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The Cincinnati Beacon

The Debate Rages: Kids Helping Kids
Saturday, March 18, 2006

Posted by [The Dean of Cincinnati](#)

A guest column from an anonymous source (the same one interviewed [here](#))—another piece in our ongoing investigation of Kids Helping Kids.

The following is a response to a small number of the assertions and perceptions that seem to pervade the debate about KHK, as well as my own piecemeal assessment of some general aspects of the treatment model inherited from Straight, Inc. and KHK's specific application of this model.

I have read in many places that KHK is a money-making scheme; this could not be more untrue. Though I don't know what the executive director is paid, the staff at KHK all make considerably less than workers in related fields, and there are no stock-holders making money. KHK has almost had to shut down a number of times, and has been bailed out by donations on several occasions. They are motivated by an at times fanatical belief in the righteousness of their work, particularly among the peer staff. The professional staff seem to enjoy the easy work and are willing to accept meager compensation. The peer staff genuinely believe in providing the same opportunity they were given to someone else. I believe the executive director could be considered a true believer as well, though I do not know where this belief stems from.

The charge for treatment has double or tripled, on a sliding scale for different income levels, since Pathway Family Center (PFC) became involved. To my understanding this increase is motivated by a need to avoid financial crises, and KHK, at least, lost money on every client.

I do not believe allegations of conspiracy are worth discussing. Though I understand Straight was considerably different, KHK has for a great many years operated in isolation from similar facilities until their recent ties with PFC. Until this point KHK always appeared to operate in the absence of outside

http://www.cincinnati beacon.com/index.php/magaddiction/comments/the_debate_rages_ki... 3/27/2006

influences or collaboration, in my mind this has been one of its primary defects.

Regarding abuse, I have never seen or heard of clients being physically or verbally abused in my years of involvement in any of the ways described by Straight survivors. I have seen clients confronted in the group with such pressure that it clearly causes great stress, though never being downgraded or having their person verbally assaulted. Clients were in the past restrained for disrupting group and refusing to enter seclusion on their own when they did not pose any physical danger to themselves or others. I believe this is a result of prioritizing the maintenance of a level of order in group at the expense of any best-practices standard of



the use physical force only to prevent physical harm. The verbal intensity of confrontation was greatly reduced by the time I came on staff, as was the use of restraint to maintain order in the group. Both of these changes were largely a result of the evolution of the peer staff. Restraint is only used now according to the standards set by, I believe, ODADAS, again because of outside pressure. KHK was faulted during state audits for the aforementioned restraint and seclusion practices and complied with recommendations. The absence of abuse at KHK is largely, in my opinion, due to the good fortune that KHK has produced largely self-regulating peer staff. For all but the last two years the program was one in which unprofessional (though "trained" by their own recovery experience) peer staff have supervised the group alone and decided when restraint and seclusion were necessary. Again, restraint and seclusion practices have changed significantly but the absence of professional supervision has not. While no pattern of abuse would be ignored, it seems very easy to me for a para-professional staff member to commit an act of abuse while unsupervised. It is, in my mind, only through luck that this has not happened.

Regarding professional supervision. The average treatment experience for a client at KHK involves almost no professional care. The peer staff handle nearly all aspects of treatment, which is both KHK's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. The clinical (professional) staff at KHK are very uninvolved and do not take part in the regular treatment of clients. They do shoddy, sporadic, and generic paperwork and have even had peer staff complete their clinical documentation for clients without experiencing consequences when it has been brought to the attention of the executive and program directors. These practices are particularly egregious when it comes time for CARF certification or a state audit. Fortunately or unfortunately, this lack of work or professional ethics is a product of laziness, procrastination, and a lack of involvement in treatment rather than a need to be deceptive. This lack of outside supervision is, again the greatest weakness of KHK and prevents the analysis of current practices and the implication of better ones. There is no professional ethic among the clinical staff because there is no accountability and the peer staff do all of the front-line treatment and most of the paperwork. The internal culture of KHK has also been one in which professional training took a distant second to recovery experience. This environment seemed to strip clinical staff of their professional training as they were absorbed into the existing framework. There have been some very involved and successful clinical staff, but this is a product of individuals rather than the institution; a rather fragile framework to build a sustainable professionally run treatment program on. Again, it is only through good fortune and the general high quality of the peer staff that KHK has done as well as it has.

