

A RESPONSE TO RON LUCE'S STATEMENT

from some of the subjects of *Shiny Happy People*

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Ron Luce has claimed that the participants in Shiny Happy People season 2 were exploited by the producers. We represent some of the people interviewed in the docuseries. Because of this claim, we would like to respond to some of the things Ron said in his statement.

Ron's claim: The producers exploited the interviewees.

"The producers for the sake of their own anti-Christian and evangelical belief system bias, exploit the very real pain of those who have a negative story of their experience with teen mania [sic]."

Our response: The producers were respectful of our stories, including those of us who are still Christians. Many participants in the series still hold to sincere faith in Jesus Christ, despite Ron's attempts to dismiss us as anti-Christian, unbiblical, and biased.

Importantly, we were not exploited by having the opportunity to share our experiences publicly.

Ron's claim: All missionaries returned home safely from their missions trips.

"They took five stories from the ministry that impacted 3 million face-to-face with Acquire the Fire, Took 80,000 teenagers on mission trips around the world all of which returned home safely..."

Our response: The series featured 7+ Teen Mania participants, not "5 stories." However, Ron's miscount pales in comparison to his claim that all missionaries returned home safely.

We are familiar with stories of missionaries who were severely injured on their trips and did not "return home safely." One of us even had a friend who died while he was serving as a Teen Mania missionary in 2007. In fact, we know the stories of multiple accidental deaths during Global Expeditions work. We do not make the claim that any of these deaths were caused by Teen Mania's negligence, but we do challenge Ron's untruth that every missionary returned home safely.

As depicted in the documentary, many missionaries and interns suffered severe physical injuries and had their health and safety jeopardized due to a lack of appropriate medical care. It was common for there to be a lack of medical care available during missions trips, missionary training, day-to-day life on campus, and "Life Transforming Events" (LTEs).

Ron's claim: The producers did not use "sound research techniques."

"The word Mokumentary [sic] is not an effort to diminish the pain experienced by those interviewed, but More [sic] as a description of how these producers refused to use sound research techniques of legitimate reputable reporting of news outlets."

Our response: We do not feel that Shiny Happy People mocked the organization we once loved. In addition, our stories were fact-checked thoroughly. We were expected to provide documentation to verify our claims. Among other things, we submitted diaries, sermon notes, letters, screenshots, photos, videos, and thousands of pages of materials published by Teen Mania and Ron Luce, including manuals, yearbooks, missions brochures, and much more.

Ron's claim: Most Teen Mania participants had a positive experience, and the docuseries should have conducted scientific surveys to determine the percentages of positive vs. negative opinions on the organization.

"To be fair, they should have had at least as many positive experience stories as negative experience ,[sic] but to be more scientific, they should've made an attempt to discover what percentage of those that have any involvement with teen mania.[sic] acquire The fire [sic] or the honor academy [sic] had a positive versus negative experience, and then interview accordingly."

Our response: Ron's focus on numbers and percentages is misguided. We believe that many people had positive, faith-affirming experiences with Teen Mania. However, when telling the story of an organization that has caused harm, it is not the storytellers' obligation to depict all of the positive stories, too. When we read about the abuse of students, athletes, employees, or volunteers at other organizations, do we also need the stories of everyone who wasn't abused? Of course not. Although knowing percentages would be interesting, it is outside the scope of this project.

Ron's claim: Medical emergencies, including Phil Boltz's, were always addressed quickly.

"However, when traveling overseas, there are definitely possibility [sic] of medical emergencies in the case of Phil boltz [sic] and others. We always acted with the greatest amount of alacrity to get them the best care possible and get them home if needed, and by the grace of God all young people came home to their parents."

Our response: We have spent the last few weeks listening to stories, comments, emails, and videos of thousands of Teen Mania participants. Although we have always carried our own stories of surviving dangerous situations, we have since learned of many other failures of Teen Mania leadership to respond appropriately to medical emergencies. As depicted in the series, Phil Boltz's serious medical emergency was handled negligently; Phil should have been medically evacuated from India, and Teen Mania should have fully disclosed the severity of his condition to his parents.

