

# **EXHIBIT B**

# Who is behind Midwest Academy?

The Register's Editorial 9:18 a.m. CST February 7, 2016



(Photo: The Register)

State and county records indicate that in 2003, a partnership run by Robert Lichfield of Utah bought the Midwest Academy property in Keokuk from Lee County, paying \$500,000 for it, and three years later transferred the deed to a limited liability company called Midwest Twister. Lee County tax records indicate that company's mailing address is the office of Lichfield's R & B Management company in Utah.

Lichfield is the founder of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, a company that, according to court records, has had ties with at least 26 different boarding schools or treatment centers around the world, generating up to \$90 million in annual gross revenue.

Midwest Academy consists of eight buildings, including residence halls, a gymnasium, a metal shop and an auditorium, with an assessed value of just under \$2 million.

Between 2005 and 2012, five federal lawsuits were filed against WWASPS, Lichfield, R & B Management or their affiliates, each alleging some form of fraud or mistreatment of the students enrolled in the company's boarding schools or treatment centers. All of the cases were dismissed prior to trial. Allegations included unsanitary living conditions; physical, verbal and emotional abuse; and prolonged periods of isolation. One student's family claimed their son was subjected to sexual abuse, locked in a dog cage, forced to eat his own vomit, and ordered to use the same toothbrush with which he scrubbed toilets.



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[Editorial: Who is looking out for these kids?](#)

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/02/06/editorial-who-looking-out-these-kids/79794042/>

Court records indicate that in 2004 a counselor at WWASPS' Majestic Ranch Academy in Utah was convicted of child abuse in the form of neglect.

In 2005, the WWASP-affiliated Academy at Ivy Ridge in Ogdensburg, N.Y., entered into an agreement with the state attorney general who had accused the school of "repeated and persistent fraudulent and illegal conduct" by handing out high school diplomas it had no legal authority to award.

In 2007, the director of the Lichfield-affiliated Royal Gorge Academy in Colorado was convicted of false imprisonment and assault after being accused of mistreating students there.

Also in 2007, the state of Nevada suspended the license of the WWASPS-affiliated Sky View Academy after confirming that two students at the school had sexually assaulted a third student, and that staff members were involved in "hazing" the students.

The Des Moines Register

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# 80 sheriff calls in 3 years to Keokuk boarding school



Lee Rood, lrood@dmreg.com

11:19 a.m. CST February 15, 2016

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(Photo: Cindy Iutzi/Daily Gate City via AP)

Lee County's top prosecutor says a request that he sign off on a search warrant last month was his first sign of serious problems at Midwest Academy, a boarding school for wayward youth.

An Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation agent sought the warrant in late January, just before a two-day raid at the Keokuk facility and a Montrose site after a student reported she was sexually assaulted, County Attorney Michael Short said last week. Two staff members, one of whom was a mandatory reporter, notified authorities of the assault report, he said.

But a public records request by The Des Moines Register to the Lee County Sheriff's Department reveals that law enforcement received roughly 80 calls to the academy since January 2013. Five of those included sexual offense allegations.

In addition, Sheriff Jim Sholl told the Register that the state Department of Human Services had identified 19 "founded" abuse cases at the school, meaning most evidence suggested some type of abuse had occurred.

Another potential red flag: Seven years ago as part of a federal lawsuit, five former students made claims of widespread sex abuse and misconduct. The lawsuit was dismissed on jurisdictional grounds, and its merits were never decided.

Midwest Academy's website also carries claims about accreditation and a relationship with the Keokuk school district that the Iowa Department of Education now calls "very concerning."

Yet in the 13 years since the academy opened in Iowa, no state agency — from the state fire marshal to the Iowa departments of Human Services, Education or Inspections and Appeals — inspected or monitored the boarding school.



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Parents, students differ on value of boarding school

(<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2016/02/13/parents-students-differ-value-boarding-school/80288778/>)

Lee County officials now say Iowa's Division of Criminal Investigation has recruited the FBI to work on the probe, and the state attorney general and the U.S. Attorney's office have been consulted as the case progresses.

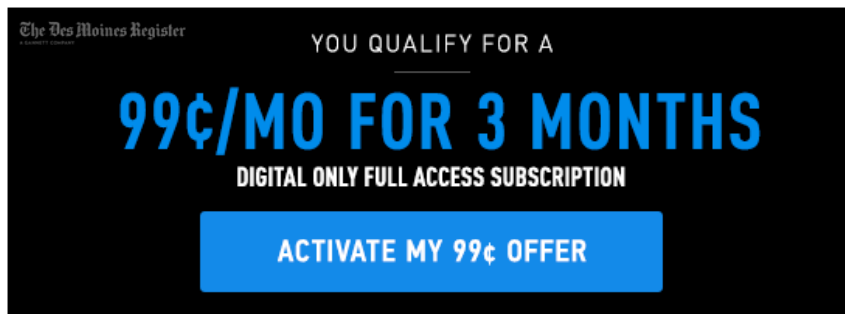
One of the five complaints alleging sex offenses was filed in January on behalf of a former student who said she was sexually assaulted by an 18-year-old in December. Another complaint was made last April. A student in May was accused of forcing another person to perform oral sex.

And Ben Trane, Midwest Academy's director, reported last year that a female teacher said she was sexually assaulted by a student, records show.



The other report, from November 2013, included unspecified sex offenses that were still considered under investigation.

As for the abuse reports investigated by Human Services, Sholl said he didn't know details. But he said he knew of none that were prosecuted criminally, mainly because the evidence needed to support criminal charges differs from what is required for DHS involvement.



"The criteria for a founded case by DHS doesn't necessarily lead to a criminal investigation or prosecution," he said.

Sholl told the Register the sexual assault allegation resulting in the law enforcement raids is supported by corroborating evidence.

"The state is still reviewing the evidence," he said. "But we're still a long ways from being able to prosecute."

## Investigation is many-pronged

Midwest Academy since its opening has taken in troubled youth from across the country with behavior and drug problems.

Five former Midwest Academy residents were among 350 students and parents who filed the federal lawsuit in Utah alleging its operators and other facilities run by the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools were profiting from false education claims and mistreatment of troubled youth.

Short, the county attorney, said he had been unaware of the lawsuit's allegations and never checked federal court records.

He also said law enforcement largely let the academy handle runaways and delinquency problems. Parents were typically asked to pay any restitution when damage was involved. He says he didn't know what discipline the school or parents may have meted out to students.

The prosecutor said the county was loath to file formal delinquency petitions against students who misbehaved because that "would have resulted in the state of Iowa having to foot the bill."

At the same time, the closings of several other schools reported to be affiliated with the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools and facing similar abuse claims were low on Iowa officials' radar.

Another search warrant was executed Thursday at the academy, which has said it laid off all 60 of its employees after the state ordered it closed. All of the program's 90-some residents have either been returned to parents or transferred by DHS to shelters.

Short says the investigation is many-pronged, including the firing of Cheyenne Jerred, one of the staffers who reported the sexual assault allegation that triggered the raid.

Geoff Greenwood, a spokesman for the state Attorney General's Office, confirmed it is reviewing the online marketing representations that Midwest Academy made to families.

Legislators, meanwhile, are demanding to know how the boarding school escaped state regulation.

"We just stepped into a can of worms," the sheriff admits. "Now we have to figure out what worms we're going to pursue."

## Judge: Allegations serious

Short says Midwest Academy got its start in Keokuk in 2003, when Bob Lichfield, founder of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, reached a deal with Lee County economic development officials to buy a vacant county home.

After conferring with the mayor, Lichfield worked with former state legislative leader Lowell Junkins, of Donnellson, to make sure the unregulated home could open in Iowa, Short said.

"My understanding was that somebody had to find interference to make sure this got through the state agency process," Shio said. "Junkins was very well-connected."

Efforts to reach Junkins last week were not successful.

Public records show Lichfield ran the partnership that paid \$500,000 for the property, which was then transferred to a limited liability corporation called Midwest Twister at no cost. The tax bills for Midwest Twister are sent to the same address as that of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, in La Verkin, Utah, county records show.

Lichfield went on to build a boarding school business at one point worth at least \$90 million, according to court records.

In a recorded interview two years ago, Trane, the academy's current director and owner, told Woodbury Reports Inc., an organization that helps parents evaluate programs for troubled teens, that he got his start in the boarding school business at the Cross Creek programs, started by Lichfield in 1988.

But as several affiliated programs in the U.S. and abroad closed amid allegations of abuse, Trane distanced himself from that connection.

In an email to the Register this week, Trane said Midwest Academy was never a World Wide Association facility.

In his recorded Woodbury Reports interview ([http://www.strugglingteens.com/artman/publish/Midwest\\_AcademyINT\\_141125.shtml](http://www.strugglingteens.com/artman/publish/Midwest_AcademyINT_141125.shtml)), Trane said his academy still specializes in youth with emotional, behavior and drug and alcohol problems. But he said its programming differs from that used by the other facilities.

#### EDITORIALS:

- [Who is looking out for these kids? \(/story/opinion/editorials/2016/02/06/editorial-who-looking-out-these-kids/79794042/\)](#)
- [Who is behind Midwest Academy? \(/story/opinion/editorials/2016/02/07/who-is-behind-midwest-academy/79867582/\)](#)

The 2009 federal lawsuit was filed against World Wide, Midwest Academy and other defendants.

The former Midwest Academy students named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit alleged practices at the facility similar to those leveled at World Wide Association and other schools. They said they were strip- and cavity-searched in front of others; denied medicine, food, toilets and showers; forced to exercise until they vomited and passed out; denied medical care and sleep, and isolated from family.

They included Nikkole Danyelle Elliott, who attended the academy from November 2002 to May 2003; Fawn Cobb, who attended for a month in 2007; Sirena Richardson, who attended from November 2004 to August 2005; Joshua Martinson, who attended for three months in 2006; and Brooke Ashley Johnston, who attended for five months in 2005.

Plaintiffs' attorneys argued that scores of desperate parents were lured into paying large sums of money to reform troubled children and were misled about their treatment.

The judge dismissed the case in 2011 because it wasn't filed in the proper jurisdiction.

In his decision, U.S. District Judge Clark Waddoup described the accusations this way : "The services were a sham and the supposed schools were essentially gulags staffed by abusive and incompetent people."

The judge said his decision to dismiss the case shouldn't be interpreted as a reflection of its merits.

"If those allegations are true, the plaintiffs here were subjected to treatment that nobody deserves to suffer," Waddoup wrote.

## Education claims questioned

On its website, Midwest Academy says, as have other World Wide Association-affiliated schools, that it's accredited by Idaho-based Northwest Association of Accredited Schools.

The Department of Education does not recognize that group for independent accreditation of schools.

The website also still says the academy has "a unique dual enrollment agreement" with the Keokuk school district "that allowed for a variety of educational opportunities, resources and support not available at other private schools."

But state Education Department spokeswoman Stacy Hupp told the Register the academy's relationship with the Keokuk School District ended five years ago after a legal review by her agency found that the agreement violated state and federal law.

That year, the parent of a special-education student claimed her 16-year-old son had been harshly treated and that the so-called dual enrollment violated his state and federal rights.

The agency's review also determined that Midwest Academy didn't meet the state's definition of a school because it was not accredited by a state-sanctioned organization. It also concluded that Midwest was a for-profit entity, something not permitted for schools under Iowa law.

The academy continued to issue diplomas, but they were not recognized by the state, Hupp said.

Today, Midwest Academy is accredited by a company called AdvancED, which is one of six organizations that is recognized by the state. The education department informed academy officials with further steps they could take to receive independent accreditation. But school officials did not follow through with that process, Hupp said.

The department advised academy officials about additional steps it could take to achieve independent accreditation from the state — which would require certain health and safety reporting. Midwest Academy took no action, Hupp said.

So while the educational programs may be monitored by AdvancED, the state oversees nothing, she said.

"We consider the students at Midwest Academy to be home-schooled," Hupp said. "The value of that diploma would have to be determined by the entity accepting it."

Last fall, Midwest Academy began the application process to become a group foster care facility, which would have opened the door to oversight by Iowa's Human Services department.

But that process was never completed.

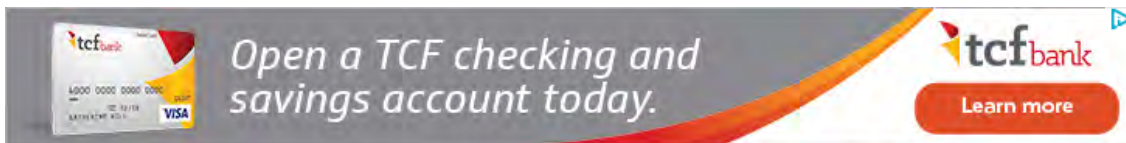
In the meantime, state Sen. Herman Quirnbach, a Democrat who chairs the Senate Education Committee, wrote the Education Department, asking what the state should do to provide any facility such as Midwest Academy better oversight.

"We need to get on top of this," he said.

Education Department Director Ryan Wise responded last week on several points. Among the possibilities: changing Iowa code to require greater transparency by independently accredited schools that fail to meet mandatory health and safety requirements.

Wise also said such schools, if there are others in Iowa, could also be required to disclose on their websites that they are not considered accredited in Iowa.

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# Editorial: Who is looking out for these kids?

The Register's editorial 9:49 a.m. CST February 7, 2016



(Photo: The Register)

Twelve days ago, dozens of law enforcement officers descended on Midwest Academy in Keokuk and Montrose to [execute search warrants](http://www.dps.state.ia.us/commis/pib/Releases/2016/01-28-2016_DCI_IowaDCIExecutingSearchWarrantsAtMidwestAcademy.html). The warrants stemmed from alleged sexual abuse involving a staff member and a former resident at the facility for teenagers. The Iowa Department of Human Services was called to assist and conducted dozens of child abuse assessments. A state probe is ongoing, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has a separate investigation underway and the public is left with many questions.

The editorial board's first question: What the heck is Midwest Academy?

Iowa lawmakers should be asking that question too. Regardless of the outcome of investigations, this type of private facility for children raises concerns that should be addressed. Iowa should not be home to youth facilities subject to no oversight, accreditation or licensure by the state. We have an obligation to protect children.

Midwest Academy advertises itself as a "therapeutic boarding school" for "struggling teens" dealing with everything from anger and delinquency to substance abuse and emotional problems. It offers "a safe and secure environment in which adolescents can receive academic support, counseling and therapy," according to its website. It is the kind of place sought online by desperate parents who have tried everything else to help a troubled child.



