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Teen facility targets suicide prevention

State ordered steps be taken after hanging

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By Amy Joi Bryson
Deseret Morning News

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Summary

A residential treatment center for troubled teens is being required by state licensing officials to take "corrective action" after a 16-year-old Pennsylvania boy hanged himself earlier this month.

SYRACUSE — A residential treatment center for troubled teens is being required by state licensing officials to take "corrective action" after a 16-year-old Pennsylvania boy hanged himself earlier this month.

The youth, who had been at Island View Academy for only a month, apparently hanged himself from a shower support with a belt. The shower was in a bathroom shared by other residents.

Ken Stettler, the state's human services director over licensing, said Island View officials plan to meet with him next week to submit a corrective plan of action in light of the teenager's death.

While the boy had a history of suicide attempts, Stettler said nothing in the weeks the youth was at the facility indicated there was significant trouble.

"They had done their own assessment, developed a treatment plan around that and were instructed to watch him closely," Stettler said. "He had been there a month without any kind of suicide gestures or overtones, and there was no reason for them to believe that at that point it was still an issue."

Still, Stettler's office wants directors of the 110-bed facility to submit a list of steps they have taken or plan to take to minimize the potential for future incidents.

"There might be some things the program can do to prevent this sort of thing from happening in the future," he said. "We gave them recommendations, and they will present that back to us."

Stettler said Island View officials have conducted a walk-through of the facility to remove possible risks, such as fixtures that could be used in suicide attempts.

Island View, which has been operating in Davis County for more than a decade, has experienced no troubles in the past, Stettler said.

"Their record has been exemplary."

Syracuse police detective Mark Sessions said the boy was found hanged in the bathroom July 2 after he excused himself from a movie, which was being shown before dinner.

In the hallway outside his room, Sessions said, the boy encountered a couple of other teenage residents and joked with them before entering his room.

Staff believed he was in his room at his desk, but the youth entered the bathroom from the private entrance in his room. When staff found him, they unsuccessfully tried to revive him.

State licensing officials also are in the process of revoking the license of a Manti outpatient treatment center that was performing services without properly credentialed staff.

Stettler said the people who run MATR did not use appropriate treatment professionals and had not performed required background screen- ings.

MATR most likely was operating outside of state regulations for several years — something Stettler concedes was the licensing entity's own fault because a former state employee didn't conduct appropriate follow-up visits.

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