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## NEWS

### 'BOOT CAMP' CLOSED

**Tufton wants educational/training facility for controversial Tranquility Bay camp**

BY GARFIELD MYERS Editor-at-Large South/Central Bureau  
Monday, February 23, 2009

TREASURE BEACH, St Elizabeth - Tranquility Bay, the controversial offshore reform school for rebellious children, mostly from the United States, closed its doors last month as a result of a fallout in business. The last 'inmate' reportedly left the island on January 5.



Now, Member of Parliament for South West St Elizabeth Dr Christopher Tufton wants the government to acquire the facility and convert it into an educational/training institution.

Tufton told the Observer that he had approached the Education Minister Andrew Holness about the matter.

"I have had discussions with him (Holness) about exploring the possibility of using it (Tranquility Bay) for training," Tufton said last week.

TUFTON... I have had discussions with him about exploring the possibility of using it for training.

The Tranquility Bay complex was controversially used for 12 years by the United States group World Wide Association of Speciality Programmes and Schools (WWASP) as a 'boot camp' for non-Jamaican teenagers

until its closure early last month.

A comment by Holness over recent days at Spot Valley in St James that the ministry had identified premises in St Elizabeth as a site for the Education Ministry's proposed Alternative Student Intervention Programme for disruptive

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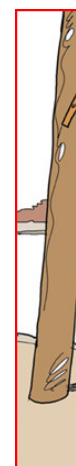
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**'Boot camp' closed**



Today



children, fuelled speculation in St Elizabeth that he was referring to Tranquility Bay.

Holness could not be reached for comment as the Observer went to press. But a ministry spokesman told the Observer that the minister's comment at Spot Valley was not related to Tranquility Bay in Treasure Beach, but to a facility further east on the St Elizabeth/Manchester border. The ministry spokesman said he had no knowledge of any plans for Tranquility Bay.

Mandeville businessman Tony James, whose family owns Tranquility Bay, told the Observer last week that the property was up for lease or sale.

Originally built 20 years ago by the James family, the Tranquility Bay complex cited on two and a half acres of beachfront land often referred to by locals as Old Wharf was originally used as a hotel - Old Wharf Hotel. It was leased for a period by the United States army before the Ken Kay-led WWASP took it over in 1997 as a privately-run educational reformatory targetting children - mainly from the United States - who were considered disruptive or indisciplined. Fees were said to have run from US\$25,000 to \$40,000 annually per child.

At it's height, Tranquility Bay, directed by Kay's son Jay Kay, was said to have had close to 300 children with as many as 250 people - mostly Jamaicans - on the employment roll. But allegations in the international media that children were psychologically, if not physically abused, and that living conditions were unsanitary and generally unsatisfactory, marred its name.

Business steadily declined in recent years and it was finally closed last month.

A few years ago the facility was slapped with a number of lawsuits from parents, with some claiming that the 'help' they had been promised with their rebellious teens had been extreme.

In 2001, the facility was again thrown into the spotlight after a 17-year-old Alabama teen jumped from a 35-foot-high balcony shortly after arrival. The police told the Observer then that the teen, who had arrived in the island the previous day, asked to be excused from her class in order to dispose of a piece of paper. She then reportedly ran through the door and jumped off a balcony to her death.

The teen, newspaper reports said, was awoken from her bed and taken to the island as her family had arranged her surprise removal to Tranquility Bay. The Constabulary Communication Network (CCN) officer for St Elizabeth later told the Observer that the post-mortem had found that the teen had died from head injuries received from her fall. Her skull, the CCN officer said, was fractured in two places. Bars were subsequently added to all balconies at the facility.

In addition, in 2005, two teenagers ran away from the facility after Hurricane Emily sideswiped the island. The students were later found with the help of the police and a private investigator.



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