The Sembler Report

This report deals with the connections of Melvin and Betty Sembler to Straight Inc, Straight Foundation, and Drug Free America Foundation

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A special thanks to Wes Fager for all his research

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All findings of this report and any additional reports are being forwarded to the proper government
and law enforcement agencies, and international press

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Table of Contents

Page

Introduction:……3

Section One: Mel and Betty Sembler……4

Section Two: Whom did the Semblers approve for high positions at Straight, Inc……4

Section Three: 1974-1981……7

Special Note on James T. Russell……10

Section Four: 1982-1992……12

Section Five: 1993-2002……17

Final Note……22

Works Cited……24

Introduction

Part one of this report deals specifically with the facts on a yearly basis concerning Mel and Betty Sembler and their relationship to Straight, Inc. It also contains a timeline in an effort to establish a pattern of abuse by Straight, Inc. and to prove that Mr. and Mrs. Sembler knew or should have known of the abuses taking place. Mr. Sembler claims in his own words to have been the President of Straight, Inc. for over seventeen years.

Part two of the report, which goes into more detail of the facts, is nearing completion at this time.

Section One

Melvin and Betty Sembler

Mel and/or Betty Sembler served on the board of directors of Straight, Inc. from 1976 until 2002. Straight, Inc. is now called Drug Free America Foundation.
(Appendix A)

Betty Sembler sits on the board of DARE. She also serves on the board of DARE International as vice chairperson. She started an anti drug outreach organization through the Advertising Federation of South Australia. (http://www.dfaf.org/post/sembler.html)

Melvin Sembler has said he and Betty urged Nancy Reagan to get involved in the war against drugs, leading to her famed "Just say No" Campaign. (http://www.fornits.com Record 026)

Section Two

The people approved by the Semblers for high positions in Straight, Inc.

The following is a partial list of those in leadership positions and their qualifications or lack thereof

Melvin Sembler

Education: Bachelors in Speech
Experience: Former Seed parent
Position at Straight: President and Board Member

Helen Peterman

Education: High School drop out
Experience: Former Seed parent
Position at Straight: Executive Staff, later Clinical Director at Straight Inc.-St. Petersburg

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Joseph Zappala

Education: High School diploma
Experience: If any, he **may** have been a former Seed parent
Position at Straight: Board of Directors, 1979; In Senate hearings, while being confirmed as Ambassador to Spain, he claimed to be co-founder of Straight, Inc. We can find no evidence to confirm this, as he is not listed on the original board. In those same confirmation hearings, he claimed a 3-week Spanish language course as part of his qualifications.

Miller Newton

Education: Masters of Theology; He later received a Ph.D. in Public Administration and Urban Anthropology from an unaccredited graduate school. He attended no classes and took no test.
Experience: Attended a workshop on alcoholism
Position At Straight: Assistant Director, then Clinical Director at Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg, FL

Chris Yarnold

Education: Priest
Experience: We will let this transcript speak for itself: During the Fred Collins' trial, which resulted in a $220,000 judgment against Straight, Inc. for false imprisonment, Straight, Inc.'s director Dr. Miller Newton presented Chris Yarnold as Straight, Inc.'s expert on diagnosis for drug abuse. In fact, Mr. Yarnold had been Straight, Inc.'s senior intake counselor when Mr. Collins had been admitted. During deposition Mr. Yarnold admitted he did not know what laughing gas was, nor did he know the active ingredient in marijuana [THC]. When asked, in court, if he knew how the hallucinogenic factor in drugs worked, he replied, "No. All I knew was drugs affected people." He declared that he had known Mr. Collins had been smoking marijuana because his eyes had been red at intake! He admitted that contact lenses could make one's eyes red, but on physical examination of Collins at the trial, he failed to notice that Collins was currently wearing contact lenses.
Position at Straight: Senior Intake Counselor at Straight, Inc-St. Petersburg, FL; then Director at Straight, Inc.-Sarasota, FL

Jim Hartz

Education: Masters Degree in Psychology, former Marine.
Experience: He worked for a mental health program in Georgia. His brother was on the St. Petersburg, FL Police Department. Director Hartz had no special training in The Seed's therapeutic methods. It would appear to this writer that much of the training that Jim Hartz and Helen Petermann received on The Seed's therapeutic methods could only have come from six teenage graduates of The Seed who were made counselors at Straight, Inc.
Position at Straight: Director at Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg, FL

Dr. George Ross

Education: Ph.D. In Education
Experience: Studied Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) under Dr. Maultsby at the University of Kentucky
Position at Straight: Director, Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg

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Dr. Mel Riddile

Education: Masters in Education
Experience: Employed in the school system for Fairfax County, Virginia. He had worked in the school's program dealing with substance abuse.
Position at Straight: Program Director at Straight, Inc.-Springfield, VA; later Regional Director.