[DES MOINES REGISTER](http://www.desmoinesregister.com)

[Who is behind Midwest Academy?](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/02/07/who-is-behind-midwest-academy/79867582/)

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Yet this facility is not a school accredited by the [Iowa Department of Education](https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/accreditation-program-approval). That means it is not required to meet specific standards and guidelines or report educational information to anyone. (Scattergood Friends School, a boarding and day school in West Branch, for example, does have state accreditation). Though the facility claims to have an affiliation with the Keokuk Community School District, the superintendent told an editorial writer last week that the teens "are definitely not attending school here" and the district does not receive any state funding for them.

The academy is also not a designated [psychiatric medical health institution for children](http://dhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/PMIC.pdf). It is not a residential treatment center, group home, shelter home, child care facility, or any other juvenile facility identified in Iowa Code and subject to state oversight. It is not even registered as a "[boarding home](https://dia.iowa.gov/document/registered-boarding-homes)" with the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals. The Iowa Department of Human Services also does not oversee the facility, but it has broad authority to conduct evaluations when the abuse of a child is alleged. Though other media outlets are reporting claims about children being sent home or "removed," DHS will not confirm that.

While this private facility flies under the state's radar until there are allegations of abuse, the [Federal Trade Commission](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0185-residential-treatment-programs-teens) cautions parents about such programs. They go by a variety of names, including wilderness therapy programs, boot camps and therapeutic boarding schools.

"The programs are not regulated by the federal government and many are not subject to state licensing or monitoring as mental health or education facilities, either," according to the FTC. It references a 2007 [report](http://www.gao.gov/assets/120/118038.pdf) to Congress that found thousands of allegations of abuse in residential programs, some of which involved the death of teens. Government investigators identified "boarding schools" as programs that "often enroll youth whose parents force them to attend against their will." Wilderness schools promising to rehabilitate teens can cost as much as \$438 per day.

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The Midwest Academy website does not reveal the cost of tuition on its website. It does, however, direct parents to a company offering loans with interest rates as high as 36 percent. Staff would not answer questions about cost — or anything else — posed by an editorial writer. They were advised by their attorney not to do so.

According to the academy's website, youths have access to services provided by a mental health counselor and social worker, individuals we were able to confirm are licensed by the state. Several "teachers" are identified by only first names, so we could not confirm licensure. There also does not appear to be any medical professional on staff. Are the "struggling" teens prescribed medication? By whom? Do employees undergo background checks? How many kids live there, and where are they from?

No state agency can answer any of these questions, because none of them is responsible for any aspect of this private facility. That creates a situation ripe for abuse. A residential facility essentially taking custody of "struggling" children should not fly under the radar of government in the 21st century.

## Cautions on private 'boarding schools'

The Federal Trade Commission [advises parents \(http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0185-residential-treatment-programs-teens\)](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0185-residential-treatment-programs-teens) to diligently research any private residential treatment program they're considering for a child. These programs, offering everything from drug treatment to military-style discipline, are frequently not monitored by any government entity. Parents should confirm claims about staff credentials, education credit transfers and endorsements. "Accreditations" may be membership organizations that do not conduct site inspections or evaluations of the programs. Below are some of the questions the FTC advises parents to ask representatives of any program being considered. The commission also encourages parents to confirm answers.

Are you licensed by the state? If so, get the name of the state agency and confirm. If the program cannot provide an agency, consider it a red flag.

Do you provide an academic curriculum, and do you have teachers certified or licensed by the state?

Do you have a clinical director, and what are his/her credentials?

Do you conduct background checks on employees?

What are the criteria for admission, and how are any pre-admission assessments conducted?

How do you handle medical issues, and is there a licensed nurse or doctor on the premises?

How do you define success, and how is it rated?

How do you discipline youth?

Can I contact/speak with my child when I want, and can the child contact me when he or she wants?

What are the costs, what do they cover, and what is the refund policy if the program doesn't work out?

## Teen with depression commits suicide

A [report to Congress \(http://www.gao.gov/assets/120/118038.pdf\)](http://www.gao.gov/assets/120/118038.pdf) from the Government Accountability Office found cases involving serious abuse, neglect and deaths at private, residential programs for teens. The report includes photographs of the exterior of a "boarding school" (also called "academies") visited by government investigators. It had video monitoring, fencing and wire mesh over the windows.

"Case 5" in the report involved the death of a 14-year-old male. His father told government investigators his son had been diagnosed with clinical depression, attempted suicide twice, was on medication and was being treated by a psychiatrist. After consulting with experts, they enrolled him in a private West Virginia treatment center and boarding school that cost \$255 per day. From the GAO report:

"According to the parents and court documents, the victim committed suicide six days into the program. On the day before he killed himself, while participating in the first phase of the program ("survival training"), the victim deliberately cut his left arm four times from wrist to elbow using a pocket knife issued to him by the school. After cutting himself, the victim approached a counselor and showed him what he had done, pleading with the counselor to take the knife away before he hurt himself again. He also asked the counselor to call his mother and tell her that he wanted to go home.



The counselor spoke with the victim, elicited a promise from him not to hurt himself again, and gave the knife back. The next evening the victim hung himself with a cord not far from his tent. Four hours passed before the program chose to notify the family about the suicide. When the owner of the program finally called the family to notify them, according to the father, the owner said, "There was nothing we could do."

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# Former students speak - The Daily Gate City, Keokuk, Iowa: News

Posted: Monday, February 15, 2016 10:51 am

Associated Press |

A boarding school for troubled teenagers in Iowa that is being investigated by the FBI routinely kept pupils in small concrete "isolation boxes" for days or weeks and wouldn't let them out unless they sat in a specific posture for 24 hours, according to several former students.

Six former students recently told The Associated Press about abuse they say they suffered while attending Midwest Academy in Keokuk.



They said the dark, cell-like punishment rooms were often filled with the sounds of students' screams and motivational recordings piped in through speakers. Surveillance cameras and staff members kept watch.

"You spend your time pounding your head against the wall. You can't sleep because there is a lot of noise. A lot of girls like to scream in there. You basically look forward to bathroom breaks and those moments when you can get out of your box," said Emily Beaman, 17, of Wheaton, Ill.

Beaman said that after weeks of isolation, she got out in July only after cutting herself with a bottle cap and begging emergency responders to place her elsewhere. She said an earlier escape attempt failed.

The students, who attended the academy between 2008 and September 2015, said they and their classmates mutilated themselves, hated the lack of activity and natural light and lost weight due to small meals. Some said they were scarred by the experience months or years later.

Officers raided the academy Jan. 28 to investigate allegations that a staff member sexually assaulted a student. The investigation has since expanded to other possible criminal activity and abuse.

Academy owner Ben Trane declined to comment on abuse claims at a news conference this month and didn't respond to AP interview requests. The academy's 90 students were removed and it has been temporarily closed. Three students interviewed by the AP said they had spoken with the FBI.

Lauren Snyder, 17, of Springfield, Mo., recalled begging to get out of isolation last year, after an employee turned up the audio recordings so loud that the speakers blew out and were making a screeching noise.

"It was complete hell," she said.

Snyder said she eventually attempted suicide by tying a sock around her neck, and was sent to a psychiatric hospital the next day.

After being placed in isolation her first day for refusing to take out a belly-button ring, Sarah Wilson said she made a point not to return.

"I knew I would lose my mind in there," said Wilson, 20, of Rock Island, Ill.

School for misbehaved kids

The academy said it provides "struggling teens with a safe, structured and disciplined environment."

Many middle- and upper-class families from Midwest states and beyond sent misbehaving teenagers to the academy, which costs roughly \$5,000 per month. Trane has said the students were fortunate to have its staff in their lives. Other supporters include parents who said the program saved teens' lives.

As a privately funded school without state-ordered placements, the academy didn't require a license to operate and was otherwise unregulated.

"It flew under the radar," said Drake University professor Jerry Foxhoven, an Iowa juvenile law expert who'd never heard of the program previously.

alleged long-term

isolation

Foxhoven said long-term isolation can be very damaging for juveniles, exacerbating mental illnesses and causing lasting effects that may include post-traumatic stress disorder. He said parents wouldn't be allowed to keep children in isolation for weeks without facing abuse allegations, and the academy shouldn't, either.

Former students said the school kept parents in the dark by strictly limiting and monitoring their communications. Only now, they say, are some of their claims being taken seriously.

A typical academy day started with physical education, followed by hours of online-based school work and meetings. Former students said the goal for many was to avoid an “out-of-school suspension” for violating rules, recalling that fighting and insubordination were some reasons they were put in isolation.

“That is the worst I’ve ever been treated,” said Shaun McCarthy, 19, of Avoca, Iowa, who said he was lucky to go into isolation only twice. “It’s not humane.”

McCarthy complained about the small meals and lack of stimulation, but said it was worse for others. Students who reach “level 3” in the academy’s points-based advancement system help staff watch the boxes. In that role, McCarthy said he saw one girl puncture her finger, draw on the walls with her blood and go to the bathroom on the room’s floor before staff intervened. No one else would clean up the bodily fluids, so it fell to him.

seclusion

To get out, students said they had to sit in a certain way for 24 hours. Sometimes, lengthy essays were required.

“They use seclusion preemptively and as a punitive measure,” said former student James Farris, 24, a nursing assistant in St. Petersburg, Fla. “This is illegal in public health care settings, yet somehow they get away with it.”

Farris recalled waking up in an isolation box on his 18th birthday and demanding his release, screaming when it took hours to accomplish. He said he had nightmares for years.

Rachel Adkisson, 19, of Des Moines, said she was put in isolation for refusing to run during gym and had lost 20 pounds when she left two weeks later. She said she told the FBI about another girl who tried to kill herself by tying her bra strap around her neck.

“It’s like torture,” Adkisson said. “You think it’s never going to end. You think, how can a human do this to another person?”



# 'It's like torture': Ex-students say boarding school kept them in isolation boxes

By The Associated Press

Published: February 13, 2016, 9:23 am

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Students were routinely kept in small concrete “isolation boxes” for days and weeks at a time as punishment at a private boarding school for troubled teenagers that is now under FBI investigation, former students told The Associated Press.

Six former attendees at Midwest Academy in Keokuk, Iowa, described the cell-like rooms, where they had to sit quietly on the floor in a specific posture for 24 hours in order to get out. The harshly lit rooms with small windows were often filled with the sounds of students screaming and motivational recordings piped in through speakers, they said. Surveillance cameras and staff members kept watch.



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(<https://mgtvwncn.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/midwest-academy.jpg>)

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Midwest Academy. Source: Google Images

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to place her elsewhere. She said an earlier

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September 16, 2015

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Officers raided the academy Jan. 28 to investigate allegations that a staff member sexually assaulted a student. The investigation has since expanded to other possible institutional activity and abuse. Academy owner Ben Trane declined to comment on abuse claims at a news conference this month and didn't respond to AP interview requests. The academy's 90 students were removed and it's temporarily closed. Three students interviewed by the AP said they have spoken with the FBI.

Possible institutional activity  
WordPress.com  
(https://wordpress.com  
ref=lof)

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Farris recalled waking up in an isolation box on his 18th birthday and demanding his release, screaming when it took hours to accomplish. He said he had nightmares for years.



Rachel Adkisson, 19, of Des Moines, said she was put in isolation for refusing to run during gym and had lost 20 pounds when she left two weeks later. She said she told the FBI about another girl who tried to kill herself by tying her bra strap around her neck.

"It's like torture," Adkisson said. "You think it's never going to end. You think, how can a human do this to another person?"

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# Ex-students say boarding school kept them in isolation boxes



In this photo taken on Thursday, Feb. 11, 2016, a Uhaul is parked outside Midwest Academy in Keokuk, Iowa. Federal, state and county law enforcement officials have returned to the southeast Iowa boarding school for troubled teens following abuse allegations. The Keokuk Daily Gate reports officials with the FBI and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation returned to Midwest Academy on Thursday to execute a search warrant for records following an initial search of the academy on Jan. 28 and 29. (Cindy Iutzi/Daily Gate City via AP)

IOWA CITY, Iowa — A boarding school for troubled teenagers in Iowa that is being investigated by the FBI routinely kept pupils in small concrete “isolation boxes” for days or weeks and wouldn’t let them out unless they sat in a specific posture for 24 hours, according to several former students.

Six former students recently told The Associated Press about abuse they say they suffered while attending Midwest Academy in Keokuk, a city along the Mississippi River where Iowa borders Illinois and Missouri. They said the dark, cell-like punishment rooms were often filled with the sounds of students’ screams and motivational recordings piped in through speakers. Surveillance cameras and staff members kept watch.

“You spend your time pounding your head against the wall. You can’t sleep because there is a lot of noise. A lot of girls like to scream in there. You basically look forward to bathroom breaks and those moments when you can get out of your box,” said Emily Beaman, 17, of Wheaton, Illinois.

Beaman said that after weeks of isolation, she got out in July only after cutting herself with a bottle cap and begging emergency responders to place her elsewhere. She said an earlier escape attempt failed.

The students, who attended the academy between 2008 and last September, said they and their classmates mutilated themselves, hated the lack of activity and natural light and lost weight due to small meals. Some said they were scarred by the experience months or years later.

Officers raided the academy Jan. 28 to investigate allegations that a staff member sexually assaulted a student. The investigation has since expanded to other possible criminal activity and abuse. Academy owner Ben Trane declined to comment on abuse claims at a news conference this month and didn't respond to AP interview requests. The academy's 90 students were removed and it has been temporarily closed. Three students interviewed by the AP said they had spoken with the FBI.

Lauren Snyder, 17, of Springfield, Missouri, recalled begging to get out of isolation last year, after an employee turned up the audio recordings so loud that the speakers blew out and were making a screeching noise. "It was complete hell," she said. Snyder said she eventually attempted suicide by tying a sock around her neck, and was sent to a psychiatric hospital the next day.

After being placed in isolation her first day for refusing to take out a belly button ring, Sarah Wilson said she made a point not to return. "I knew I would lose my mind in there," said Wilson, 20, of Rock Island, Illinois.

The academy says it provides "struggling teens with a safe, structured and disciplined environment." Many middle- and upper- class families from Midwest states and beyond sent misbehaving teenagers to the academy, which costs roughly \$5,000 per month. Trane has said the students were fortunate to have its staff in their lives. Other supporters include parents who say the program saved teens' lives.

As a privately funded school without state-ordered placements, the academy didn't require a license to operate and was otherwise unregulated. "It flew under the radar," said Drake University professor Jerry Foxhoven, an Iowa juvenile law expert who'd never heard of the program previously.

Foxhoven said long-term isolation can be very damaging for juveniles, exacerbating mental illnesses and causing lasting effects that may include post-traumatic stress disorder. He said parents wouldn't be allowed to keep children in isolation for weeks without facing abuse allegations, and the academy shouldn't, either.