ODADAS has recently put considerable pressure on KHK to increase professional supervision. The program director and clinical staff have established Potemkin oversight with, from what I can tell, no real changes. Fortunately PFC seems to be very different in this regard, but I have little direct experience with them. I do know that PFC clients have considerable contact with trained professionals,

and their groups are always supervised by a trained professional. I expect that PFC will make significant changes in this area, and they do seem to have incorporated professional psychological care into their institutional structure to some degree.

Another aspect of this treatment model that I find particularly troubling is the coercive nature of the treatment itself. Clients under 18 are rarely given a choice to be admitted to treatment, and cannot leave once admitted without running away or being withdrawn by their parents. Now, at least in terms of actually getting away, running away is easy as the program has eliminated belt-looping (ODADAS or CARF deemed it to be client-to-client restraint) and clients can run any time they are outside without being chased. They are then, however, generally not allowed by their parents to return home. Coercion in this regard, at least, is more subtle but still clearly present. The problem for KHK has always been an inability to maintain any desire to continue treatment in such a long program. This difficulty is the source of many of the rules and restrictions that either seem or are in fact objectionable. The reason the program exists in the form it does is because of the legal authority parents have over minor children. While this coercion has always made me uncomfortable, it is hard to imagine any treatment that can reach adolescents without some coercive power over them. I do think this type of treatment can effect change early in life and prevent later consequences, but ideally one would find a way to reach adolescents without forcing them to participate. It is in areas like this that I think public criticism and dialogue such as that put forth by KHK's detractors can be very useful in clearing deadwood and maybe even finding a way to make this treatment work without so many negative aspects.

KHK and from what I can tell PFC are both very insular organizations. You experienced this when you went into the lobby looking for information. This insularity is part of their legacy from Straight, as are a number of their questionable practices. They have been allowed to operate without external supervision and this has prevented their treatment practices from evolving to meet current standards as quickly as they would otherwise. I do believe that this treatment is effective and helpful for some individuals, but the failure of these programs to operate in the light of day prevents positive change, traumatizes clients, leaves them vulnerable to abuse, and, frankly, creeps people out. KHK has great institutional weakness that may be corrected in the takeover by PFC, but without pressure from ISAC, ODADAS, and the state KHK has not been motivated to change and improve. I would recommend finding someone from PFC to give you insight into their organization, as they are who you will be dealing with in Milford from now on. They seem in many ways to have evolved into a more recognizably modern treatment program than KHK, but have also retained more of the vestiges of Straight due to their being a direct descendent. Unfortunately, I do not have enough experience with PFC to provide you with more insight.

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1. Cincinnati Straight Survivor 84-86 says:

20 Mar 2006 at 11:29 am | #

Regarding abuse, I have never seen or heard of clients being physically or verbally abused in my years of involvement in any of the ways described by Straight survivors. I have seen clients confronted in the group with such pressure that it clearly causes great stress, though never being downgraded or having their person verbally assaulted.

This is the hallmark of coercive thought reform. More later about this.

I take it cussing is still used? Are kids still screamed at while being confronted? I would call both verbal abuse while used to confront in a group setting.

Confrontation in the group setting is arguably in itself, an abusive tactic in which a high degree of emotional damage can result, solely due to that unbearable stress resulting from intense pressure from the group. Dissent of any kind is literally impossible in this setting, right? Anyone who disagrees in any shape or form is usually strongly confronted, told he/she needs to get honest, to start applying his program, etc. So, how many times did you personally witness someone be stood up in group, be called a liar, and be bullied to accept the group's opinion? A child may eventually give in to the intensity of group pressure and 'confess' anything to avoid further pressure from the group. Many survivors, even the ones who did experiment with drugs, recall exaggerating their drug list to please the group and to get relief from the intense group pressure. I personally did this as well. I 'confessed' to inhalent use (which I never did) and to being a druggie (yet I never even considered drug use), which was a result of repeated confrontations from the group, repeated accusations of being a liar, being told to get honest, being accused of being in denial, etc. I was called a kiss ass too. (Does KHK do that?) Compared to others, I had it easy. The worst abuse was always reserved for misbehavers. And I did witness others being called derogatory names in group. Again, these are all hallmarks of coercive though reform even without name calling.

For me, a few weeks of confrontation caused me so much stress that I quickly dissociated (its kinda like not really being there a psychological and emotional sense) the rest of the time in Straight (15 1/2 months total) and complied with everything and anything solely to avoid being confronted, just to survive.

