

Parents fight for anti-drug program

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A group of parents convinced that a Yorba Linda drug-treatment center saved their children's lives is informally keeping the program alive while trying to persuade state officials to reverse a decision denying the center a license.

The state Department of Social Services last month denied a foster-family agency license to Straight Inc., a Florida-based drug-treatment program that had been operating in the city for a year.

In the June 27 letter, the state alleged that Straight subjected its teen-age clients to "unusual punishment," including intimidation, ridicule, mental abuse and withholding of food, sleep and the use of bathrooms.

The department also said the program did not follow state standards in placing children in so-called host homes while they underwent the first phase of counseling and drug treatment at the center on Prospect Avenue.

The Straight program uses the 12-step process pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous to help teen-agers confront and overcome drug addiction. About 60 teen-agers and adults were enrolled in the private program, which charged about \$1,400 a month.

In another letter July 19, the state said Straight was in violation of state law for continuing the program without a license. Straight officials said the program has not operated since receiving the second notice, and parents and teen-agers who participated said there was no mistreatment.

"If I thought my kid was being mentally or physically abused, I would have yanked him," Steve [REDACTED] of San Dimas said.

[REDACTED] and other parents said Monday that they intend to fight the state's decision with public pressure and legal action, if necessary.

Meanwhile, they are continuing the host-family aspect of the program, [REDACTED] and other parents said.

Upon entering the Straight program, teen-agers live with families whose children are further along in the treatment process. During the day, the teen-agers attend intensive group-therapy programs. As the teen-agers progress out of the first phase of treatment, they return to live with their own families.

[REDACTED] said a couple of teen-agers are staying at his home. Other parents said they are hosting teen-agers, or their children are staying with host families.

Although some parents praised Straight, Terry [REDACTED] of La Habra said she was horrified at what her children told her about the program when she withdrew them from it to move to another state.

[REDACTED] daughter, Candace [REDACTED], 15, said she wet her bed one night because she had been denied bathroom privileges earlier in the day. [REDACTED] said she also was not allowed to use her prescription glasses.

Her brother, Paul [REDACTED] 16, said he once was kept up until 3 a.m. to complete an essay when he had to get up at 6 that morning.

[REDACTED] son, Scott, 18, has spent 13 months in Straight. He said the program is "strong and rigorous" but got him off drugs and alcohol. He said he and other clients were at times told they had to wait to use the bathroom until a group session ended, and he said people were at times physically restrained.

Straight has filed an appeal with the state and has hired an attorney to represent it during administrative hearings. Spokeswoman Joy Margolis said the organization is frustrated because the state has not given it a list of specific incidents upon which the allegations are based.

The Department of Social Services' deputy director, Kathleen Norris, said the next steps by the state depend on what Straight does. If it alters its program to meet state requirements, a license could be granted, she said.

The state also could file an accusation against Straight in which the allegations would be outlined in greater detail, she said.

- Memo: 'GC

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