Former students said the school kept parents in the dark by strictly limiting and monitoring their communications. Only now, they say, are some of their claims being taken seriously.

A typical academy day started with physical education, followed by hours of online-based school work and meetings. Former students said the goal for many was to avoid an "out-of-school suspension" for violating rules, recalling that fighting and insubordination were some reasons they were put in isolation.

"That is the worst I've ever been treated," said Shaun McCarthy, 19, of Avoca, Iowa, who said he was lucky to go into isolation only twice. "It's not humane."

McCarthy complained about the small meals and lack of stimulation, but said it was worse for others. Students who reach "level 3" in the academy's points-based advancement system help staff watch the boxes. In that role, McCarthy said he saw one girl puncture her finger, draw on the walls with her blood

and go to the bathroom on the room's floor before staff intervened. No one else would clean up the bodily fluids, so it fell to him.

To get out, students said they had to sit in a certain way for 24 hours. Sometimes, lengthy essays were required.

"They use seclusion preemptively and as a punitive measure," said former student said James Farris, 24, a nursing assistant in St. Petersburg, Florida. "This is illegal in public health care settings, yet somehow they get away with it."

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"It's like torture," Adkisson said. "You think it's never going to end. You think, how can a human do this to another person?"

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## COUNTY ATTORNEY SEEKS REINFORCEMENTS IN MIDWEST ACADEMY ABUSE CASE

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Posted: Thursday, February 11, 2016 12:47 pm

CINDY IUTZI [dgceditor@dailygate.com](mailto:dgceditor@dailygate.com) | 0 comments

KEOKUK – An ongoing investigation into a complaint alleging a Midwest Academy student was sexually assaulted by a staff member, has prompted Lee County Attorney Michael Short to request additional assistance should the matter result in criminal charges.

"It would involve complex litigation and we just don't have the time or resources for something like that," Short said.

A multi-agency force executed a search warrant Jan. 28-29 at the academy in Keokuk.

After the search was complete, personnel from the search team met with Short, including the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Human Services as well as a representative from the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Short later asked the Iowa Attorney General's Office for help in reviewing the potential criminal case regarding MWA, said Geoff Greenwood, spokesman for the AG's office. Short's request was granted.

Greenwood said that "as a matter of course, we have attorneys who advise DHS on child welfare matters. Additionally, we are looking at certain representations made by the school."

Twelve days later

Now 12 days after the initial search while evidence gathered from MWA is being processed and official interviews are conducted, 150 people closely associated with the boarding school are in limbo.

Some 90-plus students generally identified by the academy as troubled have been removed from the institution as ordered by DHS, and 60 academy workers have been laid off indefinitely.

Parents/guardians were given 24 hours to pick up their children from the academy. Responsibility for any who were left behind was assumed by DHS, which announced at the time of the closure it would offer shelter services.

At the time, authorities announced that DHS had made 28 individual assessments. Since then, the agency hasn't been willing to divulge whether any of the students, who could be anywhere from ages 13 to 17, are under their protection.

Checking on students

DHS public relations officer Amy McCoy responded via email to several questions Tuesday about the children involved: How many were not picked up from Midwest Academy by parents or guardians? If there were some

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who were not, where are they – foster homes or shelters? What is their future? Is there no state licensure or oversight for private training/boarding schools?

"There is no operational or programmatic oversight provided by DHS to the facility," McCoy wrote. "The department does have the authority to investigate allegations of abuse at almost any facility where it is reported.

"Guardians of the children determine their placements, or the courts may become involved in making placements if there is concern for the child's safety.

"DHS may monitor the ongoing safety needs of children involved in child abuse assessments, but (the public is) not entitled to this information which is confidential under the law. Child abuse information is confidential to protect the victim.

"We continue our assessments and law enforcement continue their investigation," McCoy said. "Law enforcement have noted it may be several weeks before more information is released."

Since the removal of students by DHS, Trane has been unable to conduct business. Short has said because the academy isn't licensed by the state, nothing prevents owner Ben Trane from reopening.

Former students have stories to tell

The Daily Gate City has received numerous calls and emails from former students who want to tell their story, as well as contacts from people who support the academy.

As the official status of the academy situation develops, more information will be made available.

DCI spokesman Alex Murphy said Tuesday there is no new information available from his agency, and offered no timeline.

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Posted in News on Thursday, February 11, 2016 12:47 pm.

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## DCI searching Midwest Academy

Story

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Posted: Thursday, January 28, 2016 2:55 pm | Updated: 11:12 am, Fri Jan 29, 2016.



### Roadblock

The Lee County Sheriff's Office is stopping vehicles at the entry point to Midwest Academy. More than 30 investigators from an array of law enforcement agencies executed search warrants there at about noon today.

The Iowa Department of Criminal Investigation Major Crimes Unit is executing two search warrants at two Midwest Academy locations in the Keokuk Area.

The search warrants stem from an investigation into allegations of alleged sexual abuse involving a staff member of Midwest Academy and a former academy student, according to a DCI statement.

The first search warrant is being served at the main campus, 2416 340th St., Keokuk. The second is an affiliated location at 2818 Highway 218 in Montrose.

In addition to the DCI, personnel from several law enforcement agencies are participating in the raid: Special Enforcement Operations Bureau, Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, DCI Crime Lab Crime Scene Team, State Fire Marshal Division, Iowa State Patrol Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Lee County Sheriff's Office.

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## Academy probe ongoing

Story

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Posted: Monday, February 1, 2016 10:48 am

The Iowa Department of Human Services was called to Midwest Academy Thursday in Keokuk after two search warrants regarding an allegation of sexual abuse were executed there earlier in the day (at about 12:30 p.m.) by state, federal and local agencies.

According to a statement from the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, DHS personnel conducted 28 assessments at Midwest Academy.

DCI said the warrants stemmed from a complaint alleging that a staff member of Midwest Academy sexually assaulted a resident, according to the Associated Press.

A former employee claims in a lawsuit that she was fired in December 2015, one day after reporting to DHS that a female student had been sexually abused by a staff member.

No charges have been filed or arrests made to date. DCI has not received any further allegations involving Midwest Academy.

"Agents continue to work together to thoroughly investigate this very complex area," according to the DCI statement.

Call 800-225-5324 with information about Midwest Academy beneficial to the investigation.

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Mark Sobotta of Lindenhurst, Ill., had to leave work early Friday afternoon to drive to Keokuk and pick his daughter up from Midwest Academy. He was not happy about the rushed trip.

"This is what's going on and this is my concern," he said. "Your Health and Family Services of Iowa has infiltrated Midwest Academy and they are giving parents 24 hours to pick up their kids or they're going to put them in a shelter."

Sobotta said the students were detained in one room while everything was searched.

He complained that when he called DHS, they would not hear his concerns.

"They're safer at a school than a shelter," Sobotta said. "It's disgusting."

Sobotta said all the children residing at Midwest Academy have different issues – cutting, running, gangs, violence, sexual promiscuity, etc.

"They are gaining self-confidence at Midwest Academy" he said. "Now what are they going to do, decide 'maybe I'll cut myself deep this week?'"

The fact that there have been no arrests to date but the facility apparently is being closed down by the Iowa Department of Human Services bothers Sobotta "not only for the children and communities they have to go back into, but there is no exit plan, no transition for them," he said.

Part of the Midwest Academy program is to provide a regimen that introduces youth back into society Sobotta said. He believes this closure is short-circuiting the plan and he worries about the consequences.

"There's not just one child there, there are 100 to 150 children at Midwest Academy," he said.

Sobotta's 16-year-old daughter has been enrolled at Midwest Academy for 18 months. He's not too worried about how she'll do, but wonders "how we'll keep her mind busy."

"She went from being way out of control to where now we can sit down and talk to her," he said. "If it wasn't for the school, we're not sure where she'd be now. The first thing they do is bring them self-confidence so they're no longer depressed. They're giving these kids tools to go forward."

After they dropped their daughter off at Midwest Academy, they didn't see her again for six months – until she had earned the merits for the privilege, Sobotta said.

"Parents agree to the program," he said. "She started to realize she had to move forward, to deserve everything she has in life. My daughter would have ended up in juvenile detention. This is like the last stop before jail for some of them.

"They have worked wonders to make my daughter work to grow and achieve. She has grown so much. We are so proud of her. Some kids fight it and fight it."

Sobotta said his daughter hasn't been mistreated and always had enough food and exercise.

Tuition is \$5,000 per month for 24-hour care. Midwest Academy offers scholarships to families who can't make the payments.

"They have helped us," Sobotta said.

Assisting agencies

Agencies involved in the execution of the search warrants include the Iowa Department of Public Safety's Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation's Major Crime Unit, Special Enforcement Operations Bureau, Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, Crime Lab Crime Scene Team, State Fire Marshal's Division, Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center, Iowa State Patrol and Lee County Sheriff's Office.

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Posted February 13 | Updated February 13

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# FBI probes alleged abuse at Iowa boarding school for troubled teens

Former students say they were subjected to forced isolation and unpleasant noises at the since-closed Midwest Academy.

BY RYAN J. FOLEY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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IOWA CITY, Iowa — A boarding school for troubled teenagers in Iowa that is being investigated by the FBI routinely kept pupils in small concrete “isolation boxes” for days or weeks and wouldn’t let them out unless they sat in a specific posture for 24 hours, according to several former students.

Six former students told The Associated Press about abuse they say they suffered while attending Midwest Academy in Keokuk, Iowa. They said the dark, cell-like punishment rooms were often filled with the sounds of students’ screams and motivational recordings piped in through speakers. Surveillance cameras and staff members kept watch.



Ben Trane



Shaun McCarthy



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“You spend your time pounding your head against the wall. You can’t sleep because there is a lot of noise. A lot of girls like to scream in there. You basically look forward to bathroom breaks and those moments when you can get out of your box,” said Emily Beaman, 17, of Wheaton, Illinois.

Beaman said that after weeks of isolation, she got out in July only after cutting herself with a bottle cap and begging emergency responders to place her elsewhere.

The students, who attended the academy between 2008 and last September, said they and their classmates mutilated themselves, hated the lack of activity and natural light, and lost weight due to small meals. Some said they were scarred by the experience months or years later.

Officers raided the academy Jan. 28 to investigate allegations that a staff member sexually assaulted a student. The investigation has since expanded to other possible criminal activity and abuse. Academy owner Ben Trane didn’t respond to AP interview requests. The academy’s 90 students were removed and it has been temporarily closed. Three students told the AP they had spoken with the FBI.

### NOISE TORTURE

Lauren Snyder, 17, of Springfield, Missouri, recalled begging to get out of isolation last year, after an employee turned up the audio recordings so loud that the speakers were screeching. “It was complete hell,” she said. Snyder said she eventually attempted suicide by tying a sock around her neck, and was sent to a psychiatric hospital the next day.

After being placed in isolation her first day for refusing to take out a belly button ring,

Sarah Wilson said she made a point not to return. “I knew I would lose my mind in there,” said Wilson, 20, of Rock Island, Illinois.

The academy says it provides “struggling teens with a safe, structured and disciplined environment.” Many middle- and upper- class families from Midwest states and beyond sent misbehaving teenagers to the academy, which costs roughly \$5,000 per month. Trane has said the students were fortunate to have its staff in their lives.

## LARGELY UNREGULATED

As a privately funded school without state-ordered placements, the academy was largely unregulated. “It flew under the radar,” said Drake University professor Jerry Foxhoven, an Iowa juvenile law expert.

Foxhoven said long-term isolation can be very damaging for juveniles, exacerbating mental illnesses and causing lasting effects that may include post-traumatic stress disorder. He said parents wouldn’t be allowed to keep children in isolation for weeks without facing abuse allegations, and the academy shouldn’t, either.

Former students said the school kept parents in the dark by strictly limiting and monitoring their communications. Only now, they say, are some of their claims being taken seriously.

A typical academy day started with physical education, followed by hours of online-based school work and meetings. Former students said the goal for many was to avoid an “out-of-school suspension” for violating rules, recalling that fighting and insubordination were some reasons they were put in isolation.

“That is the worst I’ve ever been treated,” said Shaun McCarthy, 19, of Avoca, Iowa, who said he was lucky to go into isolation only twice. “It’s not humane.” To get out, students said they had to sit in a certain way for 24 hours. Sometimes, lengthy essays were required.

“They use seclusion preemptively and as a punitive measure,” said former student said James Farris, 24, a nursing assistant in St. Petersburg, Florida. “This is illegal in public health care settings, yet somehow they get away with it.”

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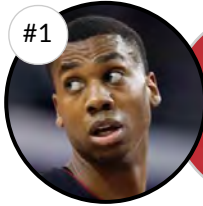

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**NBA players with the most blocks per game**

**#1**

**Hassan Whiteside**  
Miami Heat

**3.9 Blocks Per Game**  
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NBA TOP PLAYERS IN 2015 - PRESENTED BY

News

# Midwest Academy: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know

Published 1:20 pm EST, February 13, 2016 | Updated 1:28 pm EST, February 13, 2016 | 2 Comments | By [Stephanie Dube Dwilson](#) 2.3k

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Midwest Academy is accused of keeping students in isolation boxes. It may be connected to the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools (WWASPS), which has been the subject of many abuse and neglect lawsuits. Midwest, whose property was bought by WWASP founder Robert Lichfield, has denied the connection. (Google Maps)

Former students at Midwest Academy in Keokuk, Iowa, are accusing school administrators of keeping them in isolation, cell-like rooms for days and hours on end, in conditions that felt like torture. The boarding school for troubled teens may be part of the controversial WWASPS (World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools), which has faced lawsuits before for fraud and abuse of students.


Here's what you need to know.

## 1. Midwest Academy Is Accused of Locking Students in Tiny Isolation Boxes for Days or More

**NCAAB teams in the M Conference with the m game**

Evansville Purple A

**#1**



**18.1 Assists Per**  
in the 2015 Sea:

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(Google Maps)

Midwest Academy, located in Keokuk, Iowa, came under scrutiny after allegations that a staff member had sexually assaulted a student. The school was raided in late January and temporarily closed, [WNCN reported](#). Six former students have since come forward with allegations of abuse. They said they had to sit in small, isolation rooms in a specific posture for 24 hours on end. The rooms were harshly lit and filled with sounds of screaming or motivational recordings. All the noise makes it impossible to sleep, one student said, and you only get out for bathroom breaks, WNCN reported. Some students are kept in isolation for weeks, former students said. One girl said she only got out because she cut herself with a bottle cap and begged for medical help.

