

## Teen Challenge: Sex abuse and sexual predators

by **dogemperor**

Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:08:50 PM PDT



I've written quite a lot on the subject of coercive "behaviour modification" facilities in past--including **legislative efforts to stop the industry in its tracks** as well as exposes of **their heavy usage as a dominionist "parallel economy" alternative to legit mental health** and **info on gross abuses in these facilities**.

Over the next few days, we are going to focus on a specific chain of these facilities (which have been compared to Abu Ghraib)--Teen Challenge, a chain of Assemblies-run "faith based rehabs" that was the target of a "get out of jail free" deregulation of the "kiddie gulag" industry in Texas by none other than George W. Bush.

In our latest installment, we now touch on disturbing subjects--sexual abuse (including a known child molester as a Teen Challenge facility manager) both in Teen Challenge and its parent denomination.

**dogemperor's diary** :: ::

### ***Child molesters in the "Christian" teen rehab? Heaven help us!***

The pattern of abuse doesn't stop there, either. One of the more decidedly shocking results of Teen Challenge setting up shop in states with little or no regulation of "Faith-based children's homes" is of a known multi-offense sexual assaulter and child molester *running* one of the Teen Challenge homes in Winthrop, ME--namely, **Shondi Fabiano**, listed officially as a co-head of Teen Challenge New England by the website of the Northern New England District of the Assemblies of God, and **who is officially listed as a lifetime-registered sex offender** for second-degree child molestation and sexual assault in the third degree. An online check of sex offender registries, including the Florida sex-offender registry run by Florida Department of Law Enforcement, also shows **Shondi Fabiano also has a history of 2nd degree sexual assault conviction in Kent, RI**. (To give you an idea just why this may be an issue: **3rd degree sexual assault** in Rhode Island is essentially statutory rape of a 14- to 16-year old minor by a person over the age of 18, **2nd degree sexual assault** is sexual assault of an incapacitated person or sexual assault using force or coercion, and **second degree child molestation** is what is generally termed as frank pedophile rape--sexual assault of a minor under the age of 14. And this was probably **not** a case of "I thought he was legal"; Fabiano would have been nearly 24 years old at the time of the offense)

Fabiano apparently (at least per a search of the records site for Rhode Island's criminal courts) **committed the crimes 10 years ago under her maiden name Shondi Barbato**; she was originally charged with 1st degree child abuse (which involves **sexual penetration of a child under the age of 14**). It also appears Fabiano (under her maiden name of Barbato) has a wee bit of a chequered history even aside from kiddy-diddling; **she has a conviction for fraud** (specifically attempts to obtain money under false pretenses, insurance fraud, and conspiracy) and a **dismissed charge of possession of a controlled substance**.

To date, **Fabiano is still head of Teen Challenge New England** despite not only state laws that prohibit sex offenders and persons convicted of crimes against children from working in children's homes but despite media publicity as well. (In fact, technically Fabiano should not legally be able to work at Teen Challenge at **all**, much less have her residence listed as Teen Challenge in Maine's sex offender registry; **Maine has some pretty strict laws** regarding contact with minors by registered sex offenders.)

And there is a risk of real sexual abuse--in fact, there are indications that sexual abuse is (sadly) not unknown at Teen Challenge facilities--including the very facility that George W. Bush gave the "get out of jail free" card to. From the Texas Freedom Network report that first broke the info on massive abuse in Texas "faith-based" facilities:

There is no question that eliminating basic health and safety standards made operations easier for a few faith-based programs in Texas, however the lack of minimum standards has threatened the safety of those participating in the program. In 1998, a boy filed suit against Dallas Teen Challenge Boys Ranch and Assemblies of God, alleging that a counselor, who was a convicted drug trafficker, sexually molested him and two other boys. The lawsuit also claimed that the ranch's Executive Director, the church and the ranch's board knowingly hired people with criminal histories to serve as counselors. (Austin American-Statesman, 5/13/1998)

The **Lubbock Avalanche-Journal** gives more details:

DALLAS (AP) - An 18-year-old man and his parents sued the Assemblies of God and the church's ranch for troubled youths Tuesday, claiming the youth was molested by a counselor at the center two years ago.

The alleged victim was 16 when he went to Dallas Teen Challenge Boys Ranch in Winnsboro in January 1996. According to his lawsuit, a counselor and convicted drug trafficker sexually molested him and two other boys, one of whom also was 16 or younger.

"(The counselor) sexually molested (the plaintiff) on at least six different occasions at the ranch," the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit further alleges that the church, ranch executive director Paul Ecker and the ranch's board knowingly employed men with criminal histories as counselors despite being informed by state regulators the practice was illegal.