In my opinion, confrontation in a group setting where one must disclose to a group of peers their 'wrongs', under intense pressure to do so, is an inherently abusive, coercive, and emotionally and psychologically damaging process. I think its an abusive process because the process itself is inherently humiliating and degrading to teenagers who are highly vulnerable to peer approval....peer disapproval is devastating for a teenager, thus the pressure to agree with a group

of their peers is unacceptable and abusive in that sense. In a group setting, to be called a liar, to be reprimanded via confrontation by a large group of teenagers, under intense pressure to agree to the group's opinions is abusive and is coercive thought reform.

You may or may not have read about my PTSD diagnosis. Being subjected to group confrontation, being falsely accused, being forced to 'admit' drug use to which I had never done damaged me severely....and I was never even restrained...repeated confrontation was all it took to break my will so completely that I soon complied to escape that intense emotional distress. But that, coupled with the constant real fear that I could be falsely accused of some real or imaginary rule transgression at any time and then be confronted in group for it hung over my head 24/7, for well over a year, and as a result, I was permanently damaged by it.

For further reading on coercive thought reform/behavior modification please see:

http://www.freeminds.org/psych/thought_reform.htm

<http://thestraights.com/images/seed-Ervin-brainwash.htm>(Straight was formed by Seed parents, the Seed was much less violent and less abusive than Straight, but still, a US Senator still called the Seed's methods behavior modification akin to communist coercive thought reform tactics)

<http://www.rickross.com/reference/brainwashing/brainwashing19.html>

http://thestraights.com/essays/beyerstein_report_on_straight.htm

2. *Cincinnati Straight Survivor 84-86* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 01:22 pm | #

Does KHK fit this description?

““Thought Reform Tactics: The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions”. Professor Beyerstein is a leading Canadian researcher on opiates and brain functioning and operates a laboratory at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. Here are excerpts from his findings on Straight.

... All such practices begin with a concerted assault upon the individual's personal identity, i.e., an attempt to destroy his or her sense of self and its relation to the pre-existing social matrix.⁵ By systematically undermining their sense of individual autonomy, target persons can be driven to a state of child-like vulnerability to outside influences, dramatic alterations in beliefs, and in extreme cases, psychotic-like behavior and suicidal tendencies.”

....."Those boundaries have been overstepped when any group:

- 1) isolates its members from past and external sources of social support . . .;
- 2) demands all ties with family, friends, defectors, and non-group members be broken;
- 3) offers initial unconditional love and support, but later threatens its withdrawal for deviancy; . . .;
- 4) institutionalizes disrespect for personal privacy and forces constant contact with the group;
- 5) exerts extreme pressure to maintain unanimity and severely discourages questioning or diversity of opinion;
- 6) threatens physical harm for thought deviation or departure from group norms;

- 7) threatens spiritual, mystical or psychological punishments for deviation from the one true path";
- 8) demands protracted confessions of unworthiness, sinfulness;
- 9) systematically induces guilt, anxiety and confusion about self-identity, previous attitudes;
- 10) holds out the group as the only relief for this disquieting and confused state;
- 11) rigidly divides the world into the good, enlightened "us" versus the evil, ignorant them" who must be shunned;
- 12) continually barrages inductees with "pro-group" information while rigidly isolating them from any contrary opinion; and
- 13) seeks to produce disorientation and an inability to engage in critical thought through physical exhaustion, sleep and food deprivation, and by emotional exhortation and ritualized behaviors in protracted, mandatory "rallies."

Andersens criteria for inferring cult-like deceptive practices include:

- 1) lying to prospective members about the purposes of the organization;
- 2) providing misleading information to families, the community, the police, government, or the media;
- 3) attempting to convince inductees that the only source of authority for beliefs and actions resides in the groups leader and/or dogma; and
- 4) ruthless control of all information from without and within the group.²⁸

By any objective standard, the activities of Straight Inc. and its imitators run afoul of these criteria. While Straight may be among the worst offenders, it is far from alone. [pp. 250 - 251]"

Everything described about KHK by KHK Source, even with the recent changes in KHK that KHK source cites, still fits this coercive thought reform criteria (and fits other criteria by experts in the other links I provided in my previous post). If I understand KHK Source's comments correctly (feel free to correct me if I am wrong), only criteria #6 and #13 from the first list no longer apply at KHK. This is obviously not enough to diminish the effect of the rest of the coercive thought reform tactics used by KHK. In addition, in the second set of criteria, I believe all four are true about KHK....although I also believe KHK Source might disagree with me (KHK Source, please feel free to disagree with my assumption) especially about #1 in the second set of criteria.

I firmly believe that coercive thought reform = emotional and psychological abuse.

Any thoughts?

