



## NEWS UPDATE

## Virginia cites Straight, Inc. for not reporting abuse

The State of Virginia has cited a drug rehabilitation program for teenagers for concealing allegations of sexual abuse within the organization.

Straight, Inc., a drug rehabilitation organization based in Florida, has been cited for at least 45 violations of Virginia state law over the last few years. Straight has facilities in eight cities in the United States, including one in Springfield, Va.

The most recent citations by Virginia officials are for failing to notify the state that a 13-year-old client claims to have been sexually abused by another client and for allowing a 19-year-

old client to stay in the program after he had been accused of sexually abusing two other clients.

Straight, Inc. was founded in St. Petersburg, Fla., in 1976. Almost from the start, Straight has drawn sharp criticism as well as high praise.

Critics, mostly former clients and their families, have accused Straight of allowing clients to be physically and emotionally abused. Numerous lawsuits have been filed against Straight since its founding.

The Straight program is divided into several phases, with new clients having virtually no rights. Veteran clients are

assigned to new clients to lead them around by their pant belt loops, taking them everywhere, including the bathroom. New clients are never left alone.

Clients also are told to physically handle other clients, sometimes to the point where several clients gang up on another client to pin him to the floor or against walls. Youths also engage in open confession, often in sessions that last up to 10 hours at a time. Former clients say they often were humiliated before their peers.

Despite the many violations of state law and serious allegations being made

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## Famed psychoanalyst's death brings horror stories to surface

Internationally recognized child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, who died earlier this year, is now being described by former patients as an abusive cult leader.

Bettelheim, 86, committed suicide last March in a nursing home by taking an overdose of drugs and placing a bag over his head. He had been renowned for his work with emotionally disturbed children at the University of Chicago's Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School. Bettelheim preached against using force against children and said they should be treated with respect.

But former patients say Bettelheim often flew into violent rages and physically abused children. He also engaged in psychological abuse, destroying troubled youths' self-esteem by publicly humiliating them.

"Life at the school was not the nurturing, caring atmosphere he described in his books," said Charles Pekow, a patient at the Orthogenic School from 1965 to 1975. "He'd preach nonvi-

olence the same day he hit kids in the dining rooms. He was always putting people down, destroying self-esteem. He threatened to put them away, he told them they had no friends, that they were 'crippled in the mind.'"

Pekow, 36, was 11 years old and a resident of nearby Highland Park, Ill., when he entered Bettelheim's school. He said he remembers Bettelheim whipping children with a belt and once he saw Bettelheim become enraged when children violated a "no-sharing" rule and split a box of Cracker Jack.

Former associates of Bettelheim's have corroborated many of the stories former patients are now telling.

"Bettelheim could be very brutal. That was my complaint," said William Blau, a counselor at the school who quit his job in 1950 after witnessing one of Bettelheim's tirades. "I did not see the level of physical abuse that people were seeing in 1965 and '70. What I saw was the degradation of their personalities, and to me, to do that to a child is much worse."

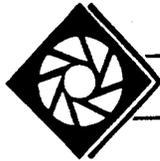
Blau said Bettelheim was a cult leader who would enter into a therapeutic relationship with staff members to solidify his hold on them.

"It's a story of how someone who's a very smart self-promoter can con the media into thinking they're someone else and build a reputation on it. Usually it's a financial scheme, and a few people lose a few million bucks. But this a tragedy based on people's lives, and every one I've talked to is still carrying around this burden."

Many people are now asking how Bettelheim's reputation could have been so different from what he was in real life. Students said they came forward before, but, as Pekow said, "Who would believe us? We were supposed to be crazy."

Bettelheim was a holocaust survivor who had been imprisoned at Dachau and Buchwald in 1938-39.

(From "Bettelheim: Beauty or beast?" by Leslie Baldacci, *Chicago Sun-Times*, Sept. 16, 1990, p. 5.) ♦



## CAN FOCUS UPDATE

CAN/Illinois members Ann Olander and Hope Hinde spoke Sept. 10 to the Women's Club of Sts. Peter & Paul Parish in Cary, Ill., on the problem of cultism in the area.

