

## **TRAILS CAROLINA MEDIA STATEMENT: FEB. 8, 2024**

### ***Response to Transylvania County Sheriff's Office Press Release***

***Dated Feb. 3, 2024, distributed Feb. 7, 2024***

A young person's life was tragically lost on Feb. 3, 2024. Our priority since that day has been to acknowledge and respect the unfathomable impact on this family's life and maintain the integrity of the investigation into the cause.

The family and their son deserve nothing less than a thorough, professional, fact-based investigation by law enforcement, other government agencies, and our program. Speculation before the full results of these investigations are available is harmful, counterproductive, and irresponsible. Those spreading information that is not true or misleading will be publicly identified and held accountable, as we continue to communicate the facts and truth.

The Transylvania County Sheriff's Office press release distributed to the media on Feb. 7, 2024, does not present an accurate account of the facts nor the current state of the investigation. Here are the facts:

1. Trails staff initiated life-saving efforts and called EMS and the sheriff, and our staff have fully cooperated with the local law enforcement's investigation, voluntarily presenting themselves for interviews with law enforcement and other related public agencies. Any assertion to the contrary is false, reckless, and defamatory. No other students were involved in any way, and all students were moved immediately so as to minimize the impact on them. Our students have cooperated to the extent authorized by their parents.
2. Trails has not been made aware of any suspicious preliminary findings by the medical examiner. Conversations with detectives and public agency personnel, interviews with staff, and preliminary reports indicate that this was an accidental death.
3. Trails has conducted an internal investigation of this incident and the Trails facility has been investigated by outside professionals who are subject-matter experts. Both investigations have concluded that there is no evidence that Trails failed to properly supervise, no evidence that Trails caused harm, and no evidence that conditions at Trails were unsafe or unhealthy.
4. As with most deaths outside a medical facility, an autopsy is being performed by the North Carolina medical examiner and, while the final report has not yet been released, the preliminary findings do not suggest that there is any evidence of foul play.
5. We continue to work with CPS to make the best decisions regarding staff in the immediate term.
6. Speculation of any kind is inappropriate and disrespectful to the family. We ask that speculations cease and the family be allowed to grieve without further interference by those seeking to capitalize on a child's death in order to advance an agenda.

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## **TRAILS CAROLINA MEDIA STATEMENT: FEB. 6, 2024**

We are shattered by the tragic loss of a young life and our deepest sympathies are with the student's family and loved ones. Our priority is to acknowledge and respect the unfathomable impact on their lives and maintain the integrity of the investigation into the cause.

There are few details available at this time, only that at approximately 8 a.m. on Feb. 3, staff called 911 when a 12-year-old student did not respond to attempts to wake him. The student, who enrolled on Friday, Feb. 2, could not be resuscitated by emergency personnel.

We are cooperating fully with investigators and have retained outside professionals to assist us in conducting our internal investigation.

While we understand the need and value of keeping the public informed, protecting the family's privacy and the privacy and well being of our students and staff is our primary concern. During this highly sensitive time and difficult time, please refer any queries directly to our media relations team.

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### **Trails Carolina Background**

- Trails Carolina is a licensed, accredited, and outcome-driven nature-based therapy program in Lake Toxaway, North Carolina. The program helps adolescents, aged 10-17-years-old, work through behavioral or emotional difficulties, build trusting relationships with their family and peers, and achieve academic success.
- Trails Carolina pairs psychological counseling with a variety of outdoor activities, including hiking, backpacking, camping, rock climbing and equine-assisted emotional work. To support a successful transition home, students practice, refine and gain confidence in their newly acquired skills through real-life exercises. At the same time, family members work with a licensed therapist to develop skills that improve communication and support.
- The program was founded in 2008 and is licensed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and accredited by The Association for Experiential Education, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities and COGNIA for academic excellence.