



Research Institute

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**Internet Sites**

- [www.MentorResearch.org](http://www.MentorResearch.org)
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- [www.OregonCounseling.org](http://www.OregonCounseling.org)
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- [www.OutdoorTherapy.org](http://www.OutdoorTherapy.org)
- [www.UnabashedSelf.org](http://www.UnabashedSelf.org)

501 c 3 Non-Profit Corp.  
Tax Id# 91-1777183

Mentor Research Institute is a non-profit educational and research organization with focus on mental health for youth and families; homelessness, effective intervention, public and professional education.

**For Immediate Release  
August 11, 2005**

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Mentor Research Institute has conducted research and provided consumer protection information regarding wilderness therapy programs for nearly 6 years. We have a data base about programs and consumer feedback; we have been involved in formative evaluation research on outdoor treatment for nearly four years. We also offer professional continuing education in outdoor behavioral health.

We would like to provide information regarding SageWalk and the ABC television program "Brat Camp." Our goal is to clear up some misinformation.

SageWalk is licensed to operate a wilderness therapy program. There are specific Oregon State regulations regarding health, safety and operation; SageWalk is in compliance with these regulations and is subject to routine review. SageWalk has been reviewed by nearly 50 licensed mental health professionals as well as officials in Oregon's Department of Health and Human Services.

SageWalk is actively involved in a comprehensive and independent research program evaluating its effectiveness. This will be one of the first and most thorough outcome studies ever conducted in this area of intervention. Initial results indicate significant improvements in graduates' behavior and emotional well being including dramatic reductions in risk factors. This program has a high success rate.

The public can be assured that SageWalk's field staff are thoroughly screened, trained and supervised by a licensed mental health professional. The program has field staff certified in search and rescue, wilderness first aid and emergency evacuation. SageWalk staff are trained in strategies to manage, de-escalate and restrain violent behavior. Dangerous and violent children are discharged from the program. Therapists and counselors are licensed or pursuing licensure as part of supervised residency in mental health or counseling. SageWalk is one of a few programs that have a psychologist as clinical director and a licensed professional counselor as its field/program director. The field/program director is a respected former case worker in a local county mental health program for youth and families. SageWalk has a registered nurse on staff and a physician group on contract to deal with medical problems. All students receive a thorough physical and medical screening. The program does not admit children with medical conditions that present a serious health risk.

SageWalk is *not* a boot camp. The overall program at SageWalk separates youth from negative and dangerous influences in their lives. Children are placed in outdoor environments that are safe in order to help them discover what they have taken for granted, to create circumstances that lead to self-examination, and to help them learn how to communicate, cooperate, and contribute to the well-being of a group. Therapists encourage and reinforce individual effort, personal growth and positive changes that occur. This is an emotional growth program.

There is a significant body of literature in the field of outdoor behavioral health. There are many articles and training programs devoted to safety, ethics, standards of care and consumer protection.



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Like many of you we have been following the showing of ABC's "Brat Camp." Remember that this is television. The program is realistic and accurate but leaves out much of what actually goes on at SageWalk. What isn't seen on TV is that the program has a powerful foundation in behavioral science. If you watch Brat Camp several times you will begin to see that there is a great deal of therapy, counseling and positive regard for these students. There is a lot more going on than the TV camera can possibly capture.

The television show, "Brat Camp", has strong emphasis on the physical challenges of the program. SageWalk also spends much time and effort providing parent education, high school education, therapy and career counseling as well as alcohol and drug counseling. These aspects of treatment are not reflected in the TV program. The physical adversities are extremely difficult but they are not continuous. Children are not merely thrown into the wilderness and made to suffer hardships. Every activity is based on behavioral and psychological principles that have been adapted to their field program.

Few children who enter SageWalk are like the ones you see on TV. The majority of the children who attend SageWalk are "at-risk" not "out of control." The children who are out of control create the most drama. Children who are at-risk adjust quickly and easily. Parents and authorities need to know that many of these children would rather be running loose, failing school, getting high, breaking the law or disrespecting their parents. Some of these kids are just plain lost, afraid and depressed. Others are anxious, afraid and lack self-confidence. Every kid in a legitimate wilderness therapy program will be encouraged, challenged, to face their emotional problems and given every opportunity to succeed. Programs like SageWalk build character. They do not destroy the spirit of a child.

SageWalk is open and responsive to professional review and feedback. Parents are involved. Our preliminary research indicates that SageWalk is among the safest and most effective emotional growth and treatment programs in America.

**For more information contact: Mentor Research Institute**

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