

Families protest state closure of drug-treatment program

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About 40 parents and teen-agers involved in Straight Inc., a nationwide drug-treatment group, picketed the state agency Wednesday that shut down a local program.

"We want it reopened right now," said Steve [REDACTED], whose 18-year-old son was enrolled in the Yorba Linda program when it was ordered closed two months ago.

"Our kids are being denied the right to get their lives together and get off drugs," said [REDACTED], who has acted as spokesman for the families. "We are pretty upset."

Carrying placards with such messages as "Straight Saves Kids' Lives" and "Straight Is Fighting the War on Drugs," the families met at noon outside a local state licensing office in Santa Ana.

Last month, the state Department of Social Services denied a foster-family agency license to Straight Inc., a Florida-based drug-treatment program that had been operating in Yorba Linda for a year. Its license had been pending.

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

About 60 teen-agers and adults were enrolled in the private program, which uses the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step guide to living free of alcohol and drugs. Most participants live with host families during some part of the program. It costs about \$1,400 a month.

In another letter sent July 19, the state said Straight violated state law by continuing the program without a license. Straight officials said the program has not operated since receiving the second notice, but some parents and teen-agers said they are continuing the host-family program on an informal basis.

The families said they want the program to remain open while state and Straight officials work out the licensing problems.

Families expressed concern that the progress made by participants could be hurt by the interruption of care. Some families said they planned to send their children to a Straight facility in Dallas.

"This is a tough program," [REDACTED] said. "It's not a day care for druggies."

The group marched up to the fourth floor of the building and delivered a letter outlining its concerns to the Community Care Licensing office.

State officials said Straight faces a fine of \$200 a day or possible court action if it continues to operate without a license.

"This is hard," said Kathleen Norris, a state spokeswoman. "There's a need for facilities to treat young people. Hopefully, this can be worked out."

- Caption: BLACK & WHITE PHOTO About 40 people picket Wednesday in Santa Ana at the state office that denied a license to a drug-rehab group. Daniel A. Anderson
- Memo: 'MCR

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