

Settlement reached in KIDS abuse case

Jersey Journal, The (Jersey City, NJ) - January 25, 2007

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- Edition: First edition or full run; Bayonne
- Page: A4

A settlement has been reached in the civil suit against the former directors of KIDS of North Jersey, a now-defunct drug treatment center in Secaucus, brought by Antonio Carrera, 26, a former patient.

The agreement was reached before Carrera was to take the stand, but Superior Court Judge Maurice Gallipoli agreed to allow him testify about his five years at KIDS.

The agreement, which involves an undisclosed sum of money, is the latest in a string of multimillion-dollar settlements that Dr. Virgil Miller Newton III, the former director of KIDS, and his wife, Ruth Ann Newton, a former assistant director, have paid out to former patients. Rebecca Erlich won \$4.5 million in a 2000 suit and Lulu Corter settled for \$6.5 million in 2003.

Newton, who ran drug rehab centers from North Jersey to California throughout the 1980s and 1990s, has been heavily criticized for his methods and has been repeatedly accused of physically abusing, brainwashing and falsely imprisoning his patients.

Carrera claims he was misdiagnosed as having drug and alcohol problems - a former staffer at the facility admitted on the stand that he had badgered Carrera during his intake interview into admitting that he'd used them - and spent five years at the facility, leaving only when he turned 18. During that time, he was prevented from going to high school and lived with a foster family.

During most of his stay at KIDS, Carrera was stuck between the first two stages of the five-stage program, often restricted for months from speaking unless spoken to and forced to ask permission for every action.

When Carrera refused to participate in sessions and other activities or was otherwise deemed "uncooperative," other patients would pin him to the ground, sometimes for several hours.

"I just had to lay there and stare at the ceilings. Sometimes I used to wish that I was dead," Carrera said, before seizing up and holding his face in his hands.

After getting out of KIDS when he turned 18, Carrera obtained his GED within months and now works as a driver at a Meadowlands hotel.

He had scathing words for Newton: "I don't know if he is in his sick head, he thinks he helped people out. He conned everybody."

The Newtons left the courtroom before Judge Gallipoli's closing remarks. Stephen Ryan, their attorney, declined to comment.

The various facilities Newton opened around the country are now closed, but Phil Elberg, Carrera's attorney, said similar programs still exist.

"In reality, they're private jails in which con artists prey on the fears of frightened parents," he said.

- Record: 070125_KIDS25_WEB
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