



Kidnapping charge stems from 'boot camp' drug intervention

[By Todd R. Hansen/Colusa County Sun-Herald](#)

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A Napa man was arrested after he reportedly took his 13-year-old grandson to Letts Lake in northwest Colusa County with the idea of getting him off drugs in a “boot camp” setting, the Colusa County Sheriff’s Department reported.

The reported victim “stated that he was accused of being on methamphetamine ... and stated he has never tried meth,” sheriff’s Lt. Shane Maxey said.

The teen told investigators that his grandfather, Robin M. Jones, 64, and his father, Michael Jones, grabbed him from his sleep about 1 a.m. Tuesday, hog-tied him and then took him against his will to Letts Lake, Maxey said.

The grandfather reportedly told other campers in the area that the teen was in “boot camp” under his custody, Maxey said.

A U.S. Forest Service agent saw the boy and his grandfather arguing Wednesday, and stopped to see what the dispute was about.

The teen told the agent he had been taken up to the lake from his Vallejo home against his will, Maxey said.

The Colusa County Sheriff’s Department was called about 3:30 p.m. The grandfather was arrested about 90 minutes later.

Jones was booked into Colusa County Jail on suspicion of kidnapping, false imprisonment and child endangerment. Bail was set at \$100,000.

The boy, who lives with his father, was turned over to Child Protective Services for release to family members, Maxey said.

No charges have been brought against Michael Jones, said Maxey, but the investigation continues.

Maxey is not sure why Letts Lake was chosen by Jones, but suspects he was familiar with the lake.

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The services stress that they are safe and effective, and some have been operating for at least a decade. But even today, they are hardly known.

In interviews with more than a hundred youth advocates, lawyers, police officers and educators, few said they had ever heard of the industry. And among those who know it well -- the managers of child-escort services and special schools, the parents who hire them and the young people who have been taken away -- few want to talk about it.

Others, however, describe an obscure industry operating virtually without regulation. Transport services are scattered across the country from Georgia to Oregon. California is the hub of the industry, and in the Bay Area, business is booming.

* On March 7, two burly men in Bolinas approached a 16-year-old girl who had run away from her father in San Francisco and said they had come to take her to a behavior modification school in Arezzo, Italy. But after an adult friend telephoned the Marin County Sheriff's Department, deputies foiled the plan and sent the girl to a youth shelter.

* On December 28, a San Jose girl spending the holidays with her grandparents in Orange County awoke to find two men and a woman at her bedside. Two of her uncles say the escorts took her to their car, strapped her in and drove more than 400 miles to Cross Creek Manor, a Utah school that her parents had chosen from a magazine ad.

A school employee recently said the 16-year-old girl was still there, kept inside except for occasional visits to a playing field outside her dorm.

* On October 21, a man with a holstered gun and a woman carrying handcuffs walked into a Palo Alto high school and asked for a Los Altos girl. The girl, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they told her they were social workers sent to take her for a psychiatric evaluation.

As they led her to a car, she said, they warned that they would hurt her if she tried to run. Only later did she learn that they were child escorts hired by her parents to take her to New Mexico.

The Santa Clara district attorney's office is apparently investigating everyone from the parents to the escorts to the wilderness camp. Prosecutors declined to say what, if any charges, they plan to file. But police officers and prosecutors in other counties believe that a case could be built to support kidnaping charges.

FRAUD OR FORCE EQUALS KIDNAPING

"Whenever you use force or fraud to take someone, that can be a kidnaping case, even against a parent," said Elvoyce Hooper, a deputy district attorney in Fresno County who has prosecuted parents for snatching children from their former spouses.

Transport services range in scale from individuals working alone to firms with perhaps a dozen agents. Child-transport is just one of the tasks performed by West Shield Investigative Services in Orange County. But for the Helping Hands firm, also in Orange County, it is the main line of business.

Many in the industry are private investigators or former police officers, but "all sorts of people have gotten into the trade," said Lon Woodbury, an educational consultant in Idaho.

Some child-escort services stress that they do not use force and that they treat the children with respect. In many cases, they say, the teenagers go with them eagerly.

TERRIFYING EXPERIENCES