- 3. *Cincinnati Straight Survivor 84-86* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 01:25 pm | #

Oops.....I forgot to post this:

The quote I posted in comment 2 came from this source:

http://thestraights.com/essays/beyerstein_report_on_straight.htm

4. *Concerned in Cincinnati* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 02:17 pm | #

Dear Dean,

Would you like to know why the clinical staff are not on the "front lines" of treatment? It is so when the bad things happen ,(like ABUSE in group)the clinical staff can say "I wasn't aware that that was even going on. The truth is they do know what is going on....but the clinical staff has the "no paperwork"(to say that they weren't there at the time) to back them up. There is one little thing that the clinical staff left out of the equation though, and that would be the children that grow up to be witnesses to what they have or have not done.

I know several ex staff members that will tell you that it is flat out abuse period. There is no candy coating it, it is emotional and physical abuse by KHK. The director I assure you knows what exactly is going on there.

-Concerned in Cincinnati

5. *Antigen* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 03:18 pm | #

Source, I agree with you that zealotry, not money, are the driving force behind the front line staff, parent group and even the higher ups. However, part of that zealot drive almost always entails a drive for fundraising. And every time we get a look at the books, there's always a whole lot more going in than they can account for in regular operating expenses. This was true of the Seed in 1970 and remains true to this day. So, not that you'd be privy to this kind of info, but I ask rhetorically, where does all that money go?

You say

I do believe that this treatment is effective and helpful for some individuals,..

And I ask again, on what do you base that belief?

6. *Royal Water* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 04:35 pm | #

Would #13 above be the "open meeting"? That is a ritual if there ever was one.

RW

7. *Royal Water* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 04:57 pm | #

Here, from the "horses mouth"... <http://www.kidshelpingkids.com>

"The Bowl-a-thon is an annual KHK fundraiser held every March since 1987. Our current goal is to raise over \$20,000, with an average of 400 bowlers participating. The event takes place at several bowling alleys located in Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, Indiana, and Dayton. Bowling teams consist of five bowlers who collect donations or pledges based on the average of the three games bowled that day. Incentive prizes are given to individuals based on how much money they are able to collect. Companies are encouraged to participate by organizing teams or by becoming a sponsor. Bowling, shoe rental, event t-shirt and snacks are free to participants. Approximately 80% of the money raised comes from bowler pledge collections."

So, from 2000 to 2004, why did TSDRCP not file the required annual reports with KY? AND, how come they filed one last year... was that because the law said they have to, or was it because someone caught them NOT doing it?

Weird but true, TSDRCP is supposed to have a registered agent in KY. The people doing that just happened to be on the board a while back. What's weird to me anyways, is that fact that when I called them, they didn't have a TSDRCP listed as a client. The client's name was KHK. KHK is not a corporation, TSDRCP is. SO WHAT THE \$#@%@ is going on? Hmmm, KHK is called a "fictitious name", not a company, in OH and does not have a registered agent there. Is anyone else confused? Maybe there's someone who can sort through this mess. Now, to complicate matters, PFC got into this. So, what is the role of TSDRCP? Do they even exist? Something is screwy about this.

RW

8. *Cincinnati Straight Survivor 84-86* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 05:08 pm | #

13)seeks to produce disorientation and an inability to engage in critical thought through physical exhaustion, sleep and food deprivation, and by emotional exhortation and ritualized behaviors in protracted, mandatory "rallies."

RW, yes I believe that Open meeting by definition is ritualized and a mandatory "rally". I was referring to KHK Source's contention that the more egregious abuses at Straight do not exist in KHK, which I interpret to mean that KHK source would probably argue that (again KHK Source, please correct me if I misinterpret your position)sleep and food deprivation, physical exhaustion, the more egregious vestiges of Straight, are (allegedly) not present in KHK.

I of course believe that children in KHK are more likely than not to be deprived of sleep (even if not intentionally) due to long drives to and from the building from the host home early in the morning and late at night, the host home rituals of MI writing, going over them, showers, etc which all collectively tend to reduce clients sleep, yes, possibly to the point of exhausting clients and producing a general state of client weariness in group all day long.

But speaking of food deprivation, I was wondering if KHK clients/oldcomers withhold food from clients in order to gain cooperation in the host homes when KHK staff are not supervising the

clients at all? KHK Source, I know in Straight such practices occurred but were sporadic. For instance such blatant food deprivation would take place in certain host homes but not others. So I was wondering if this occurs in KHK? (I'm not referring to clearly inadequate proportions of food that was the ordinary daily practice in Straight, such as a daily PBJ lunch and meager dinner in the building....I clearly remember how hungry I always was in spite of being fed minimal proportions of food 3 times a day)

Of course in KHK's (Straight-like) environment, I cannot fathom how critical thinking would ever be possible in KHK due to the overwhelming and powerful coercive nature of 'group' think. I also believe that the potential for client exhaustion is also high...so in my mind, group pressure + being tired = disorientation and an inability to engage in critical thought.

