

W.Va. girl overdoses at Pa. treatment facility – 5/5
Uncle blames lax standards at KidsPeace
By Scott Finn

Studio lead: Last month, two teenagers overdosed on the prescription drug methadone at a drug treatment facility in rural Pennsylvania.

One of those girls died Thursday. The other girl is from the Eastern Panhandle, and she suffered brain damage from which she may never recover.

The WV Department of Health and Human sent her to the facility, run by the non-profit group KidsPeace. This isn't the first time that children have died unnatural deaths under the care of KidsPeace, and the girl's uncle is asking why she was sent there. Scott Finn reports.

Finn: Christina was no angel. The 16-year-old girl had more than her share of family troubles, according to her uncle, Don Ramirez. She took drugs. She repeatedly ran away from home.

Last fall, her stepfather was desperate to get her help. State Health and Human Resources referred her to a residential drug-treatment program in northeastern Pennsylvania, run by the non-profit group KidsPeace.

One night in April, Christina and her friend took some methadone that was prescribed to one of their counselors. It's unclear how the girls got the methadone or why the counselor had it with her in the first place.

Methadone is a uniquely dangerous drug. It can be used to treat heroin addicts, and it's a powerful painkiller. But if you're not used to it, it's very easy to take an overdose.

That's what happened to the two girls. Staff found them the next morning around 9 a.m., in a coma (They were allowed to sleep in late because there was no school that day.)

On Thursday, the other girl died -- 16-year-old Katherine Rice. Christina herself was on the brink of death. Doctors say she suffered significant brain damage, according to her uncle.

Ramirez: We won't really know the true ramifications of the damage that was done to her body for some time after this. Currently, she's not walking. She's having some trouble with speech. Emotionally, she's not where she was. The doctors have told us that she won't be the Christina that we knew. They believe pretty strongly there may be some serious retribution for her acting out.

Finn: Ramirez says he's worked in the mental health field for decades, including a stint in a similar treatment facility. He's shocked that any staff member would bring such a potentially-dangerous drug into a drug-treatment facility. At the very least, it should have been kept under lock and key.

Ramirez: There's absolutely no excuse for that level of a narcotic to be accessible in an environment that is for the treatment of drugs and alcohol. And KidsPeace response to this whole thing has been completely disturbing and frankly as a mental health professional, I've been horrified by what they have to say.

Finn: In the last three weeks, Ramirez has researched the history of KidsPeace. He found that two New Jersey children suffocated while staff restrained them at KidsPeace facilities -- a 12-year-old boy died in 1993, and a 14-year-old boy died in 1998.

Ramirez: And the only thing that controlled environment is ultimately responsible for is their health, safety and welfare. And KidsPeace has failed us. And we had no understanding that when my niece was placed at KidsPeace, that KidsPeace had failed other families as well. There's absolutely no excuse for death to happen in an environment such as that.

Finn: KidsPeace spokesman Mark Stubis says the staff is saddened by what happened to Christina and her friend.

As for the two boys who died – he says they've adopted new policies to prevent it from happening again.

Considering the kids they deal with, he says their record is pretty good.

Stubis: We deal with over 10,000 children every year. These are 10,000 children who are at risk for their lives. Literally. Sometimes, though, when you are working with at risk kids, there are risks. And although it's very rare, going back 15 years, we had two other incidents in which children were lost. They were accidental. They were not foreseeable. In each case, we changed our procedures, our policies, because safety is job one, in this case as well. If there's something to be learned, believe me, we want to learn it.

Finn: The state of PA has stopped sending children to the KidsPeace facility where the teens overdosed. NJ has stopped sending children to KidsPeace altogether, at least for now.

The WV Department of Health and Human Services is investigating the incident, according to spokesman John Law. They'll send up one of their workers to interview Christina, her family and staff at the home, and then decide whether to continue sending children there.

Some state lawmakers and advocates for children want DHHR officials to stop sending children to far-away facilities. Law says his agency is sending few kids out of state than it used to.

Christina's uncle says she should have been kept closer to home.

Ramirez: I believe that DHHR and West Virginia should be providing these services in West Virginia, close to the families, close to all the natural supports that are vital to any sort of therapeutic interaction.

Finn: For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Scott Finn in Charleston.

Ramirez, Don D

Potomac & 2 St
Shenandoah Junction, WV 25442
304-724-6566

Christina -- 16

Took methadone Wednesday evening – found snoring heavily 7:30 a.m. Thursday – non-responsive at 8 a.m. – CPR twice – EMS sometime between 8 – 9

Neurological damage

Last Fall

Was in Cornell Abraxis – Pitts

Then KidsPeace in fall

Maryland class-action lawsuit 90s – DD – sent far away – forced to bring them home

One suicide

Two deaths restraints

Police report – stolen from purse – during telephone call

stolen Wednesday afternoon –

took wed night

coma Thurs morning

Girl who OD'd at KidsPeace dies

She and another girl allegedly took stolen methadone from counselor. Second teen faces tough recovery, her uncle says.

By Jeanne Bonner | and Veronica Torrejón Of The Morning Call
May 3, 2008

One of two teenage girls who overdosed on methadone that one of them allegedly stole from a counselor at a KidsPeace group home died Friday.

Katherine Rice, 16, was pronounced dead at 3:30 p.m. in Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest, Lehigh County Coroner Scott Grim said. He would not give the cause of death, saying an autopsy will be done Sunday.

It was the third unnatural death in the last 15 years at KidsPeace, of North Whitehall Township.

State police are investigating the overdoses, which happened April 17 at the KidsPeace home in Saylorsburg. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare closed admissions to the home while it is investigating how the teens got the pills and why the counselor had them.

