

Drug program under investigation

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Author: *An Associated Press Report*

ST. PETERSBURG - Straight Inc. was under investigation by the state before the controversial adolescent drug treatment program closed its St. Petersburg center this weekend.

Elaine Fulton Jones, spokeswoman for the state Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, confirmed the ongoing investigation, but said she was barred from providing any details. She also said she knew of nothing to indicate the investigation had anything to do with the center's closing.

Richard Bradbury, a former Straight client who has become an activist against the organization, said he initiated an investigation by complaining to the governor's office.

Bradbury said he complained an Orlando adolescent drug treatment center with ties to Straight had apparently been allowed to operate without insurance. He said he also had provided the names of former Straight clients who said the program had abused them.

Straight officials issued a short news release Monday blaming the closing on the economy.

Although the local center has been closed, Straight's national headquarters will remain in St. Petersburg.

Fulton Jones said the 16 remaining clients and their families had been offered the option of transferring to a Straight facility near Atlanta. She said nine of them accepted the offer, and one was being admitted to a different program. She said she was not sure about the others. The center had room for 100 clients.

Straight began 17 years ago with a philosophy of using other adolescents and reformed drug users to confront current users. The unorthodox approach became the target of complaints and investigations.

Some parents praised it, calling it a lifesaver for their children. Others went to authorities, claiming their children had been humiliated, struck or held against their will.

Despite its detractors, Nancy Reagan and President Bush have called Straight one of the nation's best drug treatment programs for adolescents.

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