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Parents with out-of-control teens sometimes have to resort to enrolling their child in an alternative placement program. (iStockphoto)

Unfortunately, the chances of never dealing with this kid again are slim to none. Any officer who has spent time working with teens and their families as a juvenile officer, school resource officer, in community policing or just working a regular beat has, at one time or another, questioned the validity of the juvenile justice system.

Officers that work juvenile cases often find themselves doing more social work than investigating crime. This is not to imply that young people are less dangerous or do not commit crimes like adults. To the contrary, teens can be unpredictable. They do not have life experiences to influence their decision making nor do they respect or comprehend long term consequences. These factors can lead to risk taking and/or poor judgment, even by a good kid who has found himself boxed into a bad situation.

The one time I was knocked flat on my backside was by a 12-year-old boy who refused to go to school. It was a routine call. I went in the house thinking it was a waste of my time. When the boy refused to get up from his chair and go with his mother, I reached out to grab his arm. Like a flash he jumped from the seat and charged straight into me, propelling both of us across the room and onto the floor. I have no idea what he was thinking, but it earned him a ride down to the county jail. However, because we don't have a juvenile facility in our community, he was seen by a probation officer, then released to his mother and was home before the school day was over.

#### **Alternative Placements for Juvenile Offenders**

##### **When parenting fails**

Volitta Fritsche  
2008 Oct 28

Juvenile center, boot camp, therapy, boarding school, Christian alternative, what's right for the troubled teen? Why should we care? We're cops, not their parents, pastor, probation officer or the judge. We did our part when we responded to the call and filed the charges.

Situations like this had me looking for alternatives for families in crisis. When parents, and even sometimes the teens themselves, ask for help, it's helpful to have something to offer them.

Through the years there's been a lot of talk, both pro and con, about boot camp-type programs. More recently the negative publicity received by some has given these programs a black eye. However, our department ran a successful military style deferral program for 14 years. Drill Instructors from our local National Guard Armory volunteered their services, along with school personnel and local counselors. The participants were instructed in physical activities, toured the jail, given time locked in a cell to reflect on their behavior, fed jail food and evaluated by our counselor. These evaluations were discussed at the end of the program with their parents and referral information was provided for follow-up. Our recidivism rates were below the national average.

The internet offers an unprecedented number of resources for families with troubled teens. However, trying to digest the information can be overwhelming. According to Dave Arslanian, Admissions Director and Co-Founder of The Eagle Ranch Academy in Utah, there are over 3,000 programs that claim they help troubled teens and young adults. Arslanian said, "Unfortunately, as in anything, there are good ones and bad ones."

Lifelines Family Services claim that "specialty schools" have emerged over the past 25 years as the residential option for teens boasting the highest success rates.

A specialty school is typically comprised of the following: behavior modification, daily self-esteem and character-building courses, emotional growth seminars, parent education seminars, family weekends, leadership skills and mental health services.

Eagle Ranch Academy (ERA) takes it a step further and incorporates physical fitness and devotes four to five hours a day to an individual academic program. Arslanian said, "Our emotional growth seminars, graduation workshops and our aftercare program are three very important components unique to ERA and are instrumental in our success."

There are several companies that offer individual and family assessments and make referrals to programs they believe will fit a family's need. Paula Arriola at Parent Hotline said, "If a private boarding school is not an option for a family, they might consider a program that allows them to work with their teen at home."

Parent Hotline's Home Solutions Program consists of two choices. The first shows parents how to stop being ignored or walked on by their teen. The educational and tutorial video program shows parents step-by-step action they can take to change their teen's behavior. This do-it-yourself program will cost the family \$199. The second choice consists of a seven-day intensive intervention and assessment at a residential care center and an outlined follow-up program at home.

Eagle Ranch Academy also offers free assessments to families. Owner Dave Arslanian said, "We are not interested in just filling a bed; we are interested in helping parents help their child in the most appropriate way. The internet can make any program look good. We have already done the research and we continue to update it regularly. We don't make the decision for the parent; we simply help make the decision easier."

According to Arslanian, recommended programs will range in cost from \$2,000 to \$12,000 per month. The length of the programs will range from 30 days to 12 months, depending on the issues and needs of the child.

As you can see, these programs can be expensive. Surprisingly, grants and scholarships are available for some. Depending on the program, private insurance companies may also cover some of the cost. To assist families in this area, ERA employs an insurance specialist on site and has a loan and funding consultant available.

Obviously there is help available for the family who has the diligence to work through their troubles. The problem is finding the right match for their situation and the resources to see it through.

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