

Trib 8/4/83

Women win settlements from Straight Inc.

SANFORD (AP) — Two Central Florida residents who claimed they were held against their will by Straight Inc., a controversial drug rehabilitation program, have received financial settlements from the organization.

One had earlier testified in a Virginia federal court trial in which a jury ordered Straight to pay \$220,000 in damages for holding a man more than five months against his will.

LuAnn Jones, 19, of Sanford, told the jury there her own story involving Straight. She said she had been forced to enroll in the St. Petersburg center in 1981.

She thought she was signing admission papers to stay for two weeks but instead was held for six months, she testified. When she had been there long enough to earn the privilege of having her car, she used it to escape in April 1982, she said.

Less than a week later, she was returned to the facility by her mother and three Straight workers, she said. Two days later, a Seminole County circuit judge ordered her released at the request of

attorney William Leffler.

Jones had not filed a lawsuit, said Leffler.

Jones said she received "a favorable settlement," but would not disclose the amount. She said she had not sued because she "didn't want to drag up a lot of dirt."

Hope Hyrons of Longwood did bring suit, charging she was kept at the St. Petersburg Center unwillingly on two occasions — once for 5½ hours and the second time for two days.

Her parents and two Straight employees kidnapped her from the parking lot outside a Longwood doctor's office early this year and took her to St. Petersburg, the suit said.

She was released as a result of efforts by a worker from the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, Hyrons said.

Straight's settlement does not mean the organization admits to any of the charges, said the group's Executive Director Bill Oliver.

Hyrons, also 19, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Straight's headquarters are in St. Petersburg. It has clinics in Alexandria, Va., Cincinnati and Atlanta.

Last year, the organization announced it planned to open 26 branches nationwide by the end of 1986.