In sum...I think criteria #13 is still met in spite of things that might be different at KHK today....I was making the assumption (hopefully correctly so) that KHK Source would probably disagree with me here, and probably with #6 as well, so I based my comments on that assumption. In my opinion even after reading what KHK source has to say thus far about KHK today, I believe all 13 criteria are still met.

9. Royal Water says:

20 Mar 2006 at 10:18 pm | #

Ok, thank you for clarifying that about #13. I would like to offer a suggestion here. As soon as a new client comes into the building and is cornered by higher phasers and "peer staff" in an intake room, that client is being subjected to abuse, and will continue to be subjected to it until they are out of there for good. Even then, side effects linger for years. It doesn't have to be overt and brazen to be abuse. Low levels for a constant period of time are as damaging, if not moreso, than the overt kind. The kids are not getting out until they get pulled, cop out or graduate. The parents think they are helping. It's a no win situation for them. They are trapped in a "legal" kidnapped-like environment. Once you get on 2nd phase, you think the treatment is just that... treatment. You are trained to believe that you need that to make changes. If you don't you will be deadinsaneorinjail. You have to worry ALL the time about what the group thinks about what you are thinking... it's pure torture on the psyches of kids. Adults don't understand that, the public doesn't either. Staff has been involved for so long that they are used to it and think they are helping. Even worse, Dr. Corcoran, a guy who has a license in Illinois, was the consulting psychologist for KHK until a complaint against him was lodged last year. Penny said he didn't have direct contact with the kids. SO WHO DOES? It's all an inside job? As long as there are intakes, phases, KHK, PFC host homes, and those doors to that WAREHOUSE are open for the STRAIGHT INC style drug treatment, there will be constant abuse. That is a fact.

Nobody from KHK past or present has explained why those kids missed the bus and how KHK gets away with filling the heads of kids with so much doubt so as to cause them to FEAR reading a sign.

OH MY GOD!!!! I READ A SIGN!!!!!! I HAVE TO REPORT MYSELF!!!!!! OH NO!!!!!!

Is that normal? COME ON!!

knock knock...

RW

10. *The Dean of Cincinnati* says:

20 Mar 2006 at 10:19 pm | #

Concerned in Cincinnati:

If you know all these staff members, have them contact me. The story may get bigger than the Beacon in the upcoming weeks!

11. *Cincinnati Straight Survivor 84-86* says:

21 Mar 2006 at 12:17 am | #

To KHK Source - In light of your comments regarding the coercive nature of KHK, I was wondering what your thoughts were on this issue?

Consequences, in general are completely appropriate for rule violations. However, consequences should always be proportionate to the infraction. In KHK/Straight, consequences are/were extremely disproportionate and, in my opinion, amount to cruel and unusual punishment for teenagers. A child can/could be started over (to day 1) or be harshly confronted for even the smallest infraction at the whim of staff.

For example, RW mentioned on another thread about a recent incident involving an upper phase KHK client who called a friend, only to get started over when KHK staff got wind of this "rule violation." Getting started over is an extremely severe consequence for making a mere phone call.

If a child makes a phone call merely because he/she is unhappy with the program, upset, or desperate to get out of KHK, then the child should be treated with respect and dignity, by talking to the child to find out what is wrong. No child should have to completely start their program over because they simply expressed their feelings to an outsider. This is an extreme consequence that, in effect, reinforces KHK veil of secrecy. In addition, the severity of KHK's consequences, substantially contributes to the general climate of fear, which in turn creates a culture of over/total self disclosure, and a culture of snitches. Clients generally believe that reporting other clients for rule violations is a way to show staff that you "are in a good place with yourself, are "compliant" and that the client is "a strong oldcomer." As a result, kids are/were constantly turning each other in for real or perceived infractions. As a result of the sea of child snitches, all clients are constantly fearful or being turned in for something, even if completely complying with the program. On the other hand, this same fear of being turned in for some real or imaginary infraction leads clients to constantly report themselves to staff via the Chain of Command or to the group.