. . .

According to the lawsuit, most of the residents were there as a condition of probation or deferred adjudication and had psychological or substance abuse problems. During the day, they performed chores, including caring for livestock, and took part in religious education. At night, they were "locked down" and monitored by alarm systems, to prevent unauthorized departures.

Among the employees and volunteers working at the ranch were men in a program called "Life Challenge," designed for adults. Many of them had substance abuse problems and were admitted to the program as part of their probation, the lawsuit states.

"The Assemblies entities would send employees and volunteers to the ranch knowing that they were not allowed to be there because of their criminal records," according to the lawsuit.

"Despite the repeated protests of the ranch administrator and citations from state regulatory authorities, the Assemblies entities funneled numerous Life Challenge men down to the ranch knowing that those men had criminal records involving narcotics and physical violence."

The scary thing is, had there *not* been a lawsuit, we would have never known about it--**Teen Challenge was the first exemptee from licensing and inspection requirements by the state of Texas.**

This may be--disturbing as it is--actually an extension of a preexisting issue in the Assemblies as a whole. Much has been made of the scandals involving sexual abuse of children in Catholic dioceses, but **there are a lot of reports of sexual abuse** in the Assemblies, including **multiple pastors** (and which has, sadly, **resulted in people being disowned from their own families** when they take courage and report the offenders). In one notable case, **a mother had to literally go into hiding with her children to protect them.** One recent case involved a pastor who was **busted for sexually molesting a 7-year-old girl.** Another Assemblies man--one which George W. Bush apparently has close links with, and whom he used to **promote the child tax credit as a Good Thing in 2004**--was a youth pastor who **eventually was busted for sexual abuse of a 17-year-old girl in his youth group.** In fact, there's indications that **dominionist denominations may well have the most serious troubles of any Protestant group re reports of child sexual abuse**--\*definitely\* out of proportion to their numbers--and this becomes even more disproportional when **one just counts the Assemblies churches.**

Unfortunately, due to the almost complete lack of accountability within the Assemblies, it's not uncommon for the abuse to go on until either a parent or the victim files charges--as noted above, often at great risk to themselves.

There are indications, too, that the abusiveness is spreading. Among other things, Teen Challenge is involved in **Assemblies-linked compulsory programs in Australian schools.** (Oz in general is starting to get a dominionist problem not unlike that here in the States, and in the case of the Land Down Under the dominionists are almost *entirely* Assemblies--and in fact largely linked to *one* Assemblies megachurch, Hillsong A/G, which is widely documented to be coercive, has a large number of frontgroups (including Gloria Jean Coffee's international operations and quite possibly links to the US operations as well), and has been the subject of a recent expose by a walkaway.) Even worse, Teen Challenge is now **explicitly preying on vulnerable populations** in India--namely, children sold to the sex trade.

Tomorrow--People being forced to join Teen Challenge by the courts, and the disturbing possibility people can't sue for damages due to legal roadblocks.

*Previous posts in this series:*

Part 1: **Teen Challenge: The Assemblies' own "kiddie gulag"**

Part 2: **Teen Challenge: Coercive groups disguised as rehab**

Part 3: **Teen Challenge: A typical week in the "Jesus Gulag"**

Part 4: **Teen Challenge: Life within the "Jesus Gulag"**

Part 5: **Teen Challenge: Possible missionary mill?**

Part 6: **Teen Challenge: The depths of coercion at a "God Warrior" training camp**

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**Tip jar (57+ / 0-)**

For you folks reading in the Mississippi River Valley, stay safe--I know you have had some incredibly rough weather today.

***Dominionist hell: it's not just for Sunday anymore***

by **dogemperor** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:09:52 PM PDT**

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**I just had to quit reading... (10+ / 0-)**

I had just read this one:

**<http://ac360.blogs.cnn.com/...>**

When will we learn that 'closed and hidden' breeds abuse?

The sicko-control freaks are given free license when we remove 'openness' and positive societal control.

*"...fighting the wildfires of my life with squirt guns."*

by **deMemededia** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:06:43 PM PDT**

[ **Parent** ]

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**i grew up in those churches in the sixties (21+ / 0-)**

full of freaks then...they drove me to atheism at the age of nine (perhaps i'll write a diary someday)

*Have you hugged a torturing CIA thug today?*

by **memofromturner** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:13:38 PM PDT**

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**Please do. n/t (10+ / 0-)**

*"The party of ideas has become the party of Beavis and Butthead." ~ Paul Krugman.*

by **Neon Vincent** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:01:22 PM PDT**

[ **Parent** ]

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**Bounce me a note when you do. (12+ / 0-)**

I can well understand being driven to atheism--a **lot** of survivors end up either atheists, or if not atheists, in non-Abrahamic faith systems. (This seems to be especially true of multigenerational walkaways.)

