

APRIL 24TH, 2008

TESTIMONY OF MS. MADELINE MCGROTHA

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

HEARING ON

“Child Abuse and Deceptive Marketing by Residential Programs for Teens”

I honestly believe I am alive today as a result of the wilderness program that I attended. I attended a wilderness program by the name of New Horizons for Young Women located in Maine from March 1st, 2006 until May 1st, 2006. It was the best and most rewarding experience of my life and I am truly blessed to have been given the chance to experience the help that I received at New Horizons.

Beginning in middle school I spun into a deep depression. Throughout the years it developed into something worse and worse. At the age of 16 I dropped out of high school and didn't see any reason for myself to keep living. I hated myself, my family, and the world. People had tried to help me in any way that they could, but I was extremely defiant and not receptive to any of the help that was being offered to me. I had been to numerous therapists, tried many different prescription drugs for my depression, but nothing seemed to work. I needed something more, something that I couldn't get in the environment that I was in.

Wilderness took me out of my normal environment. It removed me from my family problems, a harmful boyfriend, and a crowd of people that I didn't need to associate myself with. It allowed me to focus on myself for the first time in my life. I was surrounded by people who cared about my well being and showed that to me in every possible way they could.

While I was in the wilderness program I gained so much confidence through completing the day to day activities that we had to do. In the program we lived in tents in the woods of Maine. Before this experience I had never even been camping before, so living in the woods for two months is a huge accomplishment for me and something that I am very proud of. I learned to saw down small trees, make a fire without a lighter, cook my own food along with many other things I would have never thought I would be able to do. We hiked during the day and even though it was physically hard sometimes, it wasn't anything too strenuous and it was actually very therapeutic. On these hikes it gave me time to really think about things, most importantly to me, the relationship with my mother and father which had become so damaged and destructive over the past couple of years. It also gave me a

chance to talk in a non threatening environment with the counselors about the thoughts I was having. Wilderness in my experience was in no way a boot camp and after the first week it was apparent that this was not punishment but a tool to help me grow into the person that I unknowingly wanted and needed to be.

I want to personally make sure that every person is able to continue to get the help that they so desperately need from these types of programs. These programs save lives and I can't stress enough how important that is. I truly feel like my success is a direct result of the program that I attended. I graduated on time from a traditional boarding school in Texas called San Marcos Baptist Academy and currently am studying psychology at the University of North Florida. I am also involved in a sorority on campus, Kappa Delta. Another huge accomplishment is the mended relationships that I have developed with my mother and father, which is extremely important to me. After my experience I learned to successfully function in society and I feel that none of this would have been possible without my life changing experience in my wilderness program.