Another student said the loudspeakers made loud, screeching noises and it was so terrible that she tried to commit suicide in her cell. Another student said he saw a girl draw on the wall with her own blood because of the conditions. An Iowa juvenile law expert [told WNCN](#) that this type of treatment can be especially damaging for youth who have mental illness and can lead to PTSD. The school itself hasn't yet commented. [But WGEM spoke with](#) Tyler McGhyghy, who worked at Midwest for seven years, and he said the accusations were false. He said the school had an extensive protocol to limit interactions between adults and minors.



**David Evans: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know**

David Brian Evans killed two Harford deputies when he was approached at a Panera Bread in Abingdon, Maryland. His son said his dad's been violent before.

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## 2. The School Says It Provides Structure and Discipline for Struggling Teens

NCAAB teams in the Atlantic Athletic Conference with the most personal fouls per game: Memphis Tigers

#1

20.6 Fouls Per Game in the 2015 Season

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**Midwest Academy**  
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According to Midwest Academy's [website](#), it's a "therapeutic boarding school" that helps provide "struggling teens with a safe, structured, and disciplined environment." It says that its seminars, therapy, and academic programs help teens excel.

WNCN reported that because the school is privately funded and has no state-ordered placements, it doesn't require a license to operate and is pretty much unregulated. It's not designated a psychiatric medical health institution or a residential treatment center, so it's not subject to relevant Iowa codes and oversight. It's not registered as a boarding home either, [The Des Moines Register](#) reported.



**Simon Newman: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know**

Simon Newman is president of Mount St. Mary's. He came under criticism after saying struggling freshmen were like bunnies who needed Glocks put to their heads.

[Click here to read more](#)

### 3. Midwest Academy May Be Connected to the Frequently Sued WWASPS, But Denies This Connection



Midwest Academy (Google Maps)

The [Des Moines Register](#) did a little digging and discovered that Midwest Academy's property was purchased in 2003 by a partnership run by Robert Lichfield of Utah. He later transferred the deed to a limited liability company called Midwest Twister. That company's mailing address is Lichfield's R&B Management company in Utah, The [Des Moines Register](#) reported.

**NCAAB teams in the M Conference with the hi goal percentage**  
New Mexico Lobc

#1



**47.2 Field Go**  
in the 2015 Sea:

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Lichfield is the founder of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, a company that has ties to 26 or more boarding schools and treatment centers around the world and brings in about \$90 million in gross revenue every year.

Meanwhile, Midwest Academy denies any affiliation with WWASPS. [On a YouTube video](#) the school posted (posted under Fact #2), one commenter complained about their association with WWASPS. Midwest's YouTube account owner wrote, four years ago: "Just to clarify with you we have never and are NOT affiliated or associated with the WWASP organization. However, we were utilizing marketing services and billing services, that were owned by the same owners of WWASP." The commenter went on to say that when the association began to negatively affect their school, they terminated the marketing services and distanced themselves from the WWASP name.

However, [a New York Times article from 2013](#) stated that Lichfield, family members, and business partners have financial interests in many schools through a network of limited liability companies and property ownership. These entities may oversee marketing, business, and educational services for many schools and get up to one-third of the school's gross revenues. One anonymous owner of a school said that even after ownership was transferred to him, Lichfield still controlled the money flow. This 2013 article listed Midwest Academy as one of the programs with ties to Lichfield, according to testimony and business filings.



**Einstein & General Relativity: The Photos You Need to See**

These are photos of Albert Einstein and his journey with the General Theory of Relativity, which predicted gravitational waves.

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## 4. WWASPS Has Been Sued and Accused of Abuse on Numerous Occasions



WWASPS has come under intense legal scrutiny and is the subject of many complaints. [According to The Des Moines Register](#), WWASPS was the subject of five federal lawsuits between 2005 and 2013, each claiming fraud or abuse of students at its boarding schools. The cases were dismissed prior to trial. Accusations included unsanitary living conditions, isolation, sexual abuse, and being locked in a dog cage. In 2004, a counselor at a WWASPS school in Utah was convicted of child abuse. In 2007, a director of a Lichfield-affiliated school in Colorado was

convicted of false imprisonment and assault of students. Another WWASPS school in Nevada lost its license after two students were sexually assaulted in 2007.

An article run by [The New York Times](#) in 2013 brought up many of these accusations, saying that the Utah-based “tough love” boarding school was forced to close almost 24 programs because of child abuse claims. Lichfield told [The New York Times](#) that he no longer owned any of the schools and didn’t know about any children being harmed. He said he only supplied business and educational services for more than a decade. But he did say that such accusations are common when working with troubled adolescents:

“All schools working with disturbed teens have a few students who are angry and manipulative, with long histories of lying and dishonesty, who will make allegations...”

He said the satisfaction rate for the past 20 years was about 96 percent. However, many people dispute those numbers. In fact, a website called [WWASP Survivors](#) has been set up to give support to alumni. An article written by [The Huffington Post](#) in 2011, when discussing a class-action suit by 350 former students against WWASPS, quoted the lawsuit as saying:

“In many instances, the abuse could be accurately described as torture of children...”



**Joseph Ziyaaee: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know**

Joseph Ziyaaee made \$90,000 off Uber in 6 months by barely driving at all. Here's how he did it and how referral codes can do the same for you.

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## 5. Online Reviews of the Expensive Midwest Academy Are Mixed



**Midwest Academy** ★ Website Directions

Drug Addiction Treatment Center

**Address:** 2416 340th St, Keokuk, IA 52632

**Phone:** (877) 945-6777

**Hours:** Open today · 12AM–11:30PM ▾

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**Reviews** Write a review Add a photo

- "During a hard time in my **child's life**, Midwest was there to help him through."
- "My heart goes out to these **emotionally abused** kids."
- "Highly Recommend for a **troubled teen!**"

Online reviews for Midwest Academy on Google are mixed. (Google Reviews)

According to WNCN, Midwest Academy costs about \$5,000 a month to attend. On the website [Teen Revitalization](#), which advertises Midwest Academy, month-to-month rates are \$3,490, prepaid monthly fees are \$3,190, and registration is \$2,000. Although Teen Revitalization doesn't name Midwest as the school on its website, [this school newsletter](#) shows Midwest as being one of their schools.

The online reviews for the academy are mixed. One former student wrote on Google that when she first got there she hated it, but she grew in ways unimaginable as she progressed through the system. A mom said she had great success when she sent two of her kids to the school. Another reviewer said that the 14 months she spent there were the worst of her life. The Google reviews continue the same, alternating between 5 stars and 1 star.



**Thane Naberhaus: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know**

Thane Naberhaus was a tenured professor at Mount St. Mary's who was fired without a faculty review after speaking out against President Simon Newman's policies.

[Click here to read more](#)



**Stephanie Dube Dwilson** is a news, entertainment & science/tech contributor to Heavy. She's also a featured cat blogger for CatTime, runs a [post-apocalyptic blog](#), and is a guest writer for a number of publications. In her spare time, Stephanie writes screenplays and novels about sci-fi mysteries. You can follow her on Twitter at [@StephanieDube](#) or contact her by email [here](#).

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*Elizabeth Davis* says: February 15, :  
 These abuse allegations are absolutely and completely false. I attended Midwest Academy myself and was forced to leave recently by the FBI when they down.  
 They have a very loving environment and Midwest Academy was the best thing that ever happened to me. When I first got there I hated it, because I was to change and was a very non-working person. But as I progressed through the program I grew in more ways imaginable. It hurts me to see all these ne reviews on MWA containing false information. Midwest Academy saved my life, my family relationships, helped me to discover who I really am, my purp to let go of addictions, past baggage, and so many non-working patterns. I highly recommend this school!  
 Former student of Midwest Academy  
 Elizabeth Davis

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**Hassan Whiteside**  
Miami Heat

**175 Total Blocks**  
2015 Season

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## Several sex offense allegations reported at Keokuk, Iowa school



KEOKUK, Iowa (AP) — Public records show five allegations of sexual offenses were reported by former students, students or staffers at Midwest Academy in Keokuk over the past three years.

In addition, Lee County Sheriff Jim Sholl says the state Department of Human Services had identified 19 “founded” abuse cases at the school, meaning evidence suggested some type of abuse had occurred.

The boarding school for troubled teenagers was raided Jan. 28 by officers to investigate [allegations that a staff member sexually assaulted a student.](#)

The [Des Moines Register](#) reports in a copyrighted story that five former students made claims of widespread sex abuse and misconduct as part of a federal lawsuit filed seven years ago. The newspaper reports that the lawsuit was dismissed on jurisdictional grounds, and its merits were never decided.

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## FIRED EMPLOYEE SAYS ACADEMY KNEW SHE REPORTED ABUSE TO AUTHORITIES

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Posted: Wednesday, February 3, 2016 3:11 pm | Updated: 3:18 pm, Wed Feb 3, 2016.

CINDY IUTZI [dgceditor@dailygate.com](mailto:dgceditor@dailygate.com) | 0 comments

Former Midwest Academy employee Cheyenne Jerred believes she lost her job because she reported the sexual abuse of a student to the State of Iowa.

Jerred's attorney, Curtis Dial of Keokuk, filed a lawsuit against MWA on her behalf Dec. 30, 2015, at the South Lee County Courthouse in Keokuk.

The suit alleges wrongful discharge from employment/retaliatory discharge and violation against the whistleblower statute.

According to court documents, Jerred learned Nov. 28, 2015, that a female student at the training/boarding school claimed she had been sexually assaulted and harassed by an employee.

Jerred advised the girl to report the alleged sexual abuse, and six days later, Jerred also reported the alleged child sexual abuse to public officials and law enforcement authorities.

The next day, Jerred was fired, according to the lawsuit. While being terminated, Jerred alleges she was told by a Midwest Academy representative that MWA was aware Jerred had made a report of suspected child abuse, according to the lawsuit.

Jerred claims the Midwest Academy employee told her "she should not have made the report nor encouraged the resident to report the sexual abuse," the document states.

The lawsuit seeks compensation for past, present and future lost wages, attorney's fees, court costs and other charges, as well as an "amount which will fully and fairly compensate Jerred for damages ... as a result of the wrongful discharge from employment."

The whistleblower portion of the lawsuit stems from Jerred's termination the day after reporting the alleged sexual abuse and harassment, and seeks similar damages.

Jerred requested a jury trial.

DHS spokeswoman Amy McCoy said any founded abuse allegations would be shared with local prosecutors and could cause the agency to add the caretaker responsible to the state's child abuse registry, according to an Associated Press story.

McCoy said DHS does not license the academy or the treatment center, in response to request for information by the Daily Gate City.

According to the Department of Human Services website, the agency "has the legal authority to conduct an assessment of child abuse when it is alleged that the victim is a child and is subjected to one or more of the categories of child abuse defined in Iowa Code section 232.68: Physical abuse, mental injury, sexual abuse,



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A Tribute to Tri-State Area Veterans

### PHOTO OF THE DAY



**Pothitakis skies for HTC**  
Holy Trinity Catholic High School sophomore Nick Pothitakis goes up for a basket during last Friday's homecoming game against Danville. The Crusaders lost the game 56-43 to the No. 2 Bears.



### COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29					

child prostitution, presence of illegal drugs in a child's body, denial of critical care, manufacturing or possession of a dangerous substance (defined in Iowa Code 232.2), bestiality in the presence of a child, allowing access to a registered sex offender or allowing access to obscene materials.

The abuse is the result of the acts or omissions of the person responsible for the care of the child.

The president of the academy and treatment center is listed as Benjamin Trane in state business filings, which show the academy was incorporated in 2003. Trane said earlier this week that he has contacted a lawyer.

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Posted in Wednesday, News on Wednesday, February 3, 2016 3:11 pm. Updated: 3:18 pm.

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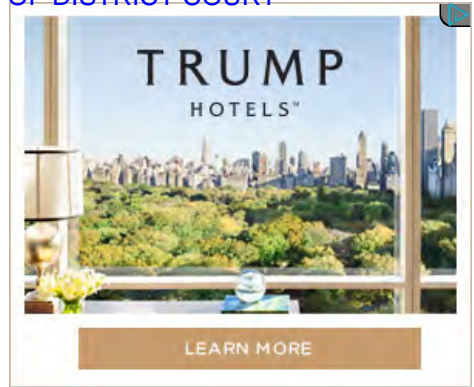
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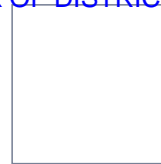
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## 60 LAID OFF AT MIDWEST ACADEMY

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Posted: Monday, February 8, 2016 12:08 pm

CINDY IUTZI [dgceditor@dailygate.com](mailto:dgceditor@dailygate.com) | 0 comments

KEOKUK – Midwest Academy owner Ben Trane announced Friday that 60 facility workers have been laid off due to the closure of the boarding school last week by the Iowa Department of Human Services.

MWA is located in Keokuk, but served families from throughout the nation.

Trane said during an interview that he's waiting to hear from the DHS about reopening the school.

"There's nothing to say we can't reopen, but we're waiting to be sure," he said.

In the meantime he's working to get a state license for Midwest Academy Treatment Center at 2818 U.S. Highway 2818, Montrose.

The licensed treatment center would provide therapeutic services.

Trane said a state license isn't offered for boarding schools in Iowa.

On Thursday, Jan. 28, Midwest Academy and the former Mithelman Meadows facility were searched by a multi-agency group of law enforcement officers and child protective services personnel.

"Although the search was unexpected and frightening for our staff and students, the law enforcement agencies acted in a respectful, thorough manner," Trane said in a statement Friday. "We appreciate law enforcement looking into allegations in an effort to keep us all safe. We are extremely fortunate to have such a wonderful sheriff's department with competent and professional staff, also the DCI, state fire marshals, state troopers, and FBI were extremely thorough in their duties. We feel secure knowing so many competent people are working on this case."

"We want to thank the community for its support through the volunteers, the service, the prayers, and those who reached out to us at this difficult time," Trane stated. "We are saddened to announce that we had to lay off our final 60 employees. These staff members worked late and long hours giving of their talents and service.

"They were dedicated, conscientious, and caring individuals. Our Midwest students were very fortunate to have such a quality, hardworking and knowledgeable group of people involved in their school career and their lives. We want to thank our students also for starting, signing and sending out petitions in support of our school. We want to thank the parents who organized themselves, offered their services and time, started petitions, called and recalled local authorities, and gave us their support."

While the facility is closed, the five families who live on the grounds will continue to live there, Trane said. MWA has a house and four apartments for resident staff.

### Background


Midwest Academy was established in 2003 as private therapeutic boarding school for troubled youth in the United States and abroad.

