

DRUG PROGRAM CLIENTS ABUSED, AGENCY REPORTS

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AUSTIN -- Clients at an alcohol and drug abuse facility are beaten, mocked and mistreated, and a state report released this week accuses the staff of ignoring earlier warnings about neglecting and abusing clients.

The Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse said in its 50-page report that seven of 22 clients of KIDS of El Paso County Inc. said in interviews that they had been physically restrained since January.

"Emotional abuse in the form of cursing, 'mocking out' and 'blasting' (program terminology), threats, ridicule, sleep deprivation, innuendoes regarding abnormal sexual practices or homosexuality, and intimidation continue to be reported,' the report said. "Several clients reported being afraid of the program, staff or other clients.'

The agency said the facility was warned Jan. 21 about the conditions and was given 60 days to make changes.

Commission staff members on March 22 inspected the facility, and in March and April interviewed former clients who had been in the program since Jan. 21. *

The report listed deficiencies found in January, and staff findings on how KIDS had responded to the first report. The facility complied with only one state regulation.

Because program director Michael McCormack is state-certified, KIDS is in compliance with a rule requiring at least one clinical staff person to be an alcoholism and drug abuse counselor, the report said.

The report said, however, that KIDS' written policy "does not address client mistreatment, abuse, neglect and exploitation.' Neither does the policy provide for alternatives to restraint, the report said.

One client reported she had been beaten, her lip split and her hair pulled. Another said his lip was bloodied, his shirt torn, and he was pinned against a wall with his feet off the floor.

"They have no mercy,' a client said.

Another said he had been in the New Jersey and Texas KIDS programs for 1,118 days, and stated he did not believe he would ever graduate, the report said.

McCormack "was adamant' during an interview with the commission staff that client abuse does not and has not occurred, the report said.

The report disagreed, stating that there had been abuse by KIDS' staff members, and adding, "In particular, there is a significant amount of client abuse by other clients.' The commission also said it had received reports since the March staff visit that some clients were punished for talking with investigators.

The report also said KIDS was out of compliance in that:

*Clients' medical needs were not assessed in consultation with a physician.

*Clients are coerced into entering the treatment program and "then are unduly hampered by program staff from exercising their legal right to withdraw.'

*Clients are not informed of their rights in writing.

*All clients cannot communicate with an attorney.

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