

= Help at Any Cost =

Help at Any Cost : How the Troubled @-@ Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids is a non @-@ fiction book by Maia Szalavitz analyzing the controversy surrounding the tough love behavior modification industry . The book was published February 16 , 2006 , by Riverhead Books . Szalavitz focuses on four programs : Straight , Incorporated , a copy of the Straight Inc. program called KIDS , North Star wilderness boot camp , and the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools . She discusses the background , history and methodology of the troubled @-@ teen industry , including techniques drawn from attack therapy and Synanon . She uses first @-@ person accounts and court testimony in her research , and states that no evidence exists proving that these programs are effective . The book also includes advice for parents and an appendix with additional resources on how to get responsible help for teenagers .

The book received positive reviews in academic journals , literary journals , and in the media . Psychologist Steve K. D. Eichel reviewed the book for Cultic Studies Review and called it a " must read " , psychologist and psychiatrist Robert John McAllister described it as " an excellent and informative book on the subject of the ' troubled @-@ teen industry ' " in his book Emotions : Mystery Or Madness , and a review in Psychology Today described Szalavitz 's work as " a meticulously reported and thoughtful investigation " . The book also received positive reviews in Publishers Weekly , Booklist , and Newsday . The book later led to an investigation into the troubled @-@ teen industry by the United States House Committee on Education and Labor of the United States House of Representatives , and Representative George Miller held hearings on the matter in October 2007 and April 2008 .

= = Background = =

Teenagers have been participating in tough love behavior modification programs since the 1960s . Many of these programs take place in the wilderness in the style of military recruit training (also known as boot camps) and the teenagers are subjected to rigid discipline , including mandatory marches , physical abuse , solitary confinement , and deprivation of food and sleep . These programs have little to no oversight from the United States federal or state governments . Teenagers ' claims of abuse at these facilities have not been investigated because the programs are not regulated .

= = Author = =

Maia Szalavitz is a senior fellow at the Statistical Assessment Service (stats.org) , a media watchdog organization which monitors news coverage of statistics and science . She has served as a researcher for journalist Bill Moyers , a part @-@ time contributor to Psychology Today , and has written articles for The New York Times , The Washington Post , Reason , and The American Prospect . Szalavitz is the co @-@ author of Recovery Options : The Complete Guide with Joseph Volpicelli , and The Boy Who Was Raised As a Dog with Bruce D. Perry .

= = Contents = =

In Help at Any Cost Szalavitz investigates the teen rehabilitation industry and focuses on four programs : Straight , Incorporated , a copy of the Straight Inc. program called KIDS of Bergen County , North Star wilderness boot camp , and the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools . Some of these programs cost parents over US \$ 2 @,@ 000 per month . She discusses the history of the troubled @-@ teen industry and its origins in a controversial group founded in 1958 called Synanon . Synanon claimed that it could cure addiction to heroin , and its methodologies such as attack therapy , forced confessions , and imposed powerlessness spread throughout the United States . After a rattlesnake was placed in the mailbox of an attorney suing Synanon , the group 's founder was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder . Synanon later went

bankrupt , but Szalavitz maintains that it influenced organizations related to the troubled @-@ teen industry .

Szalavitz notes that according to a 2004 statement released by the National Institutes of Health , teen programs using " fear and tough treatment " are not successful and evidence shows that they can worsen existing behavioral problems . Many of the children that enter these programs suffer from mental illness , and already have a history of prior trauma and abuse . Szalavitz uses first @-@ person accounts from teenagers that participated in these programs , and asserts that the programs have potentially serious negative consequences , including post @-@ traumatic stress and deaths .

An emotional story in the book recounts the death of 16 @-@ year @-@ old Aaron Bacon . Bacon suffered from a treatable ulcer , and died after being out in the wilderness in Utah for weeks while in the care of the group North Star . Bacon lost 23 pounds (10 kg) in 20 days , but was called " gay " and a " faker " when he complained of abdominal pain , and was punished by North Star supervisors ? his sleeping bag and food were taken away from him . The individuals responsible for Bacon were charged with negligent homicide , but did not serve any jail time .