Bill Oliver

Education: B.S. in Business Administration and Former Preacher
Experience: None that this researcher can verify. He worked in the computer industry.
Position At Straight: National Executive Director

Will Knisely

Education: Masters of Divinity
Experience: None that we are aware of
Position at Straight: Clinical Director at Straight, Inc.-Springfield, VA

Dr. Hugh Burns

Education: Ph.D. in Education
Experience: Former high school principal
Position at Straight: Director Straight, Inc.-Sarasota, FL

Michael Scaletta

Education: Studied business in college – a year after joining Straight, Inc.
Experience: Former army supply sergeant and former business administrator for LaSalle Alco in Orlando, FL. No known experience in drug rehabilitation.
Position at Straight: Director of Straight, Inc.-Orlando, FL

Straight, Inc. – Senior and junior staff members and staff trainees were graduates of the program with an average age of 16.

Maryland health officials cited Straight, Inc.- Maryland in 1992 for not having a single certified drug or alcohol abuse counselor on its entire staff.

Georgia officials cited Straight, Inc.- Atlanta in 1992 for hiring unqualified staff.

Straight, Inc.- St. Petersburg, from 1978 to 1980 and perhaps beyond, **did not** have any certified drug abuse counselors on staff.

See Attachment: "The Clinicians" by Wes Fager, a small sample of his upcoming book.

The evidence begs the question: Why did Melvin Sembler approve or hire individuals that had little or no education and/or experience? This business policy is at best unwise and asking for problems. The opinion of this investigator is that by doing so he assured that he was in control or could control those individuals.

Section Three

1974 - 1981

1974

The Senate determined that under its federally mandated charter, the U.S. government's Law Enforcement Assistance Agency, herein referred to as LEAA, had not been established by Congress to sponsor medical research, thus the Senate directed LEAA to cease all funding for research projects like The Seed.

February 1974, in direct response to pressure from Senator Ervin who headed the Senate's investigation of LEAA, Don Santarelli, head of the LEAA, held a press conference to announce the cancellation of all LEAA funding for medical research, psychosurgery, and behavior modification programs because, in his words, there "are no technical skills on the staff to screen, evaluate, or monitor such projects."

1975

The U.S. House of Representatives (*Records maintained by US House of Representatives*) had conducted a study of The Seed and concluded that Art Barker (Founder of the Seed program) had refused to let government auditor's see where federal grant money was being spent. That is, he refused to turn over accounting records to federal auditors.

The U.S. Senate conducted a study of The Seed *(Records maintained by US Senate)* and determined that the methods used by The Seed were experimental. The Senate found that the

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) had regulations mandating that human subjects participating in U.S. government sponsored research projects be required to sign consent forms. Thus the Senate directed Robert DuPont (the head of NIDA) to require that Art Barker get consent forms from both parents **and** children who were being subjected to experimental and potentially harmful treatment.

The U.S. Senate likened The Seed's approach to juvenile drug rehabilitation to the methods employed by North Korean Communists in their attempts to "brainwash" American prisoners during the Korean War.

For these reasons, Art Barker abruptly closed all Seed expansion programs.

The founding Seed in Fort Lauderdale had its licensed revoked for failure to comply with the new host home regulations.

It was six months after the original Seed lost its license that Melvin and Betty Sembler, along with other former Saint Petersburg - Seed parents, formed Straight, Inc. It was Melvin Sembler who inherited the host home regulations that had been drafted to regulate The Seed. For sixteen years, Straight, Inc. branches opened all over the country, allegedly locking kids in bedrooms and nailing windows shut, forcing them to urinate in jars in those over-crowed bedrooms, refusing them the right to read even a Bible in those host homes—battling state health officials from Florida to California.