Ron's claim: Honor Academy interns were never in danger, but they were placed in situations that created a "perception of danger."

"Sometimes we would create a perception of danger that wasn't real danger...Most of the soft living Christian background of Americans has produced soft faith. A pseudo stress environment was created to help them grow to help give them grit help give them a backbone."

Our response: We believe the documentary accurately depicts real stress and danger, counter to Ron's claims. We also reject the idea that it is ethically responsible to create a "perception of danger" or a "pseudo stress" environment. Teen Mania participants felt intense levels of real danger and stress during their involvement, leaving many with long-lasting psychological, physical, and emotional harm.

Ron's claim: Teen Mania's emphasis on martyrdom was fabricated for the series.

"The documentary [sic] skews this to say we were trying to make people intentional martyrs. This is not scriptural and that is not what we taught."

Our response: Preparing for Christian persecution was always a part of the equation at Teen Mania. In addition to many of the dorms being named for Christian martyrs, HA coursework often focused on martyrs. Many of the LTEs, including the End Times simulation, the Unreached People Group LTE, ESOAL, and World Awareness retreats, were based on the idea that Christians would be persecuted for their faith, even to the point of death. As the series shows, Teen Mania promoted the idea that victims of the Columbine massacre were martyrs for their faith. It follows, then, that many interns and participants understood and believed that they would likely become martyrs.

In conclusion...

When we zoom out and see the harm that was caused, and we continue to hear the stories pouring in of how many people have had similar experiences, responding to Teen Mania requires us to go beyond just "good experiences vs. bad experiences."

Teen Mania has had decades to share participants' positive experiences, and they have actively tried to silence negative ones. Our critique of Teen Mania is not rooted in anti-Christian bias, but rather, about Teen Mania's systematic control of its members. In the world Ron Luce built, the ends always justified the means.

We close by pointing to Ron's own words. Ron states that he is currently building a *"lean-mean.[sic] worldclass[sic], soul- harvesting machine."* We do not need more machines in this world, chewing young people up and spitting them out. Today's youth deserve what many Teen Mania participants didn't receive: being recognized for their innate value, while being treated with dignity, care, and the utmost compassion.

A RESPONSE TO RON LUCE'S STATEMENT

from Cindy Mallette

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Ron's claim: Cindy Mallette acted out of "hurt feelings" and Teen Mania was financially responsible.

"...Cindy got her feelings hurt and began to take advantage of partial information (since she was not in the leadership team she did not have full access) and [sic] leak to outside half truths even as she took a salary from teen mania. [sic]"

And

"[The bank] mentioned in passing that the technical term for what we agreed to is called a "friendly foreclosure" even though we were not foreclosed upon. We chose to describe in the press release what actually transpired rather than use the phrase "friendly foreclosure" because of the misperception of technical language in banking transactions. Cindy did not like that choice."

Cindy's response: Ron has grossly mischaracterized the facts around my efforts to tell the truth about Teen Mania's financial situation, after he first used me to spread a lie.

All of the information I received and reported came directly from Teen Mania's then-CEO Dan McLeod. Dan participated in the meetings with the bank to come to the "friendly foreclosure" agreement, and Dan showed me the bank statements showing the campus was in default of its mortgage.

I also had help from David Hasz and Heath Stoner, who confirmed a number of facts surrounding the bankruptcy and foreclosure, and who worked with the WORLD reporter as informational resources. David Hasz told me he resigned from Teen Mania after Ron refused to step down as CEO following the Calvin Edwards audit, which described Teen Mania as "effectively bankrupt."

In 2014, Teen Mania's membership in the ECFA was removed when I went public with the truth about the ministry's foreclosure and shared the Calvin Edwards audit with the public.

I have never discussed my emotional state of mind with Ron, and he has never asked. My motivation for sharing the financial information with WORLD Magazine was to correct Ron's lie, which he used me to spread in order to save face and protect his crumbling ministry. I also wanted to alert the tens of thousands of teenagers who would inevitably lose money on ATFs, mission trips, and an internship that would be canceled.