

Mom blames Straight for son's breakdown

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ST. PETERSBURG - By the time 17-year-old Michael ██████ got to Straight Inc., he'd been under the care of a psychiatrist for 3 1/2 years and in and out of a Lakeland psychiatric hospital seven times.

The Polk County youth had severe aggression problems, and he'd try just about anything to get high, including smoking a banana peel.

Exasperated, in 1981 his mother enrolled him in Straight, the national drug rehabilitation center based in mid-Pinellas.

But Straight drove him over the brink, to the point of a psychotic breakdown and paranoid schizophrenia, Dorothy ██████ says of her son. On Wednesday, Dr. Ali A. Kashfi, an Altamonte Springs psychiatrist, testified in Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Court that ██████ condition "was 10 times worse after Straight."

Kashfi's testimony came midway through a trial that has thrust the controversial Straight into the spotlight. The privately funded organization has continuously battled bad publicity over its use of confrontation, peer pressure and alleged forced treatment.

About the same time Ms. ██████ was filing her lawsuit in 1983, Straight was offering financial settlements to two Central Florida women who claimed that Straight kept them against their will. And soon after Michael ██████ left the program, a federal jury awarded a Virginia woman \$220,000 in her suit alleging imprisonment by Straight.

One of the philosophies behind Straight was described in court Wednesday by Dr. James E. Adams, a Clearwater psychiatrist and former Straight consultant: "Kids begin to listen to other kids long before they begin to listen to their parents."

But Michael ██████ suit alleges more than intense peer pressure. He and his mother claim that as a result of Straight's physical and mental assaults between November 1981 and May 1982, Michael wound up in a state mental hospital in Arcadia.

Kashfi said ██████, now 23, is now diagnosed as paranoid-schizophrenic and has a poor prognosis for recovery.

Straight's lawyers say the organization had nothing to do with ██████ condition. They used ██████ own witnesses Wednesday to make their point on cross-examination.

Asked by lawyer Paul D. Ley whether ██████ would have become schizophrenic had he not gone to Straight, Dr. Kashfi said, "I really don't know if he would have become psychotic or not if he hadn't entered Straight."

Ley then asked if it was probable that ██████ would have needed psychiatric hospitalization regardless of Straight. Kashfi answered yes.

The trial, which began Monday in Judge William Walker's courtroom, is expected to end Friday. Ms. ██████ and her son are asking for unspecified compensatory and punitive damages.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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