***Dominionist hell: it's not just for Sunday anymore***

by **dogemperor** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:01:49 PM PDT**

[ **Parent** ]

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**Atheism - it's not just for Christians anymore! (8+ / 0-)**

by **Massconfusion** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:06:55 PM PDT**  
 [ **Parent** ]

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**As a survivor of this kind of abuse... (14+ / 0-)**

I would like to know how it is that someone like Biondi is able to continue being involved in a children's organization? Are there no background checks being run by these folks or are they just "forgiving Christians".

Has the Maine State Police and the appropriate local court officers been informed of this? How about papers in Portland and Bangor - some reporter should be having a field day with these people. Has she been under the radar because she is a woman (not a sexist comment - there is a fairly common double standard in operation when a woman is an abuser). Finally where are the parents of the kids now in this woman's care?

by **Massconfusion** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:29:34 PM PDT**

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**Several ways she's gotten by with this. (19+ / 0-)**

As much as I've heard/read, there were people trying to notify the relevant court officers; the local papers were in fact among the first to break the news, as well as local media.

In regards to the Assemblies, about the only form of, well, **anything** sexual that gets you banned is being gay (whether or not within a consensual relationship); everything else is forgiven or, more usually, swept under the carpet and the victim demonised (often flat out accused of lying or of being possessed by "demons of rebellion").

Much of the reason there is a problem with sexual abuse in the Assemblies like this is because there is **no** real accountability for pastors--hell, even Jimmy Swaggart was able to keep his Assemblies credentials. Not only is there no accountability, there is no mechanism to report abuse by pastors, and the very act of reporting abuse is seen as an overt act of rebellion against "God's authority" (and in the case of Teen Challenge, it can legally be seen as a breach of contract--see yesterday's post where parents are not only forced to sign over custody of their kids to Teen Challenge but are forced to agree to *never* attempt to get their kids back, report negatively, or "interfere with the custody" of Teen Challenge over the kids).

***Dominionist hell: it's not just for Sunday anymore***

by **dogemperor** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:36:26 PM PDT**  
 [ **Parent** ]

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**Thanks for your work on these people (8+ / 0-)**

What more can be done to out them - she (at least) clearly should not be allowed to work with children. The Maine State Police should be notified if this is a clear violation of state statutes.

by **Massconfusion** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:42:15 PM PDT**  
 [ **Parent** ]

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**And one biggie...is the legal loopholes. (19+ / 0-)**

Another major reason she's gotten away with things is because Maine is one of the fifteen states that gives broad exemptions to "Faith-based" facilities in regards to licensing and inspection.

In practically all states, secular "children's homes" and rehab facilities are required to do background checks of employees, and nearly all states have laws against licensure of persons or facilities run by sex offenders. "Faith-based" facilities do **not** have to do this in Maine and many other states.

(Of note, this is one of the specific loopholes that HR 5876 aims to close down. In a state with effective laws covering "faith-based" groups, Teen Challenge itself would likely not be allowed to operate, and Shondi Fabiano would certainly *not* be allowed to be manager of a facility which in part houses kids.)

**Dominionist hell: it's not just for Sunday anymore**

by **dogemperor** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 02:42:34 PM PDT**  
[ **Parent** ]

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**I wonder if you could get more attention (6+ / 0-)**

by notifying the Attorney General of the State. That might be just enough to get the ball rolling.

*"Though the Mills of the Gods grind slowly, Yet they grind exceeding small."*

by **Owllwoman** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:00:41 PM PDT**  
[ **Parent** ]

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**Two Things.. (5+ / 0-)**

How about sending a few emails to the Biondi family via their ministry site? Something along the lines of "we know who you are and we intend to see you are brought into the light" (I am sure she would appreciate the Christian imagery) and...

Forward this diary to the Augusta Barracks of MSP and the Chief of Police in Augusta Local I'd be happy to help!

by **Massconfusion** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:05:10 PM PDT**  
[ **Parent** ]

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**I wonder if that's why Hyde School built a chapel (5+ / 0-)**

They never made much of a deal about church when I was being abused there in the 70s. Big on 'character defects', but not church. They've since built one. Does that make them "faith-based" now?

by **spacecadet1** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 05:25:49 PM PDT**  
[ **Parent** ]

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**Well done, again! Warmest regards, Doc. (7+ / 0-)**

*Time for real health care reform, not just to patch the patches.*

by **Translator** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:03:07 PM PDT**

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**A result of there being no atheist movement... (7+ / 0-)**

in America.

