
Therapists: girl's death not result of their advice

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For a first time, the Cascade Center for Family Growth in Orem is taking an offensive stance against allegations in the death of Cassandra Killpack.

Cascade therapists Larry VanBloem and Jennie Gwilliam responded Monday Oct. 29 to allegations of culpability in the Killpack case, and addressed opponents of the controversial holding therapy practiced at Cascade.

"It was good to be able to finally speak out personally and say what's on our minds and in our hearts and clarify," Gwilliam said.

During the past four and a half months, Cascade officials were silent as claims of misconduct have been brought against them in the water intoxication death of 4-year-old Killpack. Although the girl was a client at Cascade for a week prior to her death in June, VanBloem and Gwilliam said they do not practice or recommend hydrotherapy and that the parents were not acting on advice from them at the time of the girl's death.

The Cascade therapists said they had voluntarily participated in a thorough investigation by the Springville Police Department and the Utah County Attorney's Office.

"No charges were filed against anyone associated with Cascade Center; charges have been filed against Cassandra Killpack's parents," Gwilliam said.

Cascade employs three full-time therapists and a staff of 10, all of whom have treated patients suffering from everything from bipolar disorder to autisms for the last seven years.

Cascade has gained national recognition for its practice of holding or attachment therapy in the treatment of individuals who are detached, violent, and have trouble showing or accepting love.

The therapy is only practiced in a handful of institutions across the nation because of the controversial and often-intrusive

methods therapists use to cause a victim to revisit emotional trauma and express and resolve repressed emotions.

Rep. Michael Thompson, R-Orem, sponsored a bill in the 2002 legislature that would have banned the practice in Utah.

"We found out that there are people in Utah that do restraint therapy with home visits and that is hard to monitor, there are people who come from other states who don't have licenses that do it," Thompson said. "My bill would stop professionals from being able to practice it, recommend it or teach it."

According to Thompson, there is no credible or established organization that opposes legislation to ban coercive restraint therapy, other than those who are followers or practitioners of it.

He already has sponsored a new bill for this year's session.

"The schools of psychiatry, psychology and those are the people who doctorate degrees, who are trained in this type of stuff, they are prohibited from doing this," Thompson said. "The ones that are doing it are the ones that have a bachelors or masters degree in therapy or a massage therapy license, which is a lot different training."

Ironically, what the state is now trying to ban, it once sponsored.

In July of 1992 a group of Utah therapists were trained to do restraint therapy by two Colorado therapists paid for by the state of Utah and the Department of Children and Family Services, according to VanBloem.

"Attachment or holding therapy has evolved immensely since 1992," Gwilliam said. "We have left behind or never used certain aspects of that therapy that were shown at that initial training."

Cascade therapists have never or no longer use loud yelling, in your face cursing, compression holding or laying on the patient prone to prone as part of restraint therapy, according to Gwilliam, These methods were part of the initial training approved by the state.

"We have found that more traditional forms of therapy can effectively be used to supplement the holding and attachment therapy in treating the pathology of these children and their lack of any emotion except for rage," Gwilliam said.

But Alan Misbach, a vocal opponent of coercive restraint therapy, said even with the modifications, the therapy is still dangerous.

"What I would like to see happen is the use of coercive restraint and coercive techniques being banned by all licensed mental health professionals," Misbach said.

Misbach is a licensed clinical social worker, like Gwillima and VanBloem. He works as a child abuse treatment coordinator at the Children's Justice Center. Prior to that, he worked at the Utah Boys Ranch. Misbach said the Boys Ranch contracted with the Family Attachment Center where Gwilliam and VanBloem worked before opening Cascade, to treat boys at the ranch using restraint therapy.

Misbach said while he was employed at the Utah Boys Ranch in the early '90s he saw restraint therapy being used and it made him uncomfortable.

Misbach said he planned to resign from the Boys Ranch when they refused to stop using the therapy, but was terminated.

Restraint therapy is no longer practiced at the Utah Boys Ranch, according to Clinical Director Jim McMaster.

It was Misbach who first brought the issue to Thompson's attention in April 2001. Thompson said after talking to Misbach, he researched restraint therapy and drafted a bill to ban it. The bill was killed in the rules committee by state Sen. Parley Hellewell, R-Orem, a supporter of coercive restraint therapy.

Cascade Center is scheduled to address allegations made by the Department of Occupational Professional Licensing by the end of the month. Those allegations include a lack of parental consent for some therapy, abusive massage techniques and verbal abuse.

A preliminary hearing in the Killpack case is scheduled for Dec. 12.

Cascade was investigated in the death of Crystal Tibbets in 1995, but never faced charges.
