

# Eden II executive director rebuts report accusations

The 1995 report on Eden II, performed by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), detailed more than a dozen accusations of mistreatment and abuse.

The following includes some of the accusations reported, along with rebuttal statements obtained by the Advance from Eden II Executive Director Joanne Gerenser. She has served as executive director of all programs for the past 10 months and as school director for four years prior to that.

■ A staff member alleged that another staff member had "struck, kicked and thrown" a client against the wall in order to deal with his aggressive outbursts. These allegations were made by at least five other staffers. The staffer allegedly abused the individual for a two- to three-month period before it was reported on Feb. 16, 1995. He was not suspended until March 2, 1995 when the state intervened. The allegations were eventually substantiated and the worker was terminated, the report said.

Ms. Gerenser said this report concerned the Eden II group home in Arden Heights. Because the report preceded her tenure as director, Ms. Gerenser said she could not comment on the specifics. But she acknowledged that the agency's adult home has experienced problems, including several allegations of abuse. She insisted that the new management had resolved the problems.

■ On March 21, 1995 a staffer was allegedly observed to have slapped a pre-school child across the face because he grabbed another student's juice. The in-house recommendations were limited to retraining all of the staff, the OMRDD report said.

Ms. Gerenser said the incident was investigated, including interviews with staffers. Several said the teacher did not slap the youngster but rather accidentally brushed the student's face while reaching for the juice, she said.

■ During a Thanksgiving lunch in 1993, an assistant teacher alleged that a teacher forced a student to eat a piece of turkey that he had vomited, the report said.

According to Ms. Gerenser, this allegation, made to investigators, was never made to Eden II and it was never substantiated.

■ On May 21, 1993, the elevator operator at the school struck a student on the shoulder because he was irritated that the student had pushed the elevator bell repeatedly, the report said. Although the incident was reported to a staff member, there was no investigation, the report said.

Ms. Gerenser said the elevator operator was actually a 21-year-old retarded man hired for that position. The student was about the same age, and the two men had a small scrap, she said.

"The investigators knew that but they chose not to put it in the report," she said. "We did an investigation, and no abuse had occurred."

■ The report contained an allegation that a staff member had physically and verbally abused a client on Jan. 1, 1995, but the incident was not reported until another staff member did so on Feb. 16 of that year. Although there was a finding that the allegation was substantiated, the staffer continued to work until the state intervened much later. She was transferred, and later terminated after a parent complained of her continued employment, the report said.

Ms. Gerenser said this was another group home issue, which she could not specifically address.

■ On April 27, 1995, four assistant teachers at the school reported that one of the teachers had been abusing the children in her classroom for the past several months. They reported that the teacher had used hot mustard applied to the tongue of one student who spits, and that she struck another student with her hand. She also allegedly shoved a child with force into the radiator after he knocked over food, and struck another student across the face. Although the original allegations in this case were made on April 27, 1995, the investigation did not begin until May 8, 1995. The staffer was suspended. The families of the individuals were not notified, the report said.

Ms. Gerenser said the allegations were actually made on May 4, and the school acted upon them immediately. In contrast to what the report stated, all the parents were notified, she said. Only the mustard incident could be substantiated. The employee was immediately suspended and subsequently terminated, she said.

■ In Aug. 1993 a staffer allegedly observed another staff member use a "half-Nelson" wrestling hold to force a student to go to the gym when he didn't want to go. The staff member then sustained the hold to force the student to run around the gym. There is no record of any investigation or action, the report said.

Ms. Gerenser said the student is actually 21 years of age and has a penchant for running out of the building unsupervised, which she said could lead to his injury. In this case, the staffer caught the student doing so, and applied an "approved restraint." The rest of the accusation was unsubstantiated, she said.