

Woman distraught: denied visit with sister at Ivy Ridge Academy

WWTI-abc, June 6, 2006

A Michigan woman drove nine hours to Ogdensburg to visit her 18 year old sister at Ivy Ridge Academy.



But Rachel Stachowicz

says she was turned away at the door and told to leave the grounds.

"She was out of bounds," said Ivy Ridge Executive Jason Finlinson.

The Academy At Ivy Ridge calls itself "a boarding school for the future." Its website says "We are a passageway to assist in the forgiveness, healing and reconciliation of families."

Parents pay \$30,000 per year to enroll their teenagers in the program, according to the Watertown Daily Times in a 2003 story.

Stachowicz said she wanted to visit her sister Lindsey for Lindsey's 18th birthday and thought that as an adult, Lindsey would be free to receive any visitor she wanted, especially a sister.

She also wanted to ask her sister whether she wanted to leave the facility.

"I'm her sister," she said, her voice trembling. "Why couldn't

I see my sister? She's 18; she has the right to choose to see me or not and they're saying she can't."

Finlinson said that's not the way it works. "We don't turn people over to people we don't know," he said. "She expects us to roll out the red carpet for her."

He said that when a student turns 18, it's the student's personal choice whether to remain in the program. He said the student's decision is made without any pressure from Academy staff, although they will offer advice if asked.

However, Finlenson said, if a student chooses to remain in the program after turning 18, all visits must still be approved by the parents.

"Have her (Rachel) come up with her mom and dad and take her out to dinner," Finlinson said.

Ms. Stachowicz said she was eventually allowed to talk with her sister by telephone, but that she could hear an Ivy Ridge staffer on the other end telling Lindsey what to say.

"Don't ever send your kids to a place like this," she said.

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