To illustrate this climate of extreme paranoia, here is something I reported myself for to staff while in Straight....keep in mind that I had no clue what an inhalant was, let alone ever tried one, I had never tried any drug at all and I barely ever touched alcohol. Yet by this stage in the program, I was an oldcomer who was completely convinced (coerced into believing) that I had a drug problem (inhalant use). My dad had administered a home remedy on me for years to help alleviate sinus pain and pressure that caused me severe headaches. While in Straight, my dad did this one day in the presence of my newcomer. This home remedy consisted of eating something with hot sauce and inhaling pepper from the end of a q-tip to get me to sneeze....the point of course being to relieve the sinus pressure that was causing my pain. Now the validity of this particular home remedy is not the issue. The point is that I reported myself for doing inhalants (pepper an inhalant?) because I was terrified that my newcomer would turn me in. So I knew I had to report

myself to avoid the possibility of being stood up in group to be confronted for this....(sounds insane doesn't it??...it is).

In sum, since the consequences for minor rule violations are so severe, this creates a climate of extreme fear and paranoia. Start-overs are just one such extreme consequence. Confrontation in group is yet another. All compliance with the rules therefore, is merely to avoid unbearable and/or extreme consequences. Thus all the miraculous changes that KHK proclaims result from their program is always coerced and the child cannot make a voluntary decision to cease their alleged drug use (if any). In addition, I believe that a climate of intense fear and constant paranoia is extremely destructive to a child psychologically, emotionally, and mentally.

12. *The Dean of Cincinnati* says:

21 Mar 2006 at 07:51 am | #

From the author of this column:

First, I have posted a new comment in the original interview addressing issues brought up in readers' comments. I am sorry for the delay. Now to address comments in this article.

Cincinnati Straight Survivor:

Comment 1:

Kids are not screamed at or cursed at during confrontation, and I get the feeling that confrontation at KHK is significantly different from your experience in Straight. Confrontation has certainly changed since I was a client of KHK. This is not to be interpreted as a defense of confrontation, only a clarification. From my experience the experience of the average KHK client is structurally very similar to what you have described going through. It does seem like the intensity is greatly reduced. Whether that removes any potential for harm I cannot say.

Comment 2:

From your first list, I agree that 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, and 12 are to some (not insignificant) extent still true at KHK. From the second list, I would agree that 3 and 4 are also partly true of KHK.

Needless to say this is a disturbing catalogue of attributes, and I appreciate you bringing some research to the debate. My only hesitancy to condemn KHK outright stems from what I interpret to be my own positive experience and the absence of traumatic experience from the individuals I have had contact with. Unfortunately, the preponderance of concrete information about KHK, my personal experience aside, seems to justify condemnation. I think it would be useful to have outside analysis of KHK clients to determine whether the presence of the characteristics you listed leads to the brainwashing, traumatic effects described.

Comment 8:

The program hours are greatly reduced, to the point where clients in school are in group for about 18 hours a week. I don't believe sleep deprivation is nearly the issue it has been in the past, but the program is still rigorous. Regarding food, if anything, the clients eat too much, and generally gain weight in treatment.

Comment 11:

Consequences at KHK are still rigid and do not necessarily correspond to the infraction. There does seem to be a significantly greater deal of flexibility in this area, however.

Concerned in Cincinnati:

Comment 4:

I would not be surprised to hear that physical and verbal abuse occurred at KHK in its early years, as I imagine it was nearly identical to Straight. My denial of witnessing abuse is only in the concrete, easily identifiable sense, and only during my time at KHK. Obviously more subtle abuse may be currently taking place that is not obvious to those involved.

Antigen:

Comment 5:

I base my belief on the effectiveness for of this treatment method for some individuals on the benefit I believe was received by myself and some of my friends. I do not mean this as a justification for keeping the treatment model alive. I only point out that from my experience there may be some value that should be considered before sweeping everything away. Had I not been in KHK, based on my trajectory I do believe my life would be considerably different, and for the worse.

To all:

As a person who does feel that KHK has helped me and could potentially help others, it is hard for me to disavow the model in its entirety. In my mind it is very important to look at Straight successor programs individually, as well as in their totality, in order to understand what is actually happening at facilities that I imagine have changed a good deal over the years. I do think the dialogue on this site has been very helpful in fleshing out real areas of concern, and can lead to positive change at KHK, even if that means the best course of action is to put an end the program altogether. Clearly the link to Straight and the potential harmful impact on clients that do not benefit is of great concern. I appreciate the energy that has been put into this debate.