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It employed more than 60 local people and housed more than 90 students.

"The choice to begin operating Midwest Academy in Keokuk was an easy one," Trane said in his statement. "The building and grounds that had been the former Lee County Home were purchased and our mission to help young people began. Under our direction and as the facility progressed, it allowed us to provide our students and staff with dorms, classrooms, offices, two cafeterias, lounges, a kitchen, a quality gymnasium, a workout room, a seminar building and an outdoor recreational area.

"Choosing Keokuk gave us the opportunity to be part of a smaller community, one where people are involved and where values, responsibility, and work ethic are an important part of everyday life. During our 13 years of operation in Keokuk, we have been proud to be a part of a city which supported us and treated us like family."

### Community

In the past 13 years, Trane estimates that MWA has contributed to the purchase of more than 60,000 meals from local restaurants, the use of more than 20,000 hotels rooms, provided more than 55,000 community service hours, and spent more than \$50 million in goods, services and employee payroll. Midwest also has awarded more than \$750,000 in tuition scholarships for local students.

Trane said that MWA students have enrolled in classes at Southeast Community College, participated in sports programs through Keokuk High School, and participated in community activities such as the Labor Day Parade and various service projects.

"We wanted to thank the community for its support through the volunteers, the service, the prayers, and those who reached out to us at this difficult time," according to his news release.

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Posted in [News](#) on Monday, February 8, 2016 12:08 pm.

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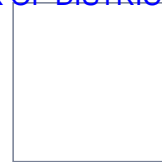


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## Academy empties food stocks

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### Shelves are empty

Mike Greenslaugh of Keokuk, a shift supervisor at Midwest Academy, stacks boxes of perishable food and drygoods Monday for volunteers of God's Way Christian Center to unload. Pastor Sylvia Tillman said the food will be used in the church's soup kitchen and food pantry.

Posted: Thursday, February 4, 2016 10:10 am

By Cindy Iutzi dgceditor@dailygate.com

Repercussions from the closure of Midwest Academy by the Iowa Department of Human Services are beginning to fan out into the Tri-State Area.

Midwest Academy Shift Supervisor Mike Greenslaugh drove a van-load of food this week to God's Way Christian Center, Keokuk.

Although thrilled to receive the unexpected bounty, God's Way Pastor Sylvia Tillman would prefer the circumstances were different.

"I'd rather have (Midwest Academy) open," she said. "We don't need it closing. We need people to have jobs, keep the community going. We'll all have to pray."

The nearly 100 boys and girls who lived at the training school have been sent home or to shelters by DHS, so the food they would have eaten instead will be used at God's Way food pantry and soup kitchen.

Roughly 50 people employed at MWA are out of a job, Greenslaugh said.

The food donated to God's Way includes banana bread, four kinds of dried cereal, four

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Academy empties food stocks - The Daily Gate City, Keokuk, Iowa: Home flavors of individual oatmeal packs, go-gurt, eggs, spinach, lettuce potatoes, tomatoes, cottage cheese, low-fat milk, five varieties of poptarts, apples, bananas, various individual bags of chips and a selection other treats.

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BC-US--Boarding School-Abuse Investigation,2nd Ld-Writethru/508

Eds: Adds information about school being voluntary in graf 6.

Agents investigating abuse claims at Iowa boarding school

RYAN J. FOLEY, Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Dozens of state and federal investigators are looking into allegations of child abuse at a privately-owned residential boarding school for troubled teens in southeastern Iowa, authorities said Friday.

Agents descended on the Midwest Academy campus in Keokuk to serve a search warrant on Thursday and Friday, seizing documents and interviewing students and employees. The investigators also served a second warrant at the related Midwest Treatment Center in nearby Montrose.

The Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation said the warrants were fully executed Friday and stemmed from a complaint alleging that a staff member of Midwest Academy sexually assaulted a resident. An academy employee has filed a lawsuit claiming she was fired last month for reporting the sexual abuse of a female student to authorities.

But the investigation appears to have grown. The Iowa Department of Human Services was also involved and had conducted child abuse assessments of 28 students, authorities said.

DCI officials did not release additional information about the alleged assault. No one had been arrested or charged as of Friday, but the DCI said agents from several teams "continue to work together to thoroughly investigate this very complex, large area." Several other agencies, including the county sheriff's office, were involved.

The FBI, meanwhile, opened a separate but related federal inquiry into Midwest Academy, which bills itself as a therapeutic boarding school for children 12 and up with behavioral and academic problems. Parents from all over the country pay tuition to voluntarily send their children to attend and live at the academy, which is located near where Iowa's border touches Illinois and Missouri. Iowa officials said no students were placed there by court order.

Authorities urged anyone who had information about wrongdoing at the academy to contact the FBI, where a spokeswoman declined comment.

DHS spokeswoman Amy McCoy said any founded abuse allegations would be shared with local prosecutors and could cause the agency to add the caretaker responsible to the state's child abuse registry.

A former employee, Cheyenne Jerred, alleges in a recent lawsuit that she became aware Nov. 28 that a female student at the school claimed she had been sexually assaulted and harassed by an employee. Jerred alleges that she encouraged the resident to report the abuse, and that Jerred also reported the case to DHS on Dec. 4.

Jerred claims that she was fired the next day and told by academy leaders "that she should not have made the report nor encouraged the resident to report the sexual abuse." She is seeking damages for wrongful discharge and whistleblower retaliation. Jerred's attorney, Curt Dial, said it's hard to say how her case fits into the investigation.

A woman who answered the phone at Midwest Academy said officials had no comment and hung up on



a reporter. The president of the academy and the treatment center is listed as Benjamin Trane in state business filings, which show the academy was incorporated in 2003.

McCoy said neither the academy nor the treatment center is licensed by DHS.

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## Summary

Date: 1/29/2016 3:41 PM  
Slug: BC-US--Boarding School-Abuse Investigation,2nd Ld-Writethru  
Headline: Agents investigating abuse claims at Iowa boarding school  
Source: AP  
Byline: RYAN J. FOLEY, Associated Press  
Copyright Holder: AP  
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With Photo:  
Dateline: IOWA CITY, Iowa  
Lead  
Editors' Note: Eds: Adds information about school being voluntary in graf 6.  
Word Count: 508  
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Editorial Type: Lead  
AP Category: n  
Format: bx

BC-IA--Boarding School-Abuse Investigation,1st Ld-Writethru/309

Eds: Updates throughout with comment from owner, prosecutor, background.

Prosecutor: Iowa boarding school investigation to take weeks

KEOKUK, Iowa (AP) — It could take several weeks to decide whether to bring charges related to child abuse allegations at an Iowa boarding school for troubled teenagers that has temporarily closed, a prosecutor said Monday.

Lee County Attorney Mike Short said that evidence seized by officers during a Jan. 28 raid at the Midwest Academy in Keokuk is undergoing forensic examination at a state crime laboratory. He said he is looking at "multiple circumstances" that may involve charges but declined to elaborate, citing the ongoing investigation.

Dozens of state and local officers served a search warrant over two days at the academy in response to a complaint alleging a resident was sexually assaulted by a staff member. Another staff member claims in a lawsuit that she was fired for reporting a female resident's sexual assault by an employee to authorities in December.

Since the raid, the school's roughly 90 students have left the campus.

Academy owner Ben Trane told reporters during a brief news conference Friday that no students are currently enrolled and that the academy has laid off its final 60 employees. He declined to answer questions, including one about the lawsuit allegations.

In a statement, Trane called the search "unexpected and frightening for our staff and students" but added that officers acted respectfully.

"We appreciate the law enforcement looking into allegations in an effort to keep us all safe," he said.

He said he was saddened to announce the layoffs of employees who "worked late and long hours giving their talents and service." He defended the academy's 13-year tenure in Keokuk, saying it had served troubled youth and contributed to the local economy.

Short said that academy leaders have indicated they may want to reopen. Because the academy doesn't have a state license, he said nothing would prevent them from doing so.

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## Summary

Date: 2/8/2016 1:42 PM  
Slug: BC-IA--Boarding School-Abuse Investigation,1st Ld-Writethru  
Headline: Prosecutor: Iowa boarding school investigation to take weeks  
Source: AP  
Byline:  
Copyright Holder: AP  
Priority: r (4)

With Photo:

Dateline: KEOKUK, Iowa

Lead

Editors' Note: Eds: Updates throughout with comment from owner, prosecutor, background.

Word Count: 309

File Name (Transref): k8666

Editorial Type: Lead

AP Category: n

Format: bx

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# WWASP Survivors

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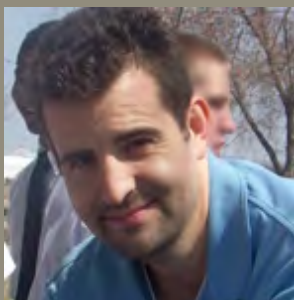
## Midwest Academy



**Midwest Academy**

Midwest Academy in Keokuk, Iowa was started by Brian Vaifanua in 2003, former owner of Paradise Cove in Samoa. Midwest Academy is currently directed by Ben Trane however the property is owned by The Lichfield Family Partnership. Since the “restructure” of WWASP, Midwest claims to have dissolved affiliation with WWASP despite similarities in program structure, the use of seminars and being marketed by Teen Revitalization, WWASP’s current marketing arm. Former students have reported systematic abuses including restraints, stress positions and isolations for multiple days even weeks at a time. Also several accounts of emotional and neglectful abuse have been reported along with a considerable lack of medical sufficiency including dangerous cocktails of medications forced upon students causing mental breaks and attempts at suicide. In February 2006, 3 staff members at Midwest Academy including a man referred to as “Howard V.” were placed on the State of Iowa Child Abuse Registry as a result of an Iowa Department of Human Services Investigation of their actions towards at least one student. This may or may not have been in response to a scandal within the same year in which a nurse and a student were caught engaging in inappropriate sexual conduct (reported to be intercourse). In 2004, 2 students from Casa by the Sea were transferred to Midwest after it’s closure in 2004. In 2006 Midwest Academy sent 2 runaways from the facility to WWASP’s Tranquility Bay in Jamaica. Midwest claims to have dual enrollment with the Keokuk county school district however, [in 2011 that enrollment policy was put up for review citing the issues with enrolling students that the district were not allowed access to.](#) WWASP Survivors has not confirmed the decision on this review. Midwest Academy continues to utilize improper and violent means of restraint and places children in isolation rooms with no ventilation, constant video taping and harsh lighting for 24 hours or more. Midwest Academy is currently named as a defendant in [the class action lawsuit against WWASP.](#)

## Staff



Ben Trane

Director of Midwest Academy and facilitator for Midwest Academy’s seminars. Trane says his qualifications to be running Midwest are derived from his experience working at two “similar schools” in Ohio and Southern Utah. He also owns and manages a gas station and condos “right across the river from Nauvoo” (Montrose, Iowa). Trane has been insistant that under his tutelage Midwest has changed, yet he still hires unqualified employees, maintains a program that systematically abuses children and refuses them the right to call the authorities for help if they feel they are being abused.



Brian Vaifanua

As owner, this man ran one of the most notorious WWASP programs, Paradise Cove in Samoa, a facility where children were subject to miserable conditions, denied proper food and medical care and systematically tortured,

assaulted, neglected and broken. Vaifanua started his career with WWASP at Cross Creek, La Verkin Utah, Then in 1994 he opened Paradise Cove. After Paradise Cove was shut down he moved back to Cross Creek and then went on to become director of Midwest Academy, in Keokuk Iowa. In 2012 Vaifanua was reported to the St. George school district superintendent with a long list of alleged human rights abuses committed by him and urging the Board to have Mr. Vaifanua banned from working with young children.

## Survivor Testimony

[Despots in the American Heartland – Daniel Maurer](#)

[Survivor Testimony Midwest Academy – James F](#)

[Treatment at Midwest Academy – Shayla](#)

[My Experience of Midwest Academy – Believe Us124](#)

[Midwest Academy Sex Scandal – Believe Us124](#)

## Reviews

Some survivors have attempted to reach out to parents in hopes to dissuade them from enrollment by posting reviews on these websites:

[Merchant Circle – Midwest Academy](#)

[Google Places – Midwest Academy](#)

[Yahoo Local – Midwest Academy](#)

\*It is customary for the marketing employees of these schools to post fake positive reviews, please beware of false advertising. If you or your child were former students at this school we highly recommend you share your experience with the public and post your review on one or all of these sites.

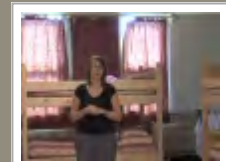
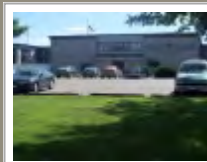
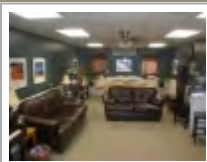
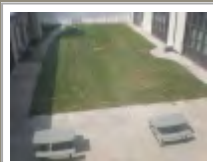
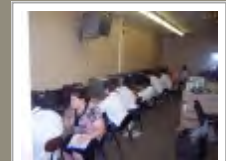
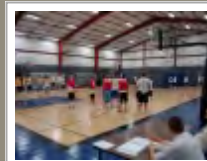
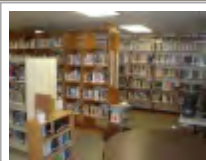
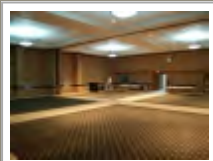
## Resources

[HEAL-online.org – Midwest Academy](#)

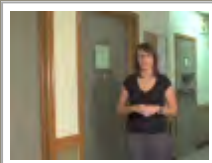
[AntiWWASP Forums – Midwest Academy](#)

## Gallery

[\[Show as slideshow\]](#)







## 53 Responses to “Midwest Academy”



1. anonymous Says:

[October 31, 2012 at 3:00 pm](#)

I was employed as a teacher there for a time. The current head of the Academics program, Miss Sarah, is a former front office secretary at MWA, with no other background or training in education or educational administration. She also has extremely poor management and people skills, with the result that teachers are left scrambling around in frustration in the effort to cope with her arbitrary decrees and still help the students. Why Ben Trane promoted her and allows her to continue in this position is a mystery. But parents should be aware that staff qualification and staff training are low priorities at MWA (for example, I was told to watch another teacher for a couple of hours to learn the “system” and then put to work with no further training). I am aware of people being employed as teachers there in the not too distant past who had no more than a high school degree themselves.