Even on this site, which is largely atheist, there is a large core of progressive Christians, who see all atheists as intrusive, and not willing to go along.

And one of the most ardent proponents of ending evangelizing in the Air Force Academy, who has written several books on the subject---I don't choose to name him--remains officially a reformed Jew.

I once met his Rabbi, who responded to my identification as an atheist with the words, "So am I."

Until we stand up and demand not only our rights, but fight for our principles, we allow things such as described in this diary to thrive, because it is, after all, a religious group.

by **arodb** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 03:04:38 PM PDT**

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**There is a large group of progressive Christians (1+ / 0-)**

here who see us non-theists as intrusive?

I felt that was a minority, actually.

*"So, please stay where you are. Don't move and don't panic. Don't take off your shoes! Jobs is on the way."*

by **wader** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 08:41:58 PM PDT**

[ **Parent** ]

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**"To Dream the Impossible Dream, (6+ / 0-)**

To right the Impossible Wrong..."

Long story short:

In the 90's I went back to college for a mid-life career change. I had to take a course that included "Child and Dependent Adult Abuse" as I would become a mandatory reporter.

It included the history of legislation. White Christian Men of Power who wrote the laws viewed women and children as chattel. Women got rights before Children and domestic, etc. abuse didn't exist because...I'm thinking that the 1970's was the first real recognition of the need for legislation.

I got my first job and was required by law to complete another 4 hour "Abuse" course provided by my employer.

In the course of that job another employee and I reported the abuse of two dependent adults by the same person. One abuse victim died a week later. Both of us who reported were harassed out of the job for reporting. "Don't make waves"... Result of the investigation was 'no charges as they could not find 'intent to abuse' and the death was due to a terminal diagnosis. The employer of course wanted to 'make sure' that they had

no legal liability or damage to their 'image'. Besides look at all the paper work that 'reporting and investigation' required.

I remain a Christian. I'm a 'free willer'. I have had to separate "What has been done and justified using the Name of God" from "What God intended".

*"...fighting the wildfires of my life with squirt guns."*

by **deMemedeMedia** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 04:25:49 PM PDT**

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#### **Many of Us have had the RE-Abuse of cover up (6+ / 0-)**

and the Re-abuse of comming forward retelling the story to councilors or DAs or courts or other bodies of inquest. It rips the bandage off of an unhealed wound and in many cases only salt pours in and not sunshine.

We are supposed to feel sorry for damaging the "carrer" of the abuser. We should look for more guidance. Our motives are questioned. We are left to feel as if we caused our own assault.

You would never know by reading this that I am one of the lucky ones. I have a good life, a family and a marriage and children. I held it together while many others turned to alchol and drugs and ended their lives - feeling they were responsible for their own abuse.

by **Massconfusion** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 06:27:39 PM PDT**

[ **Parent** ]

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#### **Your outlook is wonderful, what you related is (2+ / 0-)**

awful and unfair, IMHO.

One of my siblings, who has numerous mental and physical health issues, was assaulted by a gang when she managed to bounce around on public transportation one day, not fully realizing what it might mean . . . and nobody wanted to follow-up on it. Because of her pre-existing condition, she was not considered a reliable witness.

I know only an inkling of what you must feel from what is expressed above, but I've only felt frustration, sorrow with equal parts caring and concern about how it may have affected my sister's (now) desperat outlook on her future, relationships, etc.

*"So, please stay where you are. Don't move and don't panic. Don't take off your shoes! Jobs is on the way."*

by **wader** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 09:09:57 PM PDT**

[ **Parent** ]

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#### **I'm glad you write these posts. I don't know how (2+ / 0-)**

you manage to keep writing like you do, dogemperor. It's hard to read, must be ten times harder to write. These efferes need to be stopped.

*Gitcher' red hot Obama Bahama llamas right here! Available in three flavors. On sale for a limited time only!*

by **Aaa T Tudeattack** on **Fri May 02, 2008 at 09:36:22 PM PDT**

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**Publicity is the best disinfectant... (2+ / 0-)**

Publicizing this abuse should discourage some parents from sending their children to these camps. In addition, it might force some politically responsive state agencies to watch them a bit more closely. But, closing them is a completely different matter that will take some legislative changes that will be difficult or impossible to pass.

*I voted with my feet. Good Bye and Good Luck America!!*

by **shann** on **Sat May 03, 2008 at 03:15:19 AM PDT**

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