"In some instances they were locked in rooms by themselves and denied food for days. They also reported that they were made to sit in chairs without speaking while listening to others berate them for hours. . . I recently interviewed a child that would be diagnosed as an emotionally unstable personality with paranoid overtones. The use of the above noted practices with this kind of child could easily result in a precipitation of major mental disturbance. Fortunately this child was able to run from the Seed before very much damage had been done to her psychologically. She did manifest some confusion and paranoid ideation which she felt was a result of the manner in which she was treated by the Seed personnel. I have also interviewed children who made suicide attempts following their running from the Seed. Overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and despair were in evidence."

Letter from Jeffery J. Elenewski, Ph.D., clinical psychologist, The Children's Psychiatric Center, Dade County, Florida to Mr. Alex Miller, Youth Coordinator, Florida State Drug Abuse Program, Miami which is included as part of the 1974 U.S. Senate report on Straight, Inc.'s predecessor, The Seed.

"It [Straight] has many of the poor points of The Seed and few of the good points. If I had to recommend one [program] I'd recommend The Seed."

Straight, Inc. board member Theodore Anderson upon joining the ranks of a half dozen board members, almost all former Seed parents, who resigned within the first 16 months of Straight, Inc.'s founding.

Mel Sembler hired his good friend Walter Loebenberg (who is also the founder of the concept of the Tampa Bay Holocaust Museum) to be president of Straight, Inc. Mr. Loebenberg in turn hired Bernadine Braithwaite to be Straight, Inc.'s Executive Director. She had worked for him at U.S. Health Corporation where he had been President.

1976

Straight was incorporated in April. The board waited until late July to announce plans for an imminent opening of the flagship facility. At that time board member Leon Sellers stated that Straight, Inc. hoped to avoid government financing. But just two weeks later Jim Hartz, Straight, Inc.'s Executive Director, announced that Straight, Inc. had accepted a $47,394 grant from LEAA despite the 1974 Senate directive to LEAA to stay out of the medical experimentation/medical treatment business. The grant was to be administered through the Pinellas Metropolitan Criminal Justice Planning Council. The city of St. Petersburg was Straight, Inc.'s sponsor. The Council was responsible to the state's Bureau of Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance (BOCJPA) in Tallahassee.

Note: Straight, Inc. always boasted that it did not accept government funding but this was not true. The Seed, Straight, Inc.'s predecessor was run by a huge NIDA grant plus smaller grants from LEAA.

1977

LEAA gave Straight, Inc. **another** $50,000 grant, again going against the 1974 Senate directive to stay out of the medical treatment business. But since LEAA was not chartered to sponsor medical research in the first place, it did not require any "human consent forms" for medical research. Straight, Inc. stopped receiving LEAA grants when it was accused of violating federal law in the use of that money.

Helen Petermann was voted in as Executive Staff - just one vote short of denial. Petermann was a former Seed parent, and a high school drop out.

Note: Mel Sembler apparently did not mind unqualified individuals holding high staff positions at Straight, Inc. This has been confirmed by a former member of the board of directors in a telephone interview for an online article.