13. *KHK Survivor* says:

21 Mar 2006 at 07:12 pm | #

To the KHK Source:

Having recently gone over a stack of police reports pertaining to KHK, I find that your "concrete, easily identifiable" viewpoint on abuse simply does not wash with what I've read. Suicide attempts and self-mutilation are the primary symptoms that surface from these reports, although many other disturbing occurrences bear witness to the program's destructiveness.

You have made so many questionable assertions as to procedure that I am barely able to keep up. Am I really to believe, as a survivor of a facility that used damaging methods of thought reform with dogmatic assuredness, that teenagers are no longer suffering the way I and many others did? Suicide attempts and self-mutilation are not the byproducts of a healthy, therapeutic environment. In this case, they are symptoms of overwhelming confinement and isolation, lack of fresh air, exercise, and sunshine, systematic stripping away of self-identifiers through repeated group confrontation, coerced confessions, and verbal assaults, as well as a total loss of personal freedom and privacy, even while performing one's most private bodily functions.

You claim that clients can now flee from the facility at will, and yet there is a large chain-link fence at least ten feet high surrounding the courtyard area. Because it is angled inwards at the top, the fence is designed to maximize containment. Newcomers are loaded into vehicles behind this fence, so where are they to run? Under the improved and more humanely correct form of human leashing known as hand-on-shoulder, they are under constant restraint. I witnessed leg-over-leg locks being administered on one female newcomer as she was being driven away from the facility.

This is just one of many contradictory assertions that can be refuted with the easily identifiable, concrete manifestations of what is right in front of my eyes. Reports from recent former clients, statements from parent survivors, police reports, and accounts from various other whistleblowers, lead me to conclude that nothing much has changed since my time, in spite of your salubrious picture drawn with clinical precision. Your explanations read like dictation from the Department of Damage Control.

The outward symptoms of an abusive environment are there. Kids do not carve into their arms because they are being helped, or because they are in need of help. They carve into their arms because they are crying out for help, because they are attempting to assert what is left of their integrity and self-identity, when everything else has been stripped away.

As a final note addressed to everyone seeking balance in this debate, I invite you to review the evidence that is out there. Contact ISAC Corp. (International Survivor's Action Committee) for more information on Kids Helping Kids. Visit their Web site at isaccorp.org. Ask to review the police reports. See if these reports wash with the statements made by the source.

14. *Cincinnati Straight Survivor 84-86* says:
22 Mar 2006 at 05:27 pm | #

Kids are not screamed at or cursed at during confrontation, and I get the feeling that confrontation at KHK is significantly different from your experience in Straight. Confrontation has certainly changed since I was a client of KHK. This is not to be interpreted as a defense of confrontation, only a clarification. From my experience the experience of the average KHK client is structurally very similar to what you have described going through. It does seem like the intensity is greatly reduced. Whether that removes any potential for harm I cannot say

The risk for or actual documented harm to kids is exactly the point I keep getting at either directly or indirectly throughout many of my comments. Even if less severe, since KHK's 'treatment' approach and implementation of various practices, policies and procedures retain most if not all of the coercive thought reform characteristics, I think 'reduced intensity' will not remove the risk of harm. Even if intensity is 'reduced', I think it is safe to conclude that the risk of harm might correspondingly be reduced, but cannot possibly be eliminated. This risk of harm, in my mind anyway, is still unacceptably high, especially since we are talking about a setting that is supposedly to 'help' kids. If you read the Senator's report on the Seed, this point is pretty obvious in light of the fact the Seed was 'a kinder, gentler' Straight predecessor. This is of course my opinion based on my research of coercive thought reform to date (previously cited in comment 1), on other sources I have read, and based on my personal experiences with the Straight treatment model.

Comment 2:

From your first list, I agree that 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, and 12 are to some (not

insignificant) extent still true at KHK. From the second list, I would agree that 3 and 4 are also partly true of KHK.

Out of curiosity why do you think #3 & #7 & #10 do not fit KHK? #3 & 10 are more complicated so for now, as to criteria #7 "threatens spiritual, mystical or psychological punishments for deviation from the one true path" This sounds to me like the repeated threats that you (the child) will end up dead or in jail/**the threat** if you stop applying the program/**the one true path** (or dont enroll your child in KHK)

Needless to say this is a disturbing catalogue of attributes, and I appreciate you bringing some research to the debate. My only hesitancy to condemn KHK outright stems from what I interpret to be my own positive experience and the absence of traumatic experience from the individuals I have had contact with. Unfortunately, the preponderance of concrete information about KHK, my personal experience aside, seems to justify condemnation. I think it would be useful to have outside analysis of KHK clients to determine whether the presence of the characteristics you listed leads to the brainwashing, traumatic effects described.

