

ROSS / Los Angeles Times

Copyright 1990 The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times

All Rights Reserved
Los Angeles Times

October 1, 1990, Monday, Orange County Edition

SECTION: Metro; Part B; Page 1; Column 2; Metro Desk

LENGTH: 709 words

HEADLINE: CLINIC TRANSFERS WORRY OFFICIALS;
DRUGS: SINCE THE **STRAIGHT INC.** FACILITY IN YORBA LINDA LOST
ITS OPERATING LICENSE, CLIENTS HAVE BEEN GOING OUT OF STATE
FOR TREATMENT.

BYLINE: By CARLA RIVERA, TIMES STAFF WRITER

DATELINE: YORBA LINDA

BODY:

State social service officials have expressed concern that many clients in the controversial adolescent drug treatment program **Straight Inc.** -- denied an operating license at its Yorba Linda facility after allegations of physical and mental abuse -- have transferred out of state to continue treatment.

"We are reviewing the circumstances" of the moves, said Sergio Ramirez, an investigator in the Santa Ana district office of the Department of Social Services. "We have been consulting with our legal department and are looking at all aspects of the Straight situation."

Officials said they are particularly concerned that because of the nature of Straight's treatment regimen, some youngsters may have been taken to out-of-state programs against their will, even though the transfers may have been approved by parents or guardians.

The Florida-based organization operates one of the largest live-in drug programs for youth in the nation, but has come under fire for its confrontational methods, which include severely limited contact with family and friends.

Ramirez said it is uncertain whether the state has jurisdiction in the matter. Authorities are trying to determine if parents of minors in the program may have run afoul of an obscure law that prohibits the transfer of minors to another state for drug treatment without permission from authorities.

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children requires that programs such as Straight alert parents to the rule or face license revocation in the state that receives the clients, said Gordon Scott, director of California's Interstate Placement Bureau.

Straight directors have confirmed that nearly all of the 68 clients who had been in treatment at the Yorba Linda center have transferred to Straight centers in Dallas, the Tampa Bay, Fla., area and the Washington, D.C., area. But they insist the moves were sought by parents and clients who did not wish treatment disrupted.

"One of the major reasons we decided to make the change is that people were very upset over not being able to continue treatment," said Joy Margolis, Straight's vice president for communications. "The clients see how much better their lives can be and want to continue to get better."

Margolis said that to her knowledge none of the young clients objected to the transfers.

Carol D. Scott, a Los Angeles attorney representing the group, declined to comment on whether Straight had instructed parents about the law but said directors will "comply with whatever laws are necessary."

Despite the transfers, Straight officials maintain that they are not abandoning attempts to open a California facility and will continue to appeal the license denial.

"We have reduced the scope of services (at the Yorba Linda facility) but we have not given up or closed the program," Margolis said. "Our ultimate plan is to reopen the treatment program whenever we resolve the license issue."

Straight opened its first California treatment center in Yorba Linda in July, 1989, and applied for a license as a foster family agency.

However, California authorities denied the license, alleging that Straight had failed to comply with several Health and Safety Code requirements.

State officials ordered the facility closed in June, citing evidence of "unusual punishment, infliction of pain and humiliation, mental abuse and withholding (of) medication," among other violations.

A hearing on the license denial is still pending, said Fran Bremer, a Department of Social Services attorney.

Experts in juvenile law said the lack of clear guidelines governing circumstances under which children may be placed in out-of-state treatment programs has led to abusive situations.

"It's a chronic problem made even more dramatic by a situation like that involving Straight," said Loren Warboys, an attorney with the San Francisco-based Youth Law Center. "There are many instances where California kids are placed into private institutions out of state, largely because those institutions would not be allowed to operate in the state."

Warboys said the state's legitimate interest in the welfare of children is complicated by parental rights and the problem of actually determining "when someone doesn't want to go."
