



The School Solution Newsletter

the source for supportive schools

The School Solution

The School Solution is the educational consulting practice owned by Karen Mabie. Karen works with families whose child (age 11 to 26) is still struggling despite the best efforts of the family, including intense therapeutic and academic supports at home. At this point the family may feel exhausted, frightened and hopeless, but it is not time to give up. There are so many residential options with unique therapeutic and educational approaches, somewhere there is a place for every child to succeed, Karen can find that place. She visits over 80 schools and programs every year. She has personally and professionally evaluated each placement to assess the specific therapeutic and educational supports they provide. She continues to stay in touch with her client and their programs for at least one year.

When making this critical decision it is NOT the time to rely on the internet or word of mouth. These children are too vulnerable. Karen professionally interviews the family, teachers and treating professionals in order to develop a thorough understanding of the child's vulnerabilities and strengths. She is uniquely qualified to find the specific milieu and treatment team where that child and family can begin to heal and thrive.

Karen Mabie, Ed.S., NCSP, CEP



Karen was awarded the Distinguished Service Award for "unyielding service to young people and their families" from the Independent Small Programs Alliance. She was also awarded the Excellence in Education Award from Woodbury Reports for "appropriate placements and commitment to at-risk youth" based on feedback from therapeutic programs. Karen was the keynote speaker for the National Association of Therapeutic Wilderness Camping (NATWC) on the role of an educational consultant in wilderness placement.

Travelogue

In the past year I have been to: Utah, New York, Arizona, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Florida and Tennessee to tour schools and programs. On the vast majority visits I am truly impressed with the professionalism and dedication of the staff and the maturity and insight the kids have developed. However, it is even more important, when I visit a program and I am not impressed. Programs may have a great website and glowing testimonials, but there is no substitute for a professional evaluating the program; in person, on site.

When a family chooses to send their child to a residential treatment facility it is, necessarily, only after multiple treatment failures at home. This choice requires an enormous emotional and financial commitment, therefore, the best possible placement should be made. When I evaluate programs, I assess the qualifications of the staff, the relationship between the kids and the staff and I always spend private time with the kids. In the past year I have ruled out some programs after visiting them. The first

program I ruled out was because there was only one trained therapist for over 60 kids. The next was because there appeared to be no relationship between the clinical director and any of the students, he did not know their names and they did not know him. Finally, I ruled out a program when a young man at the program told me the one thing he would change about the program is that they should not have staff that is easily triggered by the student's anger, that program closed within 6 months.

I believe passionately in the strength and power of extraordinary professional programs to help children and support families. However, I also know that the families searching for treatment are often in crisis and extremely vulnerable, and the wrong place can be highly traumatic for the child and family. My intention is to visit as many programs as frequently as possible to ensure a positive experience for the child and family.

**Contact me anytime.
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I am available to discuss any questions you have about therapeutic boarding schools, boarding schools, residential treatment or wilderness programs. In addition, I am available to speak to your group about the scope of residential options and what client families they serve—just call or email.

Testimonial

We are continually grateful for our introduction to Karen, and all that she has done for us. Her expertise, knowledge, and commitment are beyond compare. Karen is not a corporation; she is one person who believes in the good that she can bring to others. As long as there is one more contribution that she can make to help her client's journey, she will be by their side. A better friend one cannot have.

Voice from the Front Lines:

I spoke at length with an MSW who has worked in the schools and community-based organizations for several years. Last summer she was a therapist in a Therapeutic Wilderness program. She was profoundly impacted by her work in the field and her practice has evolved. Her role at the program was to work with approximately 6 boys at a time., She saw the boys individually at least once a week, lead groups at least once a week, supported the field instructors, spoke to the parents every week and co-lead a three day family workshop.

The biggest difference she experienced was because the parents were required to be involved in treatment. She found that the relationships she forged with the families in the program were stronger and more complex than many she had formed in her years of practice in the community. Because the family has committed to at least 7 weeks of the program, it is possible to confront the parents honestly about their part in the difficulties at home. The parents must look at their part in their child's problem and begin to look at how they must also change. She found it was this honest assessment of the family system that was the reason she often recommended further residential treatment after wilderness.

She heard a boy say that "6 weeks in was like 2 years of therapy at home. She whole-heartedly agrees. She found wilderness treatment to be intense and real. There were no drugs to cloud the mind, no escape from difficult issues. The young person couldn't hide in a room or by playing video games. It was also not possible to avoid issues for a 60 minute appointment; in the field, the therapists and guides waited for the student to be ready, all day and all night, there was no escape. It was so powerful, every day they were reminded, just by waking up, that they were there for a reason and there was no hiding from the reality of what was not working at home.

Now that she is back in the community she has found that she uses more metaphors and many more experiential therapies. She has found that she speaks to her clients with a renewed thoughtfulness and care remembering that they are always learning in every relationship.

Recommended Reading

Nurture Shock

by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman

A parenting book that uses brain research to help parents look anew at issues such as: sibling rivalry, false praise, overinvolved parenting, teen rebellion and more.

"How to Land Your Kid In Therapy"

by Lorri Gottlieb from The Atlantic

An eye-opening article that discusses how obsessing over our children's happiness may rob them of a happy and self-sufficient adulthood.

We've Got Issues

by Judith Warner

An important book that looks with compassion and reason at the popular assumption that parents are over-diagnosing and over-medicating their children. This is an important book for parents to read as they are making difficult treatment decisions for their child.

