

## DRUG CENTER GETS LICENSE TO OPERATE

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LAKE WORTH -- Palm Beach County's most controversial drug-treatment program no longer is controversial, the state says.

"They've resolved what we consider the major issues," Cam Freedlund, spokeswoman for the state Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, said on Wednesday.

The private, non-profit Growing Together center for teens has been given a regular state operating license, seven months after as many as 10 parents charged that their children had been abused there.

Freedlund said teen-age staff members and older employees have been taught how to control aggressive youngsters -- ending concerns that youths were pinned to the floor by as many as five teen staff members.

Meanwhile, at least one professional counselor has been hired, ending concerns that more professional staff members were needed, Freedlund said. The center also clarified policies that troubled state investigators.

Growing Together drew scrutiny in the spring when the mother of a 15-year-old Coral Springs girl named Dana wrote letters of complaint to Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Michael Gersten, who signed the order committing the girl for drug treatment. Dana suffered "post-traumatic stress disorder" after spending time at Growing Together, a psychiatrist wrote.

Her complaint sparked investigations by HRS, the Sheriff's Office and the State Attorney's Office.

The center, which steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, is eager to correct any bad image and is alerting the media to positive happenings: Two center youths were recently honored by the county Juvenile Association for turning their lives around. And Executive Director Barbara Griffith was chosen as a member of Leadership Palm Beach County, a Chamber of Commerce program training leaders on county issues.

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