While I never witnessed any outright abuse in the classroom, I certainly witnessed situations in which staff were actually bullying students (beyond the limits of the “program”). I remember one case where a student got a consequence and was filling out the necessary paperwork. Instead of allowing the student to work in peace, the staff member kept verbally berating the student about the event that had resulted in the consequence. The student tried very hard to keep his cool and politely asked the staff member to drop the subject, since it had been dealt with already. But the berating continued at intervals for some time before the student finally got upset enough for the staff member to feel justified in giving him yet another consequence.

At MWA, there is an illusion of respect for students and staff (and demands for respect by those in charge!), but that illusion hides the true MWA culture of bullying and actively-encouraged backstabbing. Employee turnover is high (because of management, not because of the stress of dealing with the students), and many former employees can attest to the same thing.

[Reply](#)



o Lillian Says:

[November 15, 2012 at 4:13 am](#)

I completely agree with you my fiancé just got done working there “mr Nathan”. Nathan was appalled by the way they bullied the children there he tried his best to make changes and help out who he could but due to Shasta almost every idea he had was shut down. They she continued to bully my family to get Nathan it of MWA.

[Reply](#)



- James Buchanan Says:  
[December 2, 2013 at 3:46 am](#)

I was there for Mr. Nathan and he is a great man. He helped me out in some hard times. Please thank him and send him my regards .

-James Buchanan

[Reply](#)



- Brayton King Says:  
[May 5, 2015 at 3:28 pm](#)

I went to midwest academy for over a year and I agree with what you are saying. I was at midwest for a time when Mr. Nick was working at midwest and he was one of the few staff members i felt comfortable with...

[Reply](#)



- illia kovalev Says:  
[June 11, 2013 at 8:35 pm](#)

That is so true I still remember staff even telling upper classmates to only give consequences to a specific person and telling another staff with a smile and a chuckle that he was going to make a student cry today! Fucking PIGS

[Reply](#)



- Lillian Says:  
[April 11, 2013 at 11:41 pm](#)

<http://www.safeteenschools.org> has staff testimony up regarding the condition and abuse at the Midwest Academy facility

[Reply](#)



- Anon Says:  
[April 12, 2013 at 12:05 am](#)

Thanks Lillian! Great info!!

[Reply](#)



- o WWASP Survivors Says:  
[April 12, 2013 at 12:06 am](#)

Thanks Lillian, Great info!!

[Reply](#)



- o Brent Says:  
[December 5, 2013 at 7:18 am](#)

Lillian,  
The link is no longer active. Any ideas why? As a parent looking at MWA, are willing to share contact information so I can be better informed?

[Reply](#)



3. kay szweda Says:  
[June 7, 2013 at 8:15 pm](#)

my son attended one of these boarding schools. I am greatly interested in becoming part.

We need to stand together in love for our children.

It is so terrible that there are 'companies' that abuse terribly hurting parents and take thousands and thousands of dollars from us in the name of helping.

[Reply](#)



4. ekaf eman Says:  
[July 1, 2013 at 2:39 am](#)

ok here is the thing, i went there, i did a lot of dumb and bad shit before hand, any abuse that came to be when i was there towards myself, was either my fault or justified. its not hard to just shut the fuck up and take direction from someone weather you like them or not. yeah, you have to backstab to get out of there, its a game if your kid doesnt learn it, you will spend a fuck ton of money. ben trane is a good guy he offered me jobs after being forced out of the program and i still keep in contact. when kids are restrained, they are being fucking shitheads, or they are getting violent towards themselves or others. just because your kids went to the program does not mean they still arent little fucking snakes. and yes like i said before i went there in 09 stayed for a year and now im out and doing good. if you dont like the fact that your shithead criminal fucking child wont be treated as a fucking king, dont bother sending your kids there.

[Reply](#)



o

WWASP Survivors Says:

[November 13, 2013 at 11:10 pm](#)

I find it extremely troubling that a survivor would think this way about his fellow students... These kids are not criminals, they are kids, kids in need of real and ethical treatment. I know it hasn't been long since you've left the program, and you do seem quite young but there are some things you don't seem to understand about the restraints that are administered at Midwest Academy. For one, they are not used in accordance with any clinical standard of patient restraint, in fact the methods that are used have been outlawed in many states and there are pending federal laws to outlaw them in the US. The face down restraint is one of the most dangerous methods, proven to cause trauma, injury and in far too many unfortunate cases, death. The problem is not only with the staff's lack of training in the use of these restraints, it is also in the reasoning. A child saying something rude or not following directions is not a danger to themselves or others, and does not require a physical intervention. When used in this manner the goal seems to only be for punishment and intimidation to the rest of the group not to step out of line. If a physical intervention is needed, there are many safe, ethical and painless ways to restrain a patient, but MWA refuses to consider the use of these methods before resorting to tackling and contorting the limbs of students.

You have to ask yourself, from a clinical and ethical perspective, is this treatment? Is locking a kid in a tiny room with the lights on for days, weeks even months at a time therapeutic? Most mental health professionals would consider it the exact opposite, in fact would classify it as a traumatic event, which could result in negative psychological effects. I hate to sound rude here, but I would take the word of licensed mental health professional before I would take the word of a kid who would say that any kid who was abused somehow deserved it. If this is the lesson that MWA taught you before you left in 09, I would say you still have some significant de-programming to go through. It's so sad how these program can actually convince these kids that they were bad and they needed/ deserved to be abused just to grow up... It's a major mind game, and no child regardless of their issues, should have to experience such a stripping of their human rights and dignity, especially in the name of treatment.

[Reply](#)



5.

Vince Says:

[July 9, 2013 at 5:32 pm](#)

Great article. I attended MW my Sr year (2005-2006) and got my HS Diploma there. One thing I don't think was mentioned was the fact that the diploma from MW is no different than a homeschooling diploma. Therefore it is not considered an acceptable school diploma for the US Air Force, however the Army does accept it.

Also to add to the isolation part with the horrid lighting that was very true. Honestly its just called solitary. You are in a room about the length of a twin size mattress with harsh lighting that NEVER turns off and a camera pointed at you. The walls are inch thick plywood. I was in there for about a week and that was the last time.

Could go on and on bout the ridiculousness of it all but I'm sure there are articles everywhere 😊

[Reply](#)



6.

Erin Says:

[November 13, 2013 at 10:07 pm](#)

This is heartbreaking. To watch all these people degrade something that saved my life. Mr. Ben is a beautiful person with a vision and loving intentions. He does not deserve any of this. I was there for 14 months and there was never abuse. That is a lie. Yes it was hard and no it was not fun but this place is such a positive piece of my life. Leave Mr. Ben and his dreams alone.

[Reply](#)

o

Terry Says:

[September 9, 2015 at 7:59 pm](#)

I hope your school is shut down and you're out of a job.

[Reply](#)

7.

Former student Says:

[November 13, 2013 at 10:56 pm](#)

These are NOT lies! As a former student of Midwest Academy I lived through the abuse! I saw others get abused and I was abused as well. Just because you didn't witness abuse doesn't mean it didn't happen. Pull your head out of the sand. If Ben Trane really cared about those children he wouldn't hire unqualified staff who are constantly on a power trip and are physically abusing and emotionally torturing the kids there. Ben doesn't care about anything other than the money going into his pocket from desperate parents.

[Reply](#)

8.

James Buchanan Says:

[December 2, 2013 at 3:37 am](#)

Before I start I just want to say that yes... good things did come out of being sent here, for example I finished four years of highschool in 15 months but somethings do need to change. When I was restrained once my elbow popped twice and then I was put in solitary confinement for close to three days. Noone checked on my arm for ten days and I feel that is unacceptable. There was another kid there who was Muslim and he was given pork for food. He was told "eat it or dont but were not making anything special for you" then they denied ever giving him pork. It was gelatin which is made of pig bones. There is a 12 year old there who has the mental capparasy of a 6 year old and they will put him in solitary for crying too much. The place is built off of a point system and they will take away three to four days worth of points away for looking out windows, putting your hands in your pockets or looking at girls. Solitary confinement was also known as oss and to get out you had to sit with your feet in front of you and your back against the wall for 24 hours and if you move you restart structure. One time I was denied a bathroom so I was forced to urinate in a corner of the room and then stay in the room. A 12 year old who is currently there should not have to experience such things. There is also a rule there that if youe eeven say depdepartment of human



services or dhs you loose two days of points. I felt so hopeless there that I tried to kill myself multiple times including digging at my arm with my thumbnail and I was not even given a psych evaluation. Their goal is to break you and they do a good job at it.

[Reply](#)



9. [Lillian S Says:](#)  
[December 9, 2013 at 4:47 am](#)

if you were abused in Midwest Academy and would like to share your story please visit  
<http://www.safeteenschools.org>

[Reply](#)



10. [Anonymous Says:](#)  
[July 2, 2014 at 4:36 am](#)

I attended Midwest Academy from December 2013 to June 2014, a total of six months. My overall experience of this school was very poor. This is not a solution to your teens problems. Ever since the first day I arrived at Midwest I worked extremely hard, simply because I knew that, that would be my only way out of the hell hole that I had been stuck in. Yes, I do know the school is obviously not designed for you to like it. That is the point, & I completely understand that. But, what I do not understand and agree with is the schooling techniques & poor staff they have hired to work with the kids. First off, school at Midwest is ridiculous. As a level three and up you are responsible to go and watch kids sit in concrete boxes for two straight hours (on your designated shift) missing out on well-needed school time. Because of this I was unable to get as much school done as I would of liked to in the time being that I was there. When you approach a staff or an upper level to ask if you could have an alternate to go in for you they automatically say that it is your responsibility and disregard what you are even trying to say. The reason in why it makes me so mad is because one of the main reasons in which i was sent there was because of my poor attendance and grades in school. Since I progressed quickly up in the levels of the program I would miss out on a whole lot of school time. One time when I had to go watch OSS (the room where kids will sit in tiny, concrete white rooms for days) one girl who was in there at the time continuously kept cutting her self with a woodchip she had torn off of the wall. I was highly disturbed since blood was coming out of her arm and immediantly let the staff member who was in their at the time, Ms. Vicki, know. She completely ignored what was going on and just said something to the lines of, "Well, that's her choice." I couldn't bare sit there and watch this poor girl cut on herself and I told her to please don't do that to herself because I cared about her a lot and didn't want to see her like that. I ended up getting a cat 2 consequence for talking, which is a loss of 25 points. Certain staff don't care at all. Ms. Vicki is by far the most cruel, hateful staff there is. She verbally abuses everyone, but defiantly picks favorites to talk cruelly too. She bullies the kids non-stop and seems to get enjoyment out of doing it. There is a line between discipline and abuse. She defiantly crossed the line with the things that she would say. She would make fun of one person in front of the whole entire group of girls until that ine person would just be in tears. No matter how polite and nice you were to her it was just never good enough. This went for the upper levels as well. In the six montg time period that I was there I gained a total of 18 pounds. Keep in mind that I worked out hard and tried my hardest to pick healthier eating choices. Always trying to cut back on carbs & never eating the deserts that they offered at both, lunch and dinner. They barely feed you and defiantly manipulate parents into thinking the meals are nutritious and healthy. One time when I was serving we ran out of french fries and the kitchen worker told me that I was going to get any more, that, that was all she had and that I was going to have to make it work. Keep in mind that I made atleast six more people in line to serve not including myself and the other server.

We ended up not getting fries. This school is a lie and will do absolutely anything to get your money. They are manipulative and try to brain wash students. WHATEVER YOU DO, THERE IS ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE IN LIFE THEN TO SEND YOUR CHILD TO MIDWEST ACADEMY!!! Please don't do it.

[Reply](#)



o

Lillian Says:

[July 2, 2014 at 1:19 pm](#)

I would love if you could contact me to possibly have your testimony placed on <http://www.safeteenschools.org>

[Reply](#)



o

Jenna Says:

[August 26, 2014 at 2:09 am](#)

You say you just got out in June 2014. Can you tell me which family you were part of? I believe there are three different ones.

[Reply](#)



▪

Allison Sullivan. Says:

[November 9, 2014 at 4:29 am](#)

There's excellence, honor, and one other one

[Reply](#)



o

Allison Sullivan. Says:

[November 9, 2014 at 4:31 am](#)

A the girl who was cutting with the piece of wood, I just wanna say that Ms. Vicki did nothing about it. It feels good knowing that the student cares about me but not the staff

[Reply](#)



o

Allison Sullivan. Says:

[November 9, 2014 at 4:41 am](#)

I am also publishing my book about MWA and my life before, during and after. Please contact me at

E-FILED 2016 FEB 16 3:57 PM LEE SOUTH - KEOKUK - CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT  
[allison5858@icloud.com](mailto:allison5858@icloud.com) if you would like a free copy. This book is not bashing or saying anything bad about the program.

[Reply](#)



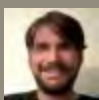
11.

Rachel Holtzman Says:

[September 17, 2014 at 9:47 pm](#)

The information that some people are providing is completely inaccurate. Midwest is the best thing that has ever happened to me and is by far the only reason why I am alive. I have NEVER seen any of the students get 'hit or abused'. If anything, the staff get hit by some of the students. Midwest provides 24/7 emotional support and if you think that being told to wait half an hour to talk to someone is neglect then you obviously never went there. Yes, Midwest was tough. But I don't know a single person that didn't learn anything there. The people who are lying on this forum absolutely disgust me.

[Reply](#)



o

Bill Boyles Says:

[September 20, 2014 at 4:12 am](#)

Please see [this reply](#) i just made to a similar comment. Odd how all of a sudden there are a bunch of people on here defending Midwest Academy. I'm sure that's just a coincidence, and totally NOT a setup.

[Reply](#)



■

Redman Says:

[June 29, 2015 at 2:43 pm](#)

god damn you are fucking liberal douche bag.

Go fucking cry about your academy days, and get a fucking hair cut, you ugly fucking cuck.

[Reply](#)



o

Parker Hammer Says:

[September 25, 2014 at 7:05 am](#)

I was at MWA for about 3 months. The third night I was there I ran away with 2 other guys that were incarcerated with me. We got split up as we were running for our freedom and eventually got caught and brought back the following day. I spent the next week after that in solitary confinement, getting fed only pp&j (3) and maybe an apple and some raisins every day. When I got out, two "upper levels" had to hold on to both my arms everywhere I went for the remainder of the 3 months.