1978

Special Note on James T. Russell – Reprinted with Permission of Wes Fager

James T. Russell, former prosecutor for Pinellas County, Florida, saw things differently from Sarasota County prosecutors. In 1977 he did not prosecute for the alleged beating of Jerry Vancil at Straight-St Petersburg. How could he? The star witness just vanished. As far as I know, to this very day, Jerry Vancil has never been seen or heard from since----dead or alive. Russell did not prosecute when Florida's Bureau of Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance (BOCJPA) confirmed in 1978 several cases of abuse at Straight. He did not prosecute when two former Straight counselors signed sworn affidavits that Helen Peterman, then Straight's clinical director, had repeatedly slapped a small youth and yanked him by his hair in an apparent outburst of temper—even though that had not been the only public accusation of abuse by Ms. Peterman. [St. Petersburg Times, 2-12-78.]. Pinellas County States Attorney James T. Russell did not prosecute for the kidnapping by Straight of Gail Stephenson, which had led to a Congressional inquiry since Ms. Stephenson was from Maryland. But then why should he? OK Roger L. Young was not on his beat. It was Circuit Court Judge Richard Miller who had committed Young to Straight's predecessor *The Seed* four days prior to his 21st birthday. Mr. Young did not even know there had been a hearing when the police arrested him and carted him off to *The Seed*. Judge Miller once bragged that he prefers juveniles to be absent from the courtroom while they are being committed to *The Seed*. But Jeff Bourgholtzer and the girl abducted from Saint Petersburg Catholic High School, they were on Mr. Russell's beat when they forcefully entered *The Seed*. But it's not really kidnapping. Hell, they had a parent in on it. James T. Russell had been instrumental in bringing *The Seed* to Pinellas County in the first place. Fact is, he was on The Seed's Advisory Board! Richard Mensh, at one time Russell's chief assistant prosecutor, is the brother of former Straight board member attorney Myron Mensh. And Allen Alweiss, one of Russell's assistant state attorneys, was on the Board of Directors for Straight, Inc.!

When Dr. Miller Newton, Straight's national clinical director, left Straight and Florida in the early 1980s, he left behind such a vast trail of civil suits and criminal allegations that there should have been a public outcry to fire James T. Russell for not doing his job. (Click **here** to see for yourself.) But why should he pursue Dr. Newton? After all, in 1993, Russell did not prosecute Mel Sembler when there was probable cause to believe that Mel Sembler had interfered with a state health department attempt to close Straight-St Petersburg for a reckless pattern over the years of violating state regulations. In a story that belongs on *A&E's City Confidential*, James T. Russell did not even try to prosecute when Mel Sembler, acting on inside information from a Clearwater city official, bought a swamp for $1 million and almost sold it a few days later to the city for use as a park for $3 million! Once that scam broke in the Saint Petersburg Times, the sale dragged on for months and the best Mel could get from his fellow citizens in Clearwater was a measly $1.95 million.

February 14, 1978 -A letter from HRS addressed to Melvin Sembler warned him of his policy of holding children and/or adults against their will. The letter stated, "…force will not be used to prohibit a child from leaving the program." [(1)]

1980

January 15, 1980 - Miller Newton became Assistant Director of Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg. He had been just a parent member, with a son in the program. Aside from a workshop on alcoholism, which he had attended in 1979, he had virtually no expertise in drug rehabilitation. One of his first assignments at Straight, Inc. was to develop a method to improve parent/client retention rates. To this end he developed a manual called the Six New Parent Raps, which he based, in part, on the workshop he attended at the Johnson Institute. These six raps became mandatory training for new parents at Straight, Inc. While at Straight, Inc. he changed the emphasis on his Ph.D. project and in 1981 received a Doctor of Philosophy for his paper "The Organization and Implementation of Family Involvement in Adolescent Drug-Use Rehabilitation." His thesis listed an enormous bibliography of books, which were part of his graduation requirement. But he was never tested to verify he had read any of them. In fact he never took any test at all other than defending his dissertation to his four-man advisory panel, which met at Straight, Inc. Dr. William Geitz, one of his panel members, worked as clinical psychologist for Straight, Inc., but Newton claims that Geitz did not work for him. (Video "Newton against Harming Kids")

July 17, 1980 - Michael Calabrese went to Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg to visit his brother. Mr. Calabrese claims Straight, Inc. staff members, who threatened to retain him for two years with a court order unless he voluntarily signed himself in, detained him for 9 hours. He says he got into a shouting match with Miller Newton during this intake.[(2)]

September 30, 1980 - Florida state health officials (HRS) received a complaint and interviewed a male juvenile client at Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg whom they found being held against his will for treatment for a drug problem he did not have. Straight, Inc. officials released this minor.

1981

March 4, 1981- HRS investigated a complaint filed by an Orlando woman and found that her son was being held against his will at Straight, Inc. (She had previously filed a Writ of Habeas Corpus to get her other son out.)