In addition to these first @-@ person accounts , she also incorporates court reports and testimony in her research . Szalavitz highlights controversial practices used by these tough love teen industry programs which the Geneva Convention banned as being too extreme for prisoners of war . She states that there is no evidence that any of the programs are effective . Portions of the book are addressed to parents and provide resources and advice on how to select better choices instead of programs in the tough love teen industry , and the book includes an appendix aimed at educating parents on how to find help for their teenagers .

= = Reception = =

In his book Emotions : Mystery Or Madness , psychologist and psychiatrist Robert John McAllister highly recommended Help at Any Cost , and called it " an excellent and informative book on the subject of the ' troubled @-@ teen industry ' " , and " important reading for any parent who is considering sending a teenager to a tough love program , a boot camp , or a wilderness program . " In a review of the book in Library Journal , Linda Beck commented : " This book is excellent owing to its whistle @-@ blowing approach : it exposes an unregulated industry and alerts adults to the severe harm inflicted by these ' schools . ' " She called the book " chilling " and " Highly recommended for public libraries . "

In a review in Mother Jones , Nell Bernstein highlighted the sources given for parents at the back of the book , commenting : " Help at Any Cost winds up with an appendix that helpfully outlines " evidence based " alternatives to the tough @-@ love approach . " Steve Weinberg of the St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch gave the book a positive review , and described Szalavitz as " a talented , relentless investigator " . He noted : " Her outrage surfaces frequently as children die , as once @-@ loving families are atomized and as troubled @-@ teen entrepreneurs escape criminal prosecution while using legal maneuvers to prevail in civil court lawsuits seeking damages " , and characterized Help at Any Cost as " an important book about an industry that sometimes helps troubled youth but causes harm way too often . "

A review in Psychology Today called the book " An alarming exposé of the burgeoning business of boot camps and drug rehab centers that promise to reform troubled teens " , and described Szalavitz 's work as " a meticulously reported and thoughtful investigation " . Vanessa Bush of Booklist characterized the book as " a revealing , at times horrifying look at the troubled @-@ teen industry . " Publishers Weekly noted : " With a useful appendix discussing when and how to get responsible help for a troubled teen , this book , filled with first @-@ person accounts , should be required reading in Parenting 101 " , calling the work " a courageous ? if horrifying ? study of the tough @-@ love industry " .

Karen Karbo , author of The Stuff of Life , gave the book a positive review in Newsday , writing : " Maia Szalavitz 's brisk investigation of America 's so @-@ called " tough love " treatment programs , which bill themselves as the last hope for out @-@ of @-@ control , drug @-@ taking teens , would be the stuff of a bad TV movie , if it weren 't so smart , well @-@ researched and even @-@

handed . " Mark Sauer of The San Diego Union @-@ Tribune noted : " Some of the stories reveal physical and psychological abuse that rivals tales from Iraq 's Abu Ghraib Prison . "

= = Aftermath = =

Help at Any Cost succeeded in bringing attention to deaths related to medical neglect and child abuse in the troubled @-@ teen industry . On October 10 , 2007 , the United States House Committee on Education and Labor of the United States House of Representatives held a full committee investigative hearing chaired by Representative George Miller on " Cases of Child Neglect and Abuse at Private Residential Treatment Facilities " . The Government Accountability Office presented findings from an investigation into the troubled @-@ teen industry , and parents of teens who died under care of these organizations testified at the hearing . Maia Szalavitz attended the hearing as well .

After the book 's publication , Szalavitz continued to write about the controversy surrounding the troubled @-@ teen industry for Statistical Assessment Service , The New York Times , The Washington Post , Reason , and The American Prospect . The House Committee on Education and Labor held additional hearings on the matter on April 24 , 2008 , again chaired by Representative George Miller .