitting your program to our review process we find our suspicions regarding your program are in error, we will remove your program from our watchlist. However, if reports of abuse are on file regarding your program or such reports are submitted regarding your program, you will not be removed or will again be added to the watchlist in the event of such existing or future report(s).

Sincerely,

Angela Smith  
 HEAL Coordinator

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

**From:** [Brian Church](mailto:Brian.Church@heal-online.org)  
**To:** [heal@heal-online.org](mailto:heal@heal-online.org)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 17, 2009 3:49 PM  
**Subject:** Aspiro Wilderness Program in Utah Staff Information

To whom it may concern:

I am trying to figure out why you would tell families not to put their students into one of our programs. We are an open book and would be more than happy to have you come visit our program and meet our staff personally --maybe even spend some time on the trail. We are not a boot camp --and are very different from the more traditional trekking wilderness programs. We are licensed by the state of Utah which has the most stringent licensing practices in the country.

To help you with your spreadsheet, I am also one of the principal owners of the companies. Yes, Aspiro, Kairos and Vantage Point are all owned by the same company. Randy does not work with Allen Cardoza. Randy was on Allen's LA radio program one time last year. Michael Escalante has worked for Anasazi and Outback. I can give you much more information about our staff, but why? If any parent asks where our staff has worked, we tell them.

While there may be some programs out there that are not in this field for the right reasons, we are doing it because of our love of these kids and their families. You will notice from our website the varied activities the students get to participate in; we don't withhold information such as the time of day, how far we will hike in a day. Our students actually get high quality backpacking gear and food --we also allow kids to have some fun in the program (that may be a bit different from the norm).

Please don't paint us all with a broad brush. We are less expensive by far than many of the programs and are in it to help save families in crisis.

I welcome your feedback or questions.

My best,

**Brian Church**

Vice President, Business Development

**Aspiro Group**

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