



ALLIANCE FOR THE Safe, Therapeutic & Appropriate Use of Residential Treatment

The Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic and Appropriate use of Residential Treatment (A START) believes that residential programs serving children with special mental health challenges should be properly licensed and monitored by state government, and accredited by independent accrediting organizations. A START is sponsored by the Department of Child and Family Studies of the University of South Florida.

How Can You Help Stop Abuse in Residential Treatment?

A START is concerned that youth have died, been injured, and been abused and neglected in programs that are supposed to exist to help them, and that parents have been deceived by these programs through false marketing. Fortunately, many programs do not engage in these practices but there are enough programs that do to warrant action.

The purpose of this brief document is to offer you suggestions for how you can help protect the safety and well-being of children and their families in residential programs. A START is happy to answer questions, and be of assistance to you. A START may be contacted thru <http://astart.fmhi.usf.edu> or by contacting Bob Friedman, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, 13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, Fl. 33612, 813 974-4671, friedman@fmhi.usf.edu

- 1. Federal Legislation** – support H.R. 6358 (formerly H.R. 5876), the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Treatment Programs for Teens Act of 2008 – this bill has passed the U.S. House of Representatives and now needs support in the U.S. Senate; consider contacting your senators to ask for their support of this bill. Senators can be contacted through: http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
Representatives can be contacted through: <http://forms.house.gov/wyr/welcome.shtml>
- 2. Within Your State** – find out if there is a licensing law for residential treatment programs, and, if there is a law, review it to see if it allows for exemptions, if it encompasses the standards of H.R. 6358, how frequently compliance is monitored, whether monitoring includes unannounced visits, and whether action has been taken against programs that have been out of compliance. If the law is non-existent or inadequate, contact your local legislator to ask him/her to propose a bill to add a law or strengthen an existing law.
- 3. Within Your Professional Organization(s) (if you belong to one or more)** – find the individual and/or office that deals with public policy and advocacy, and let them know about your concern with this issue. If the organization has not taken a stand on the issue, encourage them to do so. Consider preparing an article for the organizational newsletter, and/or a presentation for the organizational conference.



4. **Within Your Advocacy Organization(s) (if you belong to one or more)** – again, find the appropriate individual and/or office that deals with youth issues, and let them know about your concern with this issue. Encourage the organization to take a strong stand on the issue, and look for opportunities to educate members of the organization about the issue.
5. **Media** – look for stories that are relevant to your local community, and contact the print and/or electronic media about the stories. Encourage them to provide coverage about the problem. A START and CAFETY can help by providing individuals from around the country for interviews with the media.
6. **Licensing and Accrediting Organizations** – if you find programs that are licensed and/or accredited, and you believe that the programs are engaging in abusive practices, contact the licensing and accrediting organizations to let them know. Encourage them to have strong standards with regard to the use of disciplinary procedures so that the safety of children is protected.
7. **Community-based Services** – advocate in your local community and state for high quality mental health services in the community so that young people in need and their families can receive assistance in their own community.
8. **Special Events** – consider holding a special event about this issue. It can be anything from a press conference to a march to a conference or meeting. These events can help galvanize support and attract media attention.
9. **Other** – discuss this issue and share your concern with friends, colleagues, and others within your network. Share with others information about how they can help be part of the solution to this problem.

Resources

A START -- the Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic, and Appropriate use of Residential Treatment – <http://astart.fmhi.usf.edu> can be contacted through friedman@fmhi.usf.edu or 813 974-4671. A START provides general information about the problem.

CAFETY – an organization of young adults with lived experience in residential treatment programs that can provide information about the problem from the perspective of individuals who have been through programs throughout the country – CAFETY.org

House Education and Labor Committee – held hearings on the topic in October, 2007, and May, 2008, and, under the leadership of its Chair, Rep. George Miller, introduced the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Treatment Programs for Teens Act of 2008

Government Accountability Office – published two reports on the problem, based on its own investigations – <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08346.pdf> and <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d08146thigh.pdf>

Federal Trade Commission – issued FTC Facts for Consumers; Considering a Private Residential Treatment Program for a Troubled Teen? Questions for parents and Guardians to Ask – <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/products/pro27.shtm>

**For further information regarding
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