I can honestly say that MWA fucks some kids minds up and ruins there lives. Observing the students

there, especially the ones that been there for more than a year, I noticed some pretty obvious psychological damage in some. If your already mentally/emotionally challenged before going in, coming out... you are fucked. The program teaches nothing but YOU ARE A TROUBLED CHILD, LISTEN TO US AND DO WHAT YOUR TOLD SO YOU CAN HEAL, DONT EXPRESS ANY ORIGINAL IDEAS, NO FUN, FOLLOW STRUCTURE! And the scary thing is, Most kids buy it! During a routine group session we had one day, I was looking around and noticed how many kids were brainwashed into thinking the program is a good thing and that the structure is good for them, rather than having a good time and actually enjoying life. One time a fellow student (The Great Chezini Aka Austin) accused the program of trying to brainwash us to the staff member who was watching over us. The staff member, Mr. Don, replied, and I quote, "Yes, we are brainwashing you." Mr. Don is a good guy, but just because you believe that your beliefs are "right" doesn't mean that you should forcefully instill them on teens, and that goes for the whole staff.

MWA is worse than prison. In Prison, at least you know where you are, you know what your into. At MWA, They give you an illusion that "Its a good thing you'r here, your getting better, follow these rules so you can move up in the program and be successful!" No. In reality, your locked up. Your here because your parents couldn't or didn't want to take care of you or get real help (ex.a therapist,psychologist)

All that being said, I can honestly say that from my one on one talks with Ben Trane I can tell he's a good guy with good intentions, and that he honestly believes in the program since all his kids go through it. He just fails to see how destructive it can be and that the flaws outweigh the good tremendously.

[Reply](#)



Zach Devereaux Says:

[March 18, 2015 at 12:40 am](#)

Parker,

I agree completely with what you said. I remember the night that you ran away with the two other peers and you ended up getting caught and put in OSS for like over a week. It was bad. What you said was completely true though.

[Reply](#)



12.

Allysa Hammond Says:

[September 19, 2014 at 3:11 am](#)

My name is Allysa Hammond. I came home from MWA two days ago on home intern. I was there for 13 months. It was a hard long journey to get to where I am now, but in no way, shape, or form, was there any kind of abuse ever. The people who work there have the kindest hearts I've ever experienced in my life. Mr. Ben, Mr. James, and all the other staff work there because they truly want to help teens better their lives. I am going to graduate this fall and I am 100% willing to speak to any students/parents who have any questions about my experience there and the truth about Midwest contact me at : [jadehammond96@gmail.com](mailto:jadehammond96@gmail.com)

[Reply](#)



Bill Boyles Says:

[September 20, 2014 at 4:09 am](#)

Allysa,

I'm glad you (apparently) had a positive experience. I would, however, like to point out a few things you (and anyone else reading this) ought to keep in mind.

a) Whatever your own personal experience was, that doesn't mean it was also the experience of everyone else who has attended Midwest Academy. Remember, they've been in operation for over 11 years, and Ben Trane has owned it for something like 8 or 9 years. Things may be different now.

b) IF things ARE different, it's because WWASP programs have undertaken a vigorous effort lately to clean up their acts (or, to be more accurate, mostly their public images.) This is largely because of this site, and others like it. In other words, if you were not abused, odds are, you have the people who were brave enough to tell their stories to thank (as well as this site, for publishing and publicizing those stories...you're welcome.)

c) You've been out for two days, and I assume you "graduated" the program. That means you are still thoroughly enmeshed in the brainwashing to which the program subjects children (which, btw, could itself be considered abuse.) In my own case, it took several years for me to become willing to honestly talk about and deal with the abuse I experienced. This also seems to be the story with the majority of the 1,200+ members of our [WWASP Survivors Facebook group](#). (You're welcome to join, btw. Just click the link.)

d) You've been out for two days, you graduated the program, and I doubt you are 18. This means you most likely have an exit contract. Therefore, you are living under the constant and awful threat of being sent back, perhaps for even petty violations, but talking shit about the program is almost certainly grounds under that document for your parents to pack you up and ship you off to claim Midwest's "second trip free" guarantee. Your internet usage is also probably being strictly monitored. Bet once you get away from the controlled environment your folks provide, you end up singing a different tune. I certainly hope so, for your own sake.

e) Isn't it odd how there have been very few comments on this thread for months, and now suddenly there are several of you on here sticking up for "Mr. Ben" (you're out of the program, call him Ben or Ben Trane or Fuckface, for crying out loud, you know you want to.) I'm sure that's a total coincidence, though, and they aren't using threats and manipulation to coerce you into making these comments (or just flat out making them themselves under fake names.) "Mr. Ben" would NEVER do anything dishonest.

In conclusion, I'm glad you say you weren't abused, but unless Midwest Academy has DRASTICALLY changed their program and business models, odds are that according to the actual best practices of the psychological and psychiatric care communities, as well as both federal and state laws, you probably were, in fact, abused. Again, whenever you figure that out, or when the nightmares start, or the flashbacks, and life becomes a bit too much to handle, come on by our Facebook group. It exists for program survivors to help other program survivors and support them as we all try to process, cope, and deal with what happened to us. I sincerely hope to see you there someday soon.

[Reply](#)





James Farris Says:

[September 20, 2014 at 2:24 pm](#)

I'll stick to some of the more convincing arguments against Midwest Academy.

1. Ben Trane like to compare the program to “bitter medicine” which although is unpleasantly tasting, ultimately helps people. The gaping hole in this analogy is that many professional endeavors (nursing, medicine, psychotherapy) have to be validated by SCIENCE to show that they are EFFECTIVE and SAFE. The entire program structure (the 103 rules, the “seminars”) have not been validated by SCIENCE, exposing teens to UNPROVEN and potentially UNSAFE “behavior modification” techniques.
2. The structure the program purports to use to change behavior is called “Behaviorism.” Behaviorism has been discredited by the VAST MAJORITY of psychologists and psychiatrists for DECADES.
3. Iowa state prisoners are legally mandated to have AT LEAST one hour of outside time per day. Midwest Academy does not have this mandate, effectively giving teens at Midwest Academy less rights than Iowa state prisoners.
4. According to Iowa Administrative code of the Iowa DHS, foster children and those in “juvenile homes” are not allowed to be kept in isolation (aka “control”) rooms for more than 24 hours without a court order. This is because long stays in isolation can be psychologically damaging. However, in Midwest Academy, there is a 24 hour MINIMUM stay for those “acting out” in the small, concrete rooms called “OSS” or “Out of School Suspension.” This effectively allows teens in Midwest Academy to be kept in isolation for DAYS, WEEKS, and even MONTHS, even though the Iowa government recognizes that this is clearly not acceptable. These long stays in Midwest Academy DO happen, as I have personally experienced such a stay in OSS.
5. Just because some teens “get something out of” being at Midwest Academy does not mean that the facility as a whole is not abusive. On Midwest Academy’s website they state that they can handle teens with a variety of mental illnesses. However, since the program has not even been verified to work or be safe for “regular” teens, there is even less support for these techniques to be used on the mentally ill. In fact, these techniques can cause such high stress levels that they actually make mental illness WORSE (as stress is CLEARLY a contraindication for those suffering with mental illness).
6. There are plenty of teens who have developed PTSD from being exposed to these techniques used at Midwest Academy. I know one survivor who is disabled from his/her PTSD that was severely worsened after a long stay at Midwest Academy. I myself had nightmares where I would wake up screaming at the top of my lungs and hitting things for TWO YEARS (one year while in Midwest Academy and one year afterwards).
7. Midwest Academy purports to teach teens to be “accountable,” but all this really turns out to be is the teen blaming themselves for everything that has ever happened to them. PARENTS are the ones who supposedly researched this facility. PARENTS are the ones that wrote the checks to pay for Midwest Academy. You can’t discredit parents as agents because the teen is “accountable.” PARENTS are just as much accountable for the decisions that PARENTS made, just as teens are accountable for the choices teens make. Being sent to Midwest Academy is not SOLELY the responsibility of the TEEN to take accountability for. PARENTS, STAFF, and the OWNER, Ben Trane, are human beings with brains just like teens are. WE ARE ALL ACCOUNTABLE, that includes Ben Trane being accountable for deciding how to structure the school, and a parent’s choice to send his/her child to this particular school. We ALL make choices, and it is the COMBINATION of choices that leads to outcomes, not just the teen’s “behaviors,” “acting out,” etc.

[Reply](#)



Anonymous Says:

[April 13, 2015 at 8:47 am](#)

Where did you find the information for point 4? I am very interested. There was a case a few years ago for a similar situation. Check out this link

<https://caffeinatedthoughts.com/2013/07/iowa-juvenile-home-under-fire-for-use-of-isolation-cells/>

If this really is illegal why not make authorities aware and have that awful place shut down?

[Reply](#)



Allison Sullivan. Says:

[November 9, 2014 at 4:13 am](#)

I agree with Allysa! For the 18 months I was there with her, I never once saw ANY KIND OF ABUSE!!!

[Reply](#)



13.

Parker Hammer Says:

[September 25, 2014 at 7:16 am](#)

In addition to my last post, let me just add that the entire time I was at MWA (3 months) they took us outside for fresh air once...ONCE

[Reply](#)



Allison Sullivan. Says:

[November 9, 2014 at 4:24 am](#)

Cry me a fucking river!!!! Grow up already will you!!!!

[Reply](#)



14.

Allison Sullivan. Says:

[November 9, 2014 at 4:11 am](#)

I was a student at MWA from 6-21-12 to 12-6-13. My life changed so much in those 18 months. Mwa

saved my life. So please stop bashing the place. Some staff members are just there for the paycheck or to get what they feel is revenge on the program for what it did to them, but some staff are really there to help you. I plan on going back to work there soon to help kids. Mwa also has very good reasons for the things they do. You have OSS to teach you that you can not just go around doing whatever you want when you want. I would just ask yourself where you would really be if Midwest wasn't apart of your life. For me I would be 6 feet under the ground.

[Reply](#)



15.

Roger P SAYS:

[January 6, 2015 at 5:33 pm](#)

So i was a student at MWA for 9 long months. I have very mixed feelings about Midwest. Part of me thinks that is was not that bad, that i learned alot and that im thankful for going their. But then i remember how it actually felt being their. Some people are not like me and can just brush things off and do what you need to do to make things better, but me i cant. I still can remember nights when i would literally cry till i fell asleep, i would have random outburst and freekouts. Even small thing would make me angry, needless to say i was a wreck. And on top of being away from everyone i love, i had to deal with staff like Mr. Mike G or Miss Viki who where literally sadistic and would do everything they could do to make you freak out, without being fired. What im trying to say is that it is really not a good environment and the really sad part is that they will never change it! Midwest not only will never change how they do things, and thats sad because they really have an opportunity to really help struggling kids out, but their to busy making us worry about looking out of line and blurting out, instead of the real issues that got us their, for me drugs. At Midwest the only CD (chemical dependency) group is once a week and only for level 3s and up. I can safely say that Midwest did NOTHING for my drug addiction, what got me their in the first place. The only part about Midwest that works is the fear of going back. Oh yeah one last interesting point, only about 30% of student actually graduate.

[Reply](#)



o

Zach Devereaux SAYS:

[March 18, 2015 at 12:42 am](#)

Roger!!

[Reply](#)



16.

ANON SAYS:

[January 15, 2015 at 7:43 pm](#)

I am 27 years old, and have not been to Midwest academy in 10 years, but I will never forget the horror of my 9 months there. I pray things have drastically changed. It completely slays me to see the testimonies of all these kids and remember my own trauma. As an upper level, I was required to watch the kids in isolation on a grainy camera for hours. I did not catch a little developmentally disabled girl (probably mentally 7 or 8) slip her wrist wrap around her neck as she lay on her stomach. Her hair was long and in the way of my view. It was hours before someone saw she was not responsive. She had burst every blood vessel in her face and eyes. The ambulance took her away and I never saw her again. I blamed myself for

years. The way the school is set up is horrifying. I am currently getting my masters degree, and work with severely emotionally disturbed children. I urge all parents to study their techniques and read as many reviews as possible before deciding upon this route. I do not know the heart of the owners and staff. I do know their education level is not high enough, and there was no real therapy provided whatsoever when I went there. I wish they would shut this place down. As for the kids who sing praises, if you are being manipulated into it, I know what it is like to do whatever it takes to get out. I was that "perfect dorm leader" that did the program in a matter of months. Do what you have to to get out and then take a stand to prevent this for other kids.

[Reply](#)



17.

olga Says:

[February 3, 2015 at 7:33 am](#)

Ben was the one not letting me speak to my mom in Spanish on the phone ( she doesn't speak English). He said we are in america and my mom should learn how to speak English! Really?! So why even have a phone call? The one phone call a month that we would get to call home! And what was up with those seminars???

[Reply](#)



18.

shaun mccarthy Says:

[February 11, 2015 at 5:34 am](#)

I went to MWA from september 23rd 2013 to september 30th so a year an 6 days if I'm correct. I would have to disagree with Midwest and its ways.

- 1- treatment by peers in there is not good.
- 2- you are starved to death and the only way you get more food is by getting fake merit points
- 3- medical treatment was not the best due to personal and from others experiences people like nurse ivy would say take a ibuprofen and come back at noon meds or something stupid.
- 4- with the small diet as a level one buddy doing the extreme running and cardio workouts doses not go well together.
- 5- if you refuse to deal with the program they somehow get rights to set you in a brick room with concreat floor 6ft in width 7 ft in length and get at each meal one sandwich box of raisins and half orange.
- 6- when i was a level 3 and i watched oss i watched a 11 year old girl poop, pee all over a oss room and play with it and then she cut her finger and sprayed blood all over the room along with her fiecies.
- 7- your not allowed to talk because its a privilege unless your level 2 n up
- 8- that place had flies in the showers
- 9- if a student wasn't like by any kid and that kid blow up and started fig hint when no staff was there to witness the restraint upper levels would chock or gut punch the student.
- 10- staff members which would hold double standards.

i have plenty more to say but I'm sure people up here ^ know the same stuff as me

[Reply](#)



19.

Connor Beekman Says:

[March 12, 2015 at 3:15 pm](#)

Living hell.

[Reply](#)



20.

Zach Devereaux Says:

[March 18, 2015 at 1:25 am](#)

So I was a student at Midwest for a little over a year, and my experience was by far the worst of my life.

Don't, get me wrong, not all of the staff there are as bad as some people say they are. there are a couple that start to work there, realize how miserable we actually are, and actually do something to try and help. unfortunately, those kinds of staff came along very rarely, and when they did, they would end up getting fired or leaving only a couple of weeks into the job. the "administration" or "family reps" of MWA, in my opinion, were solely there to manipulate parents to leave their children there until they graduate. the staff there, except for a couple like Mr. Derron or Mr. Austin, were just very degrading, verbally abusive, unqualified, sarcastic people with no ambition in life. most of them smoke and reek of cigarettes. a lot of them power trip, and even take out their emotional issues that happen outside of MWA on the students by taunting them and giving them demerits.