Yes I agree its disturbing alright. For what its worth, I am equally baffled that anyone would consider KHK/Straight, etc. a positive experience. By the way, Straight survivors are also divided into two diametrically opposed positions...many strongly condemn and explain how much it screwed them up while other survivors claim it saved their lives...KHK survivors also seem to demonstrate the same extremes in perceptions of their experiences. This is nothing new, but the fact that there seems to be no middle ground at all strikes me as disturbing....I do attribute this, at least in part, to the distinction between those who are still brainwashed to varying degrees and those who have shaken the programming off. I realize you may not like hearing this, but keep in mind that there was a time I also hated to be referred to as brainwashed. Only 7-8 months ago could I admit that I was brainwashed while in Straight and for a period of time afterward....its a bitter pill so to speak. Fwiw, I dont think Antigen's remarks were meant to be insulting to you, but rather were based on years of observation that the 'programming' is always apparant in all survivors to varying degrees.

With all that said, I agree that "outside analysis of KHK clients to determine whether the presence of the characteristics...listed leads to the brainwashing, traumatic effects" would indeed be useful. But remember that the Lifton criteria that I cited was written years before the Seed, Straight, or KHK ever existed and yet it still clearly applies to all three programs (btw, Singer does a great job explaining Lifton's Model of Thought Reform in a more understandable manner). I dont think these and the others I posted should be disregarded at all (I hope you were not implying that).

15. *Antigen* says:

22 Mar 2006 at 07:45 pm | #

By the way, Straight survivors are also divided into two diametrically opposed positions...many strongly condemn and explain how much it screwed them up while other survivors claim it saved their lives..

Actually, I'll cop to that LOL!

When I first started looking into this issue, I didn't think I had been effected very much. I did

understand very well that having missed so much of what all of my friends took for granted as a normal childhood had been something very difficult to overcome. But I never thought of those two years in the warehouse as having been particularly damaging. I thought of it as a lame assed waste of time, but I was determined from the outset to tough it out and get on with my life. And that's pretty much what I have done.

When I started researching the history, it brought me into contact w/ a lot of other ppl who I'd never met but who, astoundingly, had the same damned issues as I did. Same nightmares (though mine were not that bad) same insecurities, same relationship difficulties... I could go on and on.

I just thought it was me, honestly. I could easily attribute all of it to the family history and other life circumstances that I was born into as well as my own choices later in life. In fact, if you really want to get down to brass tacks about what the Program is and how it works, you can make a strong comparison to your typical, garden variety, over controlling, jealous, paranoid romantic interest. Living in a toughlove TC is like that only you've got a couple of dozen such spouses and they have the practical and legal authority to physically prevent your escape.

I think it can be helpful to consider Program influence when you're in the mood to puzzle out your own mind. But there's also the danger of attributing too much to it.

16. *Royal Water* says:

22 Mar 2006 at 09:27 pm | #

I'd like to add that there are many STRAIGHT, INC. Survivors who are also too afraid or reluctant for various reasons to talk about what happened to them. It causes them actual physical/emotional side effects to re-hash this stuff sometimes. Some folks even killed themselves after this kind of treatment. I knew at least 6 of them personally. I don't know if KHK Source was on staff at the time a few years ago when a client who had been in PFC killed herself. This tragic legacy continues and so it shall until it stops once and for all. What about the folks who are in institutions now, more messed up than they were when they went in to this kind of treatment? People on medication, people totally isolated, people who still walk around thinking ONE beer will kill them or they'll fall down this bottomless slide right at the moment the suds touch their lips. Sure, maybe they aren't "using", but they are more like robots than people. Other abstinent since intake folks seem to think that they are better than people who drink, etc... like an ego trip or something.

Also, when Source talked about the confrontation, or lack thereof at KHK, he neglected to mention that oldcomers have threatened their newcomers with bodily harm if they don't "work their program". I would take that as an assault. This is a ONE SIZE FITS ALL cult method. If you don't agree, then oh well, have a seat, no ketchup on your burger tonite... How can there be "Individual treatment plans" Everyone is expected to conform to the same rules. A STRAIGHT, INC. former executive once told me that the treatment plans were just a formality they went through for insurance purposes. Now, the insurance issue, that's a whole other ballgame there. Miller Newton, wow, that's quite disturbing to hear KHK took in Newton's victims. Why did KHK give "Gone Way Down", (Newton's book) as a resource for parents putting their kids in KHK?

RW

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