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Charges filed in teen's death at boot camp

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CALEB JENSEN, 15, died from an untreated staph infection at a wilderness camp for troubled youths. He was participating in a court ordered wilderness therapy program through Alternative Youth Adventures near Montrose. (|)

A Montrose County grand jury Tuesday handed up a raft of charges against operators and staff of a youth-rehabilitation camp in connection with the death of a 15-year-old Utah boy who died in their care.

Caleb Jensen died in May 2007 from an untreated staph infection at a court-ordered wilderness camp run by Alternative Youth Adventures in Montrose.

The program was shuttered after his death and

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surrendered its state license.

The grand jury filed various charges of negligent homicide, child abuse resulting in death and manslaughter against the staff and management, as well as Keith Hooker, the camp's medical director.

"CEC stands by its position that at all times the company acted appropriately and that the circumstances that led to Caleb Jensen's death, while tragic, were not reasonably foreseeable," according to a statement from the New Jersey-based company that owns the wilderness program, Community Education Centers.

District Attorney Myrl Serra did not return a call for comment.

Jensen was placed in the program by the Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services two months before his death.

His mother, Dawn Boyd of Salt Lake City, could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

She said last year that she believed camp staff ignored her son's assertions that he was sick and needed to go home. She also thought Juvenile Justice Services failed to take into account his frequent problems with staph infections.

A tribute website she created includes a handwritten letter said to be the last one he sent home from the camp.

Caleb wrote, "I wish I could go back and be a good little boy, a nice little naïve church boy who couldn't steal bubble gum without feeling bad about it. I want to wear SpongeBob PJs . . . and cuddle up next to my mommy. I usta think I was too hard of a gangsta that nobody could break me, but they found my weakness, and I want to come home."

Alternative Youth Adventures, its parent company, program director James Omer and Hooker were charged with negligent homicide and child abuse resulting in death. Staff member Ben Askins was charged with manslaughter and child abuse resulting in death.

The defendants are to be formally charged Aug. 25.

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