On Tuesday, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families suspended referrals to KidsPeace pending the results of the inquiry.

Rice had been in critical condition since the overdose, but the nature of her injuries or illness was unknown.

The surviving girl, also 16, is recovering at LVH and faces a long battle to regain motor and cognitive skills lost as a result of the overdose, her uncle, Don Ramirez, said Friday. Ramirez, who lives in West Virginia, said her arm is paralyzed and she has blood clots.

"She's doing well, given everything that has happened," he said.

Ramirez, who said he works with developmentally disabled people, said he took issue with previous statements by KidsPeace spokesman Mark Stubis about counselors using narcotics.

Stubis has said the nonprofit agency's investigation showed the counselor was legally prescribed methadone for pain relief.

"He is essentially saying they were allowing a staff person on a narcotic to not only supervise the kids but transport them," Ramirez said. "I just found that extremely disturbing."

Asked to respond, Stubis said more and more people with severe pain are getting prescriptions for methadone. He said the counselor, who is on paid administrative leave, has chronic pain because of a back injury.

Stubis said KidsPeace is reviewing its policies and awaiting the results of the police investigation, but it's unclear if the agency will change any procedures. He said KidsPeace believes the overdoses were "an isolated incident in one small program in the Poconos."

He expressed sadness over Rice's death. "This is really hard for us," he said. "It is heartbreaking that both could not be saved."

Stubis would not say how long Rice had been at the group home, which now houses seven teens. Grim, the coroner, said her mother lives in the Saratoga Springs area of New York.

The Pennsylvania investigation is expected to conclude in the coming weeks, welfare department spokeswoman Ann Bale said Friday.

While awaiting those results, no New Jersey referrals will be made to KidsPeace, said Kate Bernyk, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of Children and Families. She said neither of the girls involved in the incident was referred by New Jersey.

State police at Lehighton are continuing to investigate the overdoses and had nothing new to report Friday, Trooper Jamie Sgarlat said.

KidsPeace came under fire in 1993 when 12-year-old Jason Tallman of Barnegat, N.J., died while being restrained, and again in 1998 when 14-year-old Mark Draheim of Pelican Island, N.J., also died while being restrained.

After each of the deaths, KidsPeace adopted a new restraint method to reduce the risk of suffocation. Tallman and Draheim both died of suffocation.

KidsPeace has been trying to rebound from a tough year. The number of youths at the KidsPeace main campus fell after the Pennsylvania welfare department closed admissions last September.

With admissions down, KidsPeace had to lay off 79 workers and slash its \$170 million budget by \$20 million.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month: Learn 24 Ways to Prevent Child Abuse ... Before it Starts

BETHLEHEM, Pa., April 1, 2008 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Americans work hard to protect their children, but child abuse and neglect remain at unacceptably high levels with nearly 900,000 U.S. youngsters hurt each year. Since many of even the best-intentioned parents don't know how to prevent abuse and the conditions under which it may come about, the 125-year-old national children's crisis charity KidsPeace is offering free downloadable information packets called, "24 Ways You Can Prevent Child Abuse ... Before it Starts."

During this April's National Child Abuse Prevention Month, parents, teachers and others can go to www.kidspeace.org (click on "resources" and "brochures") and find two dozen simple yet effective tips to Make Your Home Safe, Give Your Child Trust and Build Communication, Give Your Child Independence, and Give Your Child Self-Esteem.

"Most parents love their kids and want the best for them," says Dr. Lorrie Henderson, acting president of KidsPeace, which helps thousands of children every day at 65 centers nationwide to overcome abuse, neglect, and the other emotional crises. "Our task now is to help adults identify and avoid the most common situations in which a child may be harmed physically, sexually, or emotionally -- as well as to create the kind of positive, open communications that can serve as an early line of defense when trouble looms."

Just a few of the "24 Ways You Can Prevent Child Abuse," which are explained in more depth online, include the following:

- * Establish house rules and be consistent
- * Interview your babysitters
- * Never strike in anger -- use short timeouts and try not to yell or use hurtful words
- * Teach your children to say "no" to anyone who asks them to do anything they feel is wrong
- * When you feel frustrated, angry or overwhelmed, vent your feelings positively -- away from your children. Do not stay alone with your children if you are overwhelmed. Call a friend or leave your children with someone trustworthy.
- * Put yourself in your child's place and ask "Is what I've said or done building my child up or putting my child down?" and "Is what I've said or done really for my needs or for the needs of my child?"
- * Listen to your children and be available when they have fears, worries, or other concerns

"Even in a nation that loves its children, abuse happens far too often -- about once every 30 seconds," says Dr. Herbert Mandell, medical director for KidsPeace and the KidsPeace Children's Hospital, which helps youngsters in severe crisis. "If we can avoid or better handle the situations that can lead to problems, we have a better chance of lowering the incidence of child abuse ... and keeping our kids, whom we work so hard to protect, healthy and happy."

KidsPeace is a 125-year-old national children's charity dedicated to helping America's kids avoid and overcome the kinds of crises that can strike any child -- from traumas to neglect, depression, and the stresses of modern life. KidsPeace helps thousands of children a day with lifesaving programs at 65 centers nationally and millions more through public education and outreach efforts supported by its national spokesperson and founder of the Memory Foundation Leeza Gibbons and child safety and self-esteem icon RETRO BILL. KidsPeace was called "the outstanding organization" of its kind by the American Association of Psychiatric Services for Children and "a prototype of what we need for all children everywhere" by family expert Dr. Lee Salk. For more information, go to www.kidspeace.org .

Contact: Mark Stubis, Vice President
(800) 25-PEACE
mark.stubis@kidspeace.org

procedures – staff on schedule 2 narcotics

when did staff member discover meds missing