On Sept. 26, CAN/North Texas member Hope Evans was the first speaker in a 3-part Texas Talk series presented by the Student Activities Board Ideas and Issues Council of the University of Texas/Arlington. Her topic was understanding cults and mind control.

CAN/Akron member Ann Lloyd presented a cult education program Sept. 23 at the Calvary United Methodist Church in Sherrodsville, Oh.

Member Lee Dennison gave a cult program at the Norton Corp. Retirees meeting in Rootstown, Oh., and is scheduled to speak Nov. 10 at the Tough Love Conference in Akron.

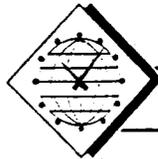
CAN/Los Angeles members heard FOCUS member Nadine Winocur speak on the Boston Church of Christ movement at their meeting Oct. 1.

CAN/Los Angeles member Priscilla Coates was one of the panelists who spoke at the Oct. 10 lecture entitled "Cults on Campus" at Cal State Los Angeles hosted by Student Union Programming, Entertainment and Recreation which also included the video *Cults: Saying No Under Pressure*.

CAN/Northern California hosted Dr. Margaret Thaler Singer's presentation on the impact of cults on individuals and families Oct. 11 in San Francisco. There were at least 65 attendees, many who were police officers, psychologists and ex-members.

CAN National Office staff member Marty Butz spoke Oct. 11 on the subject of mind control to the Elk Grove Women's Club of Elk Grove Village, Ill.

CAN Executive Director Cynthia Kissner was interviewed Oct. 24 on WGN Radio in Chicago about CAN's 1990 National Conference. ♦



## NEWS UPDATE

## Missed deadline could cost Scientology \$556,000

A hearing officer in Pinellas County, Fla., has recommended that the Church of Scientology pay \$556,425 in taxes to the county.

The recommendation will be considered by the county's Property Appraisal Adjustment Board, which consists of five members of the County Commission and School Board.

Scientology's international headquarters is in Clearwater, Fla., in Pinellas County. The organization failed to file for a property tax exemption by March 1, the filing deadline, because a Scientology lawyer responsible for the filing had been ordered to receive intensive "auditing," or church training, in Los Angeles. The lawyer did not tell

anyone else at the headquarters about the filing.

The county's hearing officer said the mistake did not qualify as extenuating circumstances that would justify an extension of the deadline.

Non-profit organizations do not need to apply each year for a tax exemp-

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## Straight, Inc. *continued from page 3*

by former clients and their families, Virginia is allowing Straight to remain open. Barry Craig, director of licensure for the state mental health department, said overwhelming evidence must be assembled before such facilities can be closed.

"It's a horrendous kind of thing," Craig said of the closure process. "It takes a great deal for us to get to the point where we feel we have enough evidence to go that far."

State Delegate Gerald A. Fill (R.-Mount Vernon) has asked the state for a full investigation of Straight, Inc.

The 13-year-old who alleges to have been abused by another client said he

had to ask permission to eat, drink water and go to the bathroom. He said he was molested one night in a locked bathroom as he was about to shower. His assailant, he said, was the veteran client who was assigned to shadow him.

Another young woman has said she was placed on a water and peanut butter diet for 29 days and was forced to strip naked in front of other clients and Straight counselors.

In 1985, a federal appeals court in Alexandria, Va., upheld a \$220,000 judgment against Straight after a Fairfax County man claimed he was falsely imprisoned.

Straight officials deny many of the allegations. They acknowledge that clients were encouraged to physically restrain one another but say that practice has been stopped. They also say clients are given privacy while in the bathroom.

Supporters also say that the physical and emotional manipulation critics cite is necessary to gain control of the teenagers, who have rejected authority through their drug use.

(From "Va. cites drug treatment center for not reporting alleged abuse" by DeNeen L. Brown, *The Washington Post*, Sept. 30, 1990, p. B8.) ♦