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## Founder Of Greenbrier School For Girls Admits He Is Responsible For Teens Death

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BY, JACK SWINT – WV NEWS

Documents Now Show L. J Mitchell Admitted Negligence In Ryan Lewis's Suicide

*"Alldredge Academy Inc, Ayne Institute and L. Jay Mitchell hereby acknowledge that they were personally responsible for the safety and well being of Ryan Lewis while he was in their care and custody and that they were personally responsible for returning Ryan Lewis safely to his parents. They hereby acknowledge that they failed in that responsibility...."* Signed by L. Jay Mitchell and notarized on April 17, 2006.

On February 12, 2001 fourteen year old Ryan Lewis (pictured to the left) hanged himself with a tent rope after showing an Alldredge Academy wilderness camp counselor where he had slashed his forearms with a knife. It is reported that the teen actually turned over the knife to staff and told them; "take my knife before I hurt myself more." Instead, the instructor "exacted a promise" from Ryan that he wouldn't hurt himself again and returned the knife back to the teen.



Ryan Lewis

Ryan, like other troubled teens, was enrolled in the 90 day wilderness philosophy program in hopes of gaining insight and help into his psychological problems and to learn about himself in a surrounding that staff members referred to as "search and rescue."

The very next day Ryan hanged himself with a tent rope. Like other troubled teens, Ryan was enrolled in the 90 day program in hopes of gaining insight and help into his psychological problems and to learn about himself in a surrounding that staff members referred to as "search and rescue."

Almost immediately, the director of the Academy, Lionel Jay (L.Jay) Mitchell took the approach that Ryan had not intentionally tried to kill himself. In fact, he told WV News recently that his opinion was Ryan wasn't suicidal, and that the boy was just seeking attention because he wanted out of the program. Mitchell stated that neither himself, staff nor Alldredge Academy were negligent in the death. It was just a tragic accident.

Paul Nusbaum, then director of the Department Of Health & Human Resources (DHHR) disagreed with Mitchells contentions and filed an ORDER to cease and desist the operation of Alldredge and close it down because their investigation found numerous violations in the day to day operation of the Academy. The DHHR wanted to close it down because of the likelihood other teens were in immanent danger if Alldredge remained open.

Tucker County prosecutor, "Mont" Miller investigated Mitchell and staff as well for neglect that resulted in the death of Ryan Lewis. Mitchell and camp counselor John Weston White were indicted on felony charges by way of the county grand jury. Shortly thereafter, Mitchell hired an attorney and was able to get Kanawha County Judge Duke Bloom to throw out the DHHR's closure order and not only allowed Alldredge to remain open and operating, he also allowed Mitchell to change the name of the facility.

Ironically, according to documents we located from the Government Accountability Office, both Kanawha and Tucker County authorities overlooked the fact that Alldredge was also illegally operating the facility on US Forrest property without paid permits or usage forms.

Not long after Judge Blooms ruling, the Tucker County prosecutor decided to drop the felony charge of neglect against both Mitchell and White if the company, Alldredge, would entertain a plea bargain against the actual corporation for neglect and pay a \$5,000 fine.

Mitchell agreed to that offer, which kept him out of jail and not convicted personally for Ryans death. According to WV law, no one convicted of a crime of neglect resulting in death can have a permit from DHHR to operate a facility like Alldredge. Being a former attorney, Mitchell knew this when he agreed to pleading out the corporation instead of himself personally.

Sources report that dismissing the felony charges against Mitchell, and subsequent plea agreement, were also supported and approved by Tucker County Circuit Court Judge Andrew Frye.

According to media reports, Ryan's father, Paul Lewis spoke out about the Alldredge program saying that..."Our family was duped into believing that caring people would help Ryan, who was struggling with a learning disability and clinical depression. We thought these were professionals who knew what they were doing. We had no idea that their interest was profit, not healing."

Mr. Lewis went on to testify before the House Committee that conducted an investigation into deaths that were occurring at these private camps and facilities. Chair George Miller (D-CA) said that these programs "are governed by a weak patchwork of state regulations. In many states, these programs operate without regulations, licensing, or accreditation of any kind, despite the often exorbitant price of tuition. Parents...send their children to these programs because of the promise that staff members will be able to help children straighten their lives out. In far too many cases, however, the very people entrusted with the safety, health, and welfare of these children are the ones who violate that trust in some of the most horrific ways imaginable"... And that, "...No federal agency keeps official data about the number of children enrolled in private residential treatment programs, despite that fact that children are typically transported across state lines sometimes even by force in order to be enrolled in the programs. This is an outrage." Several years have passed since Ryan's death. During this time, new facts and other cases have come to light of

additional abuse, injury and deaths that occurred both before and after Ryan's death. These facilities were also owned and operated by L. Jay Mitchell in WV, Utah and Arizona. In all cases, Mitchell always maintains that he personally was not responsible. That these were all either unfortunate and or tragic accidents.

An investigation into these practices also brought to light an industry known as "teen transports" that actually are hired out by parents of troubled teens to deliver them to boot camps, wilderness programs and troubled teen facilities across the country. "Agents" of these companies actually sneak into the sleeping child's bedroom in the early morning hours, wake them, dress and whisk the teen out of the safety of their homes into an awaiting vehicle under the cloak of darkness. These "transports" are conducted either with the teen's cooperation, or by force that includes handcuffs, mace and tear gas. (See story link below) The cost for this service ranges from \$1500 up to \$6,000 depending on the needs and where the troubled teen is going. The transport agents themselves come from former military and or law enforcement backgrounds. At least one media story we found included the arrest of the transport agent for beating a youth who was handcuffed behind their back.

***In Closing,***

L. Jay Mitchell currently is the founder and president of the Greenbrier Academy for Girls in Pence Springs WV. Over the past two weeks we have been communicating with Mitchell both on the phone and through e-mail. Mitchell maintains his stance that he has never personally been negligent in the care, safety and responsibility of any student in any of his programs.

Mitchell stated specifically, in Ryan Lewis's death, that he never admitted being negligent or at fault.

On January 20th, 2011 we were sent a copy of a legal agreement dated, signed and notarized on April 17, 2006 by Mitchell and his wife Teri Mitchell, which clearly states that... "L. Jay Mitchell hereby acknowledges that they were personally responsible for the safety and well being of Ryan Lewis while he was in their care and custody and that they were personally responsible for returning Ryan Lewis safely to his parents. They hereby acknowledge that they failed in that responsibility...." We spoke with two attorney's who viewed this document, and both concur that Mitchell freely admits that he was indeed negligent in the care, safety and well being of 14 year old Ryan Lewis. And that Mitchell also freely signed the same statement that he hereby acknowledges that he failed in that responsibility.

The only question left to consider? What can be done about it now?

End Of Story,  
Jack Swint – Publisher  
WV News

Anyone wishing a copy of the actual notarized Mitchell document please e-mail us at:

[WestVirginiaNews@gmail.com](mailto:WestVirginiaNews@gmail.com) Please send your e-mail, fax number or mailing address.

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