When you don't do things exactly their way, they end up putting you in a little cement box until you sit certain way for twenty four hours.

The food there was absolutely horrible, giving us tiny portions of nasty food. We constantly found both dead and alive mice and rats where we ate, and it was disgusting. the admin at MWA put in no effort to get rid of the rodents, or improve on the food or the portions. on top of that, we were forced to do long work outs, which probably resulted with the loss or more calories than we consumed.

The programs system runs entirely off of staff and students with higher ranking and/or authority. so pretty much, whatever they say goes. if an upper level student wanted to keep a lower level student level one for their whole entire program, they could do it very easily. students there have no opinion, or say in anything. MWA refuses to let students talk to those of higher authority (such as CPS) if they feel like they are being mistreated.

The reps at Midwest will lie and manipulate the parents to leave their child there by taking advantage of how desperate they are and by telling the parent that their child is not getting better and that they have the same problems they had when they first got there.

on top of that, when it comes to disciplining the students, there is never a real investigation. the staff just assume, and hand out the consequence. they don't even care to investigate, even knowing that with every consequence they give they are taking a student farther away from home. And that's all a student wants when they are there; all they want is to go home.

Honestly over all MWA is just a corrupt place. They expect the students to act like robots, and not make one mistake. they openly call themselves a "program". well, you cannot "program" human beings into what you want them to be. everybody is there own person, and if we were meant to be different God would have made us that way. I understand if they try to help us change our actions if they are bad or illegal, but forcing us to change our personality is NOT okay.

Midwest did not help me at all except for helping me break a couple of bad habits. but other than that I came out of that place way worse than when I went in, and I am mentally traumatized by anything that reminds me of it. it has developed trust issues between my parents and I, and I often still have anxiety attacks from it. it has overall just made me a angry and fucked up person. if you are a parent reading this, than please trust me when I say that MWA is not the solution, and it will damage you child more than it



will help them.  
you cannot "fix" a human being. we are not broken.

[Reply](#)



o

mr eddie Says:

[June 5, 2015 at 7:52 pm](#)

Oh thanx Zack I thought I was pretty nice but I guess not

[Reply](#)



21.

Anonymous Says:

[April 13, 2015 at 8:36 am](#)

This place truly ruined my life.

[Reply](#)



22.

Anonymous Says:

[May 20, 2015 at 2:08 am](#)

I can't agree more. I was a 13yr old female when I entered the program. It.... ruined..... my..... life. So sad. But I beg all prospective parents to please reconsider your options!!!

[Reply](#)



23.

Brandon Wilson Says:

[May 21, 2015 at 4:16 pm](#)

I was a student there from September 26, 2006 to November 2, 2007. I just now found this site and after almost 8 years since leaving that place still has scared my life. I wasn't a bad kid but didn't like to listen and wanted to learn everything the hard way. This school helped me graduate high school at 17 but other than that it was horrible. I had a few good staff members I knew but I couldn't stand the silence and breaking us down to nothing in groups making you share when not ready. And if you don't shut up and walk a line u don't get points which means you don't move up. They then manipulate your parents to thinking were lying and acting how we did before we left. One letter a week? Never saw or talked to my family on the phone for first 6 months!!! PC1 was first time and man was that hard....If you hire some local hillbilly ass holes to run the "familys" each day and bully us n give us consequence for no reason? Have the staff was bs and so was the whole structure!!! If your reading this and went to MWA you know that feeling where you just wanna run away or almost just act worse!!

My name is Brandon Wilson and if you went to the school when I did you might remember me I was the one with Scott Gustufson who jumped out of the Pride bedroom window and RAN THE FUCK AWAY!!

We were caught the next morning at 8am by Ben Trane and them and was placed in "In School Suspension" which is a small box room with concrete floor and white wall with a huge florescent light on for 24hours straight!! All I had was a twin mattress on floor and a blanket for 2 days! The night we ran was on Halloween and i left November 2nd so I was in there a few days. We had no shoes cause there locked away so ran through woods and creeks with socks on and sweaters and was winter so do the math we were in bad shape when they found us! And they had a nurse look at us and then we showered after 2 days. Then all of a sudden upper levels open door said u need to come with me and they took me to the front of building that I had not seen for over a year when my parents had brought me there. I saw a giant garbage bag so I knew what that meant from previous kids leaving and next thing I knew I was outside with my family going home.

To this day I'm 25 a college graduate working downtown Chicago and have a 6 year old son named Zachary. Life couldn't be better but if anyone reading this thinking about there kids or if they should go save yourself 50k and do your research and find somewhere that will actually help not Scar you kid.

I could write a book about this place and the hell I went through as a teenager. Just knowing there is kids in that school at this second makes me sad and think about them..Hopefully they shut this place down SOON!!!

Take it easy survivors!

[Reply](#)



o

chad Says:

[August 21, 2015 at 2:09 pm](#)

My wife and I put our adopted 13yr old girl in Midwest in april of 2015. We read the comments of people who said not to go there but decided to do it anyway. we dropped her off on a Thursday and she had a couple of blisters from a sunburn on her legs and we had been taking care of them with medicine. the next day they took her to the E.R. were she proceeded to tell the Doctor how we tied her to trees and didn't feed her. Mind you this child came from a bad home and 13yrs off bad upbringing. She had them so convinced that we were so bad that they called DCFS. By the time she got done talking she had the staff including Ben Trane believing all her stories. As soon as DCFS came knocking on our door Ben and the family jane were calling DCFS and going behind our back. this is a school for troubled teens and instead of checking out the problem MIDWEST ACADAMEY and The DCFS worker keep calling each other to make up a long list of charges against us that were unfounded after 2 months of waiting. when we got the DCFS report we were picking our mouths up to find out that BEN TRANE-MRS JANE(the family) were lying to us the whole 4 months our child was in that school. she didn't have to go to school 90% of the time as she just got up and was aloud to go to Intervention if she didn't want to do something. They also were in with the Case worker as they tried to take our parental rights away from us. this all took place after they DCFS case was closed!!!! we also were going to pull her out of there because of the monthly cost and Ben and the case worker started plotting a way to keep her there and make us pay for it. We had a sit down meeting with Ben and told him we were out of money and couldn't raise anymore he said not to worry he wanted her to stay and we all would figure it out. Before we left we got to see our daughter for the first time in 4 months and as we talked Ben found out from her that she lied about the Accusations she made about us. He couldn't believe she had been lying to him. when we got home and my wife and I talked we new something still wasn't right and the following Monday we had a call from the case worker and was asking how our "private meeting" went. As we talked to her we found out she had been talking behind our backs and we told her that there are privacy laws she is crossing and not to call Ben anymore. then we called Ben up and told him the same thing. amazingly enough the next day they called and said when can you come get her. They kicked her out of the

E-FILED 2016 FEB 16 3:57 PM LEE SOUTH - KEOKUK - CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT  
program cause they couldn't bully us anymore. So all in all I would agree that this place is not for teaching kids anything except that if they don't want to do it then they don't have to.

[Reply](#)



Lauren Says:

[November 12, 2015 at 8:11 am](#)

I was there with your daughter, and I totally understand where you are coming from. I also met you at your parent interview. I'm sorry I was not more open with you about MWA. I was afraid I was going to lose my level, and was more focused on getting my 15 minute phone call home than anything.

[Reply](#)



24.

Jon decoteau Says:

[October 10, 2015 at 9:47 pm](#)

If you think mwa was shitty, casa by the sea was 10x as bad. My experiences with both made Leavenworth federal prison seem like heaven. Just saying.

[Reply](#)



25.

Lauren Says:

[November 12, 2015 at 8:06 am](#)

The entire facility got scabies while I was there which led to many students sleeping in khaki pants and polos without underwear on, and then being forced to wear it again the next day. Along with that I was restrained by Mike Greenslaugh while in intervention, and standing still inside my room (vids prove it unless they were deleted) where I was then slammed on the ground and picked up and slammed back down repeatedly on the cement floor. I had a bruise on my right eye which was incredibly noticeable and inflamed. I also was restrained the night before and had bruises on my arms. I also witnessed a girl being dragged across the ground by the clinical director in an admit to restrain her even though she wasn't the one that did it! The other 3 men tackled the 15 year old female 2 of which were directors Mr. Devon and Mr. Ray. They lift weights intensely, under Devon Nade on Facebook. He also lacks a degree in social working, and/or counseling. Then why is he leading seminars? I agree with most of the stuff posted previously, a lot of messed up crap happens there but on the bright side I received my high school diploma and learned nothing doing it also blew 5 grand a month for 10 until getting the boot. I've graduated other programs, and made it to upper levels at MWA until fighting against the abuse. How can we get this place shutdown? Or at least to a healthy point.

[Reply](#)



26.

Emily Beaman Says:

February 1, 2016 at 5:52 am

January 2015, I was brought to Midwest Academy. My doctor, knowing my frequent hospital visits and my trouble with psychosis and depression, recommended the home in hopes I would rebuild myself to be a happier and healthier person. When I came to Midwest, I loved it. Miss. Layani, the directors wife, invited me to join her case load with only two other girls. She quickly became the mom I never had as mine was abusive and left. I fell in love with the program and the upper level girls. I did, of course, notice things that were unusual. Like why no student outside of upper levels could look in the mysterious room that a heavy door protected that screams often came from. Or where kids went when they acted up or even why we were not allowed to talk to our families. I moved up quickly and within my first week and a half, became a level two. I felt great. That is until the day it all changed. One day, a thirteen year old girl was talking, which is against the rules. Two large men were brought in as a request of the staff. This girl, who could not have weighed over 100 pounds, was slammed against the table and picked up and taken out of the room into the mysterious room. I was shocked. That other girl was on miss. Layani's caseload to. Where was Miss. Layani? I requested to see her. I told her when I saw her that day about what had happened. She didn't look surprised. Instead she told me not to be like that girl and bad things wouldn't happen. I felt trapped. I couldn't talk to anyone, couldn't call home. So I tried to get to a place where I could. I attempted to jump from the stairway railing that night. Instead of the hospital, I was restrained and dragged by the same men. I tried to fight them but my arm was twisted so hard by them I was afraid it was going to snap. I became really scared as we approached the mysterious door. I then saw inside rows of boxes, actual isolation boxes with one way handles and 24 hour video streaming attached to a large computer over seeing all the boxes. Inside each box is nothing but concrete walls painted white. No bed, nothing but walls. I was thrown into a small, dark box where I was kept overnight. The next morning Miss. Layani came to see me. As she pulled me out, I saw the little thirteen year old girl on the computer screen inside a replica of my box.

Miss. Layani told me since I was so good, she would let me out without having to follow normal procedure. When I returned to the normal program, I was an outcast. As the weeks went on I stayed quiet until I decided upon my next move. I punched a girl for trying to take me to the box. I figured jail would give me a phonecall, as well as freedom from the academy. Yet, I was dragged back to the box. No one came to see me for weeks. So I asked the staff watching the computer how to get out. She told me I had to sit in a staff approved position for 24 hours, then write a 6,000 word essay on why I loved the academy. Then the clinical team would think about releasing me. I did that. Time after time I would go to the box for everything from talking to fighting all to be let out and put back at zero points every time. One day, I was escorted to a small room where I, for the first time in months, saw my dad. But something was wrong. He told me, he was given five minutes to say a script that Miss. Layani had prepared. That was the only way he could see me. I wanted to see him more so I gave up fighting the program and became level two again. I was at level three points when I realized what a level three requirement was. In order to make it to level three and keep level three, you have to make sure no one in the box escapes. You are responsible for restraining, and watching the person in the box. I wanted to vomit. The night I found out about it, I attacked the girl who had watched my friend in the box. I was thrown back into the box but this time I was kept there for two months. After the months, they transferred me to the boys side boxes for better security. On my way, I pretended to be tired. My escorts, gripping both my arms, were my age and around the same size. I attacked them and ran at the only door I could. I was immediately pinned down by a female staff when I fought back and got up. I was almost fully up when I was tazed in the neck and picked up and locked behind the box once again. I cried so hard. I'll never forget that feeling. Like no one in the world can hear you. Days turned into weeks without seeing anyone. Just me and the four walls. I stopped eating, resulting in a fifteen pound weightloss. I weighed 124 before the weight was lost. I came out of the box in bones. I gave up. I did what I had to do but I had no energy, no motivation, no feeling. My only drive to get up each day was another day closer to being eighteen and able to go to a homeless shelter and leave. I would cry every night. One night I grabbed whatever last bit of energy I had and tried to fight one of the girls. I lost. Every staff came over and restrained me. I was nothing but bones, but I was expressed as dangerous to everyone by the staff. The next morning, I was let out and escorted to the bathroom. I grabbed a bottle cap I found on the table on my way back and went back into the box. I thought, "This is it, I'm going to end this." And made deep cuts on my arm. I was pinned back but they were to late. Blood was everywhere. They called the ambulance. Within an hour, I was brought to the hospital where the nightmare ended. I begged to go to an inpatient. The doctor prayed over me and sent me to Saint Luke's 3 east youth

inpatient. That night, the nurses gave me a radio and for the first time in seven months, I could listen to music and talk to my dad. They gave me a lot of hot chocolate and stayed up with me on the nights when I would get my voices. One nurse, would even bring in movies and talk with me every day about how I was doing. I began to get my strength back. They took photographs of the bruises that went up and down my neck and arms. One day I was playing four square with the other kids admitted when I was brought down to a small room where to my horror, Miss. Layani was sitting. I backed out and asked a staff to come with me. They sent not one, but two amazing nurses to help me in dealing with this. Miss. Layani smiled and tried to hug me as if nothing had happened. After the talk I was presented with two options, go back to Midwest and have a fresh start, or take my chances and go to a different program that could potentially be worse. I told her I would never see her again. When the meeting finished, Miss. Layani requested to see me alone to say goodbye. As I walked in, she hugged me and cried. Then she told me, "Listen to me. You do whatever the next program asks no matter what your opinion is so you can go home and this can be over. I love you." I never saw her again. A week later I was sent to Midwest Center for family and youth where I stayed for a month and a half before being released and sent home. Currently, the psychosis that Midwest's doctor said would never go away, disappeared. I have no voices, no depression and I'm even graduating in a month from high school. And I have a job. I have friends, and I wake up each day excited. For a long time after the incident, I dealt with nightmares and panic attacks about the box. But my best friend and I work through those everyday. I couldn't be more thankful to the people involved in shutting down Midwest Academy. I would still be there if I had not cut. Now all of those kids are free.

[Reply](#)

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
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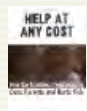
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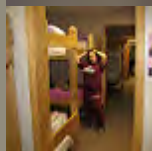
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## Useful Services

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