

Allegations of More Trauma During Treatment

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STRAIGHT INC. OPENED its drug-treatment center for adolescents in California last summer at the request of frantic parents whose children had been stranded in mid-treatment when another rehabilitation program went out of business.

KIDS of Southern California ran its program out of the same Yorba Linda warehouse now used by Straight and employed similar confrontational treatment methods, according to former clients. KIDS operated for more than a year without a state license and was under investigation by state Department of Social Service officials and local police for alleged abuse of clients when it closed.

KIDS of Southern California was run under a franchise granted by Virgil Miller Newton, who was formerly the national clinical director of Straight. KIDS treatment centers in several states have been accused by former clients of alleged abuses similar to the allegations made against Straight.

"That's the same dog with a different leash," said Florida attorney William Chastain, who has filed several suits alleging client abuse against Straight and taken testimony from Newton in a deposition.

Newton maintains that "starry-eyed" social workers and other gullible public officials are deceived by "manipulative" drug addicts who tell "wild stories" about KIDS' treatment methods. He also contends that disgruntled former clients and their parents spread false accusations from state to state.

Newton left Straight in 1983 and the next year opened his own drug-treatment program for adolescents in Hackensack, N.J. He called it KIDS of Bergen County and used techniques similar to those employed by Straight.

Using a franchise system, Newton later authorized the opening of KIDS treatment centers in Orange County, El Paso, Texas, and Salt Lake City, Utah.

KIDS has been accused of serious abuse of clients wherever it has operated. For example, the Bergen County prosecutor's office said in March that recurrent complaints have been made against KIDS in that jurisdiction since 1985.

Allegations included use of restraining practices that caused clients to suffer blackened eyes, bloody lips, a broken nose and a dislocated elbow. Former clients also complained of strip searches conducted by other clients, deprivation of sleep and toilet facilities, lack of schooling and crowded bedrooms.

Former clients at KIDS' Orange County, El Paso and Salt Lake City programs have complained of similar abuses.

Newton denies such allegations.

The KIDS centers in El Paso and Orange County closed last year because of financial difficulties, but the facilities in Hackensack and Salt Lake City are still operating. In addition, Newton has authorized the opening of KIDS of the Canadian West in Calgary this spring. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission has agreed to allocate \$600,000 toward setting it up. Private donors are expected to match the government grant. More than 40 Canadian youngsters are currently under treatment at KIDS of Bergen County in Hackensack.

- *Index terms: RELATED STORY; Straight Inc.; Virgil Miller Newton; KIDS of Southern California; DRUG ABUSE; HOSPITALS; ORGANIZATIONS; YOUTH; CA; ABUSE*
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