



ADVOCACY CENTER

SERVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND SENIOR CITIZENS

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Advocacy Center Releases *Beyond Repair: An Investigation Into Serious Abuse and Neglect at Northeast Supports and Service Center*

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After documenting an ongoing pattern of injuries and death at Northeast Supports and Services Center (NESSC) in Ruston, Advocacy Center urges the State to take action to close the institution and ensure the safety and proper placement of the people who live there. A newly released report by the Advocacy Center, *Beyond Repair: An Investigation Into Serious Abuse and Neglect at Northeast Supports and Services Center* exposes a culture of disregard for residents' rights and a consistent substandard level of care that continues to endanger those who remain at the institution.

The Advocacy Center, whose staff visit facilities like NESSC on a regular basis, was prompted to conduct an investigation after having received numerous reports of serious abuse at NESSC in a relatively short period of time. The investigation uncovered shocking information about seven NESSC residents who were injured or killed in a fourteen month period due to neglect or intentional abuse by staff.

Problems with NESSC staff and management were crystallized when Advocacy Center learned of the arrest of former administrator, Fred Williford. Mr. Williford was arrested on March 13, 2009 for "cruelty to the infirm" after a physical altercation with a resident with mental retardation. A few of the other cases detailed in the report include:

- An individual with mental retardation and mental illness died while being restrained by staff. The individual's medical records indicate that the cause of death was the cardiac arrest and asphyxia associated with the restraint. The death was classified as a homicide. Advocacy Center has contacted the Louisiana Attorney General's Office, the Lincoln Parish District Attorney and Sheriff's Department. Advocacy Center is unaware of any charges filed against the employees involved.

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The Protection and Advocacy System for Louisiana

- An individual with mental retardation was paralyzed after being attacked, chased and assaulted by a peer under the supervision of staff.
- An individual with mental retardation received no medical care for a spiral fracture to the femur for at least four days. The individual was not hospitalized for surgery until the injured leg was severely swollen and bruised. The records reveal prior complaints of pain as well as numerous signs of distress in the individual's behavior leading up to the hospitalization.
- An individual with mental retardation and mental illness was stabbed in the head with a pair of scissors by a peer. The peer retrieved the scissors from an unlocked and unmonitored medical cabinet. The records reference behavioral warning signs leading up to the stabbing, including the person's own angry words about the victim to staff just before the assault.

Advocacy Center believes that the problems with NESSC are too severe and deeply rooted to be repaired. Lois Simpson, Advocacy Center's Executive Director, says: "The conditions we uncovered at NESSC are appalling. This is not a case of one or two incidents that need to be corrected. NESSC is a place where systemic abuse and neglect is the norm. Residents are not receiving the care and treatment they were promised. Instead, they live in an atmosphere of fear and chaos. NESSC is a dangerous place that needs to be closed down."

NESSC has proven that it is consistently unable to provide adequate care to people with developmental disabilities despite a yearly budget of approximately \$14 million dollars from the State of Louisiana. Miranda Tait, Managing Attorney for investigations, states, "As a recipient of government funding, NESSC has a duty to adequately care for people and to keep residents safe. They have failed categorically. An ill-equipped staff unable and/or unwilling to respond to the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities has been allowed to abuse and neglect a vulnerable population without even the most minimal safety procedures in place. We ask that NESSC be closed and the funding redirected to a source that can adequately address the needs of the people living there as well as all people with disabilities in Louisiana."

Northeast Supports and Services Center provides care for approximately 89 teens and adults with developmental disabilities. The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Health and Hospitals is responsible for providing care for the residents and monitoring the facility.

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About the Advocacy Center

The **Advocacy Center** is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to assisting people with disabilities and seniors in Louisiana to achieve maximum potential and independence. The Advocacy Center employs 70 people statewide who assist people to achieve employment, education, housing, and health care goals.