

Wednesday, October 24, 2007

Why send inmates on a wilderness program if they will be returned to their cells in a matter of days?

Image from Bureau of Prisons' website. Oak Hill is a District of Columbia jail for males, located in Laurel, Maryland. Recently nine Oak Hill inmates were sent on a survival program, apparently to help them better adjust to society. Fine and dandy if the result is to release them from incarceration at the end of successfully completing the survival program, but quite another thing if the inmates are returned to incarceration, which they were. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Criminal Defense at 00:00

<http://oklahomacriminaldefense.blogspot.com/2006/08/oklahoma-youthful-offender-boot-camps.html>

I wrote about a similiar concept of the general public's positive perceptions of "prison boot camps" despite many problems with the same.

Like survival courses --- they are perceived as popular because the cost little money

They don't help the drug addict get treatment, and they don't help a person get the necessary job skills to get a good job. They don't teach you how to read. They don't address mental problems. They make the public feel good and cost little money and give the impression that some new program is going to "help" the inmate despite statistics showing otherwise.

The antiquated boot camp ideas came from southern states like Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, Okalahoma, Mississippi. (Hint: racial over-tones)

"What we 'ave 'ere is a FAILURE TO CUMMINICATE !!!"

They make the meaner, meaner, and the tougher, tougher.

Boot camps were banned in Florida on June 1, 2005 through legislation signed by Florida Governor Jeb Bush after 14-year-old Martin Lee Anderson was murdered by drill instructors who forcibly inserted ammonia tablets into his nose. Anderson attended Bay County Boot Camp in Panama City, Florida. After the mid-1990s, the number of boot camps declined. By 2000, nearly one-third of State prison boot camps had closed--only 51 camps remained. (See: NIJ study below.) The average daily population in State boot camps also dropped more than 30 percent.

The National Institute of Justice conducted a 10 year long study of boot camps and their report dated 2003 is available at the web site: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij> or: www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/197018.pdf

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsored an analysis of research conducted over a 10-year period beginning in the late 1980s. This analysis concluded that [See above link for the report dated (2003)] - it concluded: Mixed Results: Participants reported positive short-term changes in attitudes and behaviors; they also had better problem-solving and coping skills.

With few exceptions, these positive changes did not lead to reduced recidivism. NIJ evaluation studies consistently showed that boot camps did not reduce recidivism regardless of whether the camps were for adults or juveniles or whether they were first-generation programs with a heavy military emphasis or later programs with more emphasis on treatment.

In Canada and Europe many see US society as highly militarised for which the military style boot camps are just another example. After having shed a very militaristic past, Europeans tend to be quite wary of military influence in civil society. As well, the tactics employed in most boot camps are considered to infringe on the human rights of the affected and to be rather totalitarian. Therefore in Canada participation in boot camp programmes are voluntary, so as to avoid any challenges under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms under which treatment at boot camps could be seen as an infringement on a youth's right to not be subject to cruel and unusual punishment and to ensure security of person. Canada started a boot camp project for non-violent juveniles with subtle but distinct differences from the American models. The first one was opened in 1997 in Ontario. Unlike in the US system it is not possible to trade or shorten a jail sentence with a significantly shorter boot camp programme. Canadian boot camps do not have the time frame of 90 to 180 days and they are restricted to juveniles up to the age of 17 and not yet open for female offenders. The judges do not directly possess the authority to send a youth to a boot camp. They may impose a sentence of secure or open custody. The latter is defined as, "a community residential centre, group home, child care institution or forest or wilderness camp . . .". Once an open custody sentence is granted, a correctional official decides whether a sentence is served in a boot camp programme. But the ultimate decision rests with the young person and the decision is made purely on the merits of the programme because the time served remains the same.

The Canadian system is too young to show any comparable results but research has been done among US boot camps with different emphasises, e. g. more on drug treatment or education than solely on military drill. According to the findings treatment has a slightly positive impact on the reduction of recidivism over strict discipline.

However, altogether there are no research findings in favour of boot camps in light of any of the initial intentions. Recidivism rates in the US among former prison inmates and boot camp participants are roughly the same. Yet, the effects of boot camps are controversially disputed, some surveys claiming lower re-offence rates, others showing no change as compared to persons serving normal time. Surveys also show different results concerning the reduction of costs. Critics add, that the emphasis on authority can only result in frustration, resentment, anger, short temper, a low self-esteem and aggression rather than respect. According to a report in the New York Times there have been 30 known deaths of youths in US boot camps since 1980.

Anonymous on Oct 24 2007, 01:35

Thanks, Glen, for your message. The incarceration industry is highly profitable for those earning their paycheck from it and for corporations running private prisons and supplying publicly-owned incarceration facilities. That means plenty of people are going to oppose reforming the incarceration system on the basis of their income alone.

Anonymous on Oct 26 2007, 05:56