

# 14-year-old dies in Arizona, latest casualty of "boot camps"

David Walsh  
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The death of a 14-year-old boy at a private "boot camp" for troubled youngsters in Arizona has once again cast light on the horrific conditions at such youth facilities, both private and state-operated, in the US. According to a story in the *Arizona Republic*, the boy died after vomiting dirt in the desert. Officials at the America's Buffalo Soldiers Re-enactors Association camp near Buckeye, Arizona told the youth's mother, Melanie Hudson, that her son had eaten dirt and refused to drink water. The boy was in the first week of a five-week program.

The stated aim of the Buckeye boot camp and similar facilities around the US is to provide "tough love," on the theory that previous forms of treatment, that supposedly coddled youngsters, have failed. The camps, organized on a regimented, paramilitary basis, make the claim that through various forms of intimidation they can instill self-discipline, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio told the press he was treating the death as suspicious and was awaiting the results of an autopsy. Noting that, "There have been some serious allegations of abuse at that boot camp," Arpaio shut down the camp on Monday, returning about 50 children to their parents. Former drill instructors at the camp have said that youths were regularly subjected to corporal punishment and forced to swallow mud.

Bill Lanford, chief of the Buckeye Valley Fire District, told reporters that when paramedics arrived at the camp Sunday, camp counselors were telling children, some of whom were crying, to lie down on concrete slabs. "It was very disturbing," he commented. "We were working ... and the counselors were more interested in disciplining the kids and telling them to lie down."

The regimen at the camp included forced marches, black uniforms, "in-your-face" discipline and a daily diet limited to an apple, a carrot and a bowl of beans for the day. The inmates slept outdoors in sleeping bags on concrete slabs.

Allegations of abuse were leveled against the same group a year ago when they operated a camp on the Fort Apache Reservation, also in Arizona. In July 2000, some of the young people claimed they had been kicked, choked and subjected to other cruelties by drill instructors. Fort Apache officials clamped down on the camp operators and the latter moved their operation to Buckeye. A spokesman for the FBI reported that the agency had sent a report on the allegations to the US Attorney's Office, which had declined to pursue either a criminal case or possible civil rights violations.

Police are investigating the operator of the Buckeye camp, Charles "Chuck" Long. It was revealed July 5 that this individual, responsible for the care of troubled kids, had been arrested twice for domestic violence and had lied about his academic credentials.

The dead boy had been sent by his parents to the camp after a number of minor scrapes with the law. He had just completed probation in May for shoplifting, had slashed his mother's tires and was seeing a therapist for anger management and depression. His father, Gettis Haynes, Jr. of Hannibal, Missouri, told the *Associated Press* he blamed himself for his son's death. "I thought it would be better than jail. But jail would have been a better place for my baby. At least there he'd still be alive."

Juvenile boot camps first came into existence in the mid-1980s, during the Reagan years, when officials in Georgia and Louisiana experimented with placing teenage boys in military-type settings. The practice caught on with politicians anxious to appear "tough on

crime.”

According to an article by Bruce Selcraig in *Mother Jones* magazine (December 2000), “in state after state, public officials have ignored persuasive evidence that most boot camps don’t work. A growing body of research, from private studies to federal investigations, has shown the camps rarely reduce recidivism or save the fortunes their promoters promise, and often permit horrific abuses of kids by underpaid and undertrained staff. ... The National Mental Health Association concluded that ‘employing tactics of intimidation and humiliation is counterproductive for most youth’ and has led to ‘disturbing incidents’ of abuse. In Georgia, US Justice Department investigators found kids being forced to crawl on their hands and knees to lunch, clean floors with their T-shirts and run in summer while carrying tires. ‘The paramilitary model is not only ineffective, but harmful,’ the investigation concluded.”

Accounts of abuse in both private and state-operated camps are widespread.

At the Arizona Boys Ranch, Nicholas Contreras, 16, was forced to sleep in soiled underwear, eat meals on the toilet and carry a yellow trash basket filled with his own vomit. He collapsed and died on March 2, 1998. The Boys Ranch had provoked nearly 100 complaints in the previous five years.

In July 1999, 14-year-old Gina Score died in a South Dakota government boot camp for girls after a forced run of several miles. The conditions at the state’s facilities prompted a letter to Governor William Janklow, a staunch defender of boot camps, from Michael Bochenek of the Children’s Rights division of Human Rights Watch. After detailing some of the barbaric practices of the state juvenile facilities (physical restraint, solitary confinement, routine strip-searches of girls by male guards, indeterminate sentencing of youth), Bochenek concluded: “The serious charges brought by South Dakota’s detained youth amount to a stunning indictment of the state’s juvenile detention system.”

A highly publicized boot camp in Burke County, North Carolina, operated by a former US marine, was closed in June 2000 after social workers substantiated an allegation that a camper was handcuffed for three days and officials determined that the facility was providing foster care without a license.

The camp received nationwide attention thanks to

more than ten appearances on the Jenny Jones television talk-show by its founder, former marine Raymond Moses. Kids from as far away as California were sent to the camp. The youngsters slept outside in two-person tents surrounded by a chain-link fence. The girls had bathrooms, but the boys did not. The camp had no license and was subject to no government oversight.



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