

# State agency gives Straight Inc. good marks

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7-8-82

**CLEARWATER** — Straight Inc., the Pinnellas-based drug abuse treatment center for teen-agers, has apparently straightened up.

Just over a year after the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services cited Straight for not complying with several state regulations, the state agency gave Straight a clean bill of health.

"Overall, (Straight) is in very good shape," states a report written last month by Harry W. Moffett, a mental health program analyst with the state agency who inspected Straight for two days last May. Straight "has complied with the department's request to correct deficiencies noted in other site visits," Moffett wrote.

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— Miller Newton of Straight

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The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services inspects Straight annually to determine if it is complying with state laws regulating drug abuse treatment centers. Because of its treatment methods, the private, nonprofit treatment center has been controversial in the past and, in March 1981, state agency inspectors cited the program for several violations.

**STRAIGHT WAS** criticized for keeping inadequate client treatment records and not documenting a staff training program. Several randomly chosen clients complained that Straight staff members threatened to have a court order them into the program or commit them to a mental institution unless they joined Straight voluntarily. (Straight does not have the authority to do either.) And several clients also told of bedroom doors being locked from the outside in the foster homes where they were housed.

The report concluded that many of the is-

sues had been raised before but that Straight had made "little or no attempt to come into compliance with the regulations."

This year, however, agency inspectors randomly examined 12 client records and found all to be in compliance with state regulations. Evaluations of clients' personal histories found to be deficient last year were in "excellent" condition this year, the report stated. And locks on doors at five foster homes randomly visited by the inspectors had been removed. In their place were alarms that will sound if a teen-ager tries to leave but that present no safety hazard.

The issue of Straight staff members using bogus threats to get teen-agers to sign themselves into the program was not addressed because no clients interviewed this year by state agency officials had complained of the threats said agency mental health program specialist Terry Harper. Harper, who participated in the inspections this year and last year, said the state agency didn't bring up the issue this year because it is not directly covered in the agency's regulations.

"I'm proud of the job we've done in getting near perfect paper work," said Straight's administrative director Miller Newton, who said each client file takes nearly three hours to prepare properly. "I'm glad we got difference between us and the monitoring staff resolved," said Newton. "Every year we improve, not just in the things they monitor, but in our therapeutic techniques, which they do not monitor."

**STRAIGHT'S THERAPY** involves intense peer pressure that is intended to change the thinking and behavior of its teen-ager clients. The teen-agers are separated from friends and families for indefinite lengths of time and taught to jettison the values and lifestyles commonly associated with drug use. Critics of the program, who include parents and former clients, have charged Straight with physical and mental abuse. Supporters deny the charges and say the program is the best treatment available for drug-dependent youths.

Straight, at 3001 Gandy Blvd., is rapidly expanding into a national organization. The program plans to open 26 branches nationwide by 1987.

Its recently opened branch in Atlanta was sued by the American Civil Liberties Union last February. The suit alleged that five youths were being detained by Straight against their will and were "in immediate danger of the physical and mental health." The suit was dropped last March after an out-of-court settlement called for a three-member panel to investigate the charges.

The panel cleared the program of all wrongdoing, but the terms of the settlement prevent the attorneys involved or the members of the panel from discussing the details of the findings.