



Staff photo by Laura Allen

Prentiss [redacted], a counselor at Straight Inc. in Smyrna, leads a rap session at the Austell Road site Saturday.

## Teen-treatment center in Smyrna passes test

By Darcie Williamson  
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SMYRNA — Allegations that adolescents at a Smyrna drug-rehabilitation center were deprived of drinking water, medical attention and physically restrained against their will cannot be substantiated, according to a state investigation.

The state Department of Human Resources' Office of Regulatory Affairs launched the investigation into treatment practices of Straight Inc. in Smyrna last year, after complaints that program officials were physically and emotionally abusing adolescents.

Straight centers in Texas and

■ "The facility was not in compliance with relevant law which requires children between the ages of 7 and 16 to be enrolled in and attend a public school, private school or a home study program ..."

Straight Administrator C. Suzanne Hardman-Broder called the deficiencies "technicalities" and said a meeting with state officials to prepare a course of correction is scheduled for Monday.

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Straight centers in Texas and Virginia were ordered closed last year after similar complaints were made about unorthodox treatment practices. In all, the Florida-based drug treatment outfit has six centers nationwide.

The Smyrna center at 2221 Austell Road, which treats about 70 adolescent drug-abusers at a time, is in no danger of being closed by the state, but it will have to submit a plan for correcting several deficiencies uncovered during the investigation, DHR spokesman Martin Rotter said.

Among the 30 or so deficiencies were failure to keep accurate records, have standard admission practices and adequately coordinate medical and psychiatric care.

According to the DHR investigation:

■ "The admission criteria developed by the facility were inadequate. ..."

■ "There was no evidence that counselors in the program were qualified."

■ "It could not be assured that the medical responsibility for each client was vested in a licensed physician."

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Although Ms. Hardman-Broder acknowledged the program's shortcomings, she denied that any abuse had ever occurred.

She characterized the allegations as "outrageous nonsense."

"That just doesn't happen in a program of mine," Ms. Hardman-Broder said.

She speculated that anti-Straight activist Richard Bradbury was behind the allegations at the Smyrna center. Bradbury, a former Straight employee in Florida, has been fighting to get the drug-treatment facilities shut down.

According to officials at Straight, Bradbury was fired in 1985 for threatening to hurt himself and a client. Officials said that his anti-Straight campaign is funded through organizations that want to legalize drugs and do away with drug-treatment programs.

The DHR's Rotter declined to identify the sources of the complaints against the center. Asked whether the complaints were made by parents, Rotter said: "One can't make an assumption on where the complaints came from."

The Smyrna center has been in existence for nine years and is the only Straight center in Georgia.