March 16, 1981 - State officials Terrell Harper and Marshall met with Miller Newton and two female clients who had recently escaped from Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg but had been returned. In the presence of the state officials Newton threatened the two girls, saying they could be "sent to a mental institution," and told one of the girls he was considering advising her parents to take her to a treatment program in Georgia where she could be "locked-up for 6 months" on just her parents signature. HRS removed one of the girls the next day. The other child was removed three days later by her mother at the recommendation of a court appointed guardian ad litem. State

investigators found that the locks to the bedroom doors at the host home where these girls slept had been reversed to lock from the outside.[3]

April 1981- An HRS report found that teenage clients at Straight, Inc. had been threatened by administrative staff members with being either court ordered into Straight, Inc. or being committed to a mental institution unless they voluntarily entered the program. Several former clients reported to the Saint Petersburg Times that Straight, Inc. staff members had treated them in a similar manner.[4]

October 23, 1981 - Arletha Schauteet attended a sibling interview in order to obtain permission to speak to her brother. At one point she escaped only to be kidnapped, in a violent 30-minute struggle, by her mother, two adult males, and another woman and taken back to Straight, Inc. Ms. Schauteet says Miller Newton told her that if she persisted in saying she was held against her will, "the state of Florida would take over and put my mother in jail for kidnapping." She was held against her will until April 21, 1982 when Detective Brown from the Sanford, FL Police Department secured her release. [Judge C. Vernon Mize signed a preemptory Writ of Habeas Corpus in the interest of Ms. Schauteet, the date is smeared, but appears to be 1982.][5]

Miller Newton was awarded a Ph.D. in public administration and urban anthropology from the Union Institute in Cincinnati, which bills itself as an "alternative …learner directed " school with no campus or attendance required. Later resumes describe Newton's Ph.D. as being in medical anthropology.

Section Four

1982 - 1992

1982

July 13, 1982 - A press release from Board Chairman Mel Sembler announced that Miller Newton had been officially appointed as Straight, Inc.'s National Clinical Director on or about July 4, 1982. However, he told reporters that much of the clinical responsibilities for Straight were already being handled by Newton. Even Newton boasted that, "The local programs are responsible to me. That was going on before."[6]

February 1982 - Straight, Inc.-Atlanta settled with 3 children represented by the ACLU who claimed they were suffering "inhumane treatment."[7]

June 19, 1982 - Fred Collins, Jr. a B level engineering student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Fred now has a Ph.D. in mathematics) attended a Straight, Inc. sibling interview in order to visit his brother. Fred was detained in a room with guards at the door for 7– 10 hours, denied permission to go to the bathroom by a group of kids who related to him their stories of perverted sexual activities and drug addiction, trying to persuade him to admit to same. He finally consented to sign in for a 14-day observation period. Four and a half months later and 20 – 25 pounds lighter, Fred escaped from Straight, Inc.[8]

July 14, 1982 - HRS sent a letter to Clinical Director Miller Newton confirming allegations of "Marathoning" (denying clients food and sleep and subjecting them to 12-hour periods of non-stop confrontations for days at a time), "The Spanking Machine," "Confrontations," and "The Peanut Butter Diet." [(9)]

October 1982 - Margaret Heath (staff trainee and two-time graduate of the program) escaped from Straight, Inc. and went to law enforcement officials with her complaints of torture, abuse, neglect, kidnapping and more. This began the Sarasota State Attorneys investigation into Straight, Inc. and subsequently the closing of Straight, Inc.-Sarasota. Margaret was held in the custody of the state of Florida (HRS) in a group home until a hearing by a judge. At this point, Margaret had been in Straight, Inc. longer than anyone. Margaret was given a bodyguard to prevent "straightlings" from grabbing her off the street on her way to school. Margaret was brought before a judge and became the first person "court ordered OUT of the program."

1983

David Levin, former assistant state prosecutor for Sarasota County, Florida, led the criminal investigation of Straight, Inc.-Sarasota that resulted in the closing of that facility. The prosecutor's office in Sarasota publicly stated that the counselors inflicting the abuse at Straight, Inc.- Sarasota had admitted under oath that they had been trained in their abusive methods at Straight, Inc.-Saint Petersburg. Statements from fellow prosecutors and Congressional inquiries about abuse at Straight, Inc. forced James T. Russell to investigate the program on numerous occasions, but he never reported any wrongdoing.

Jan 19, 1983 - an 18 year-old student intern in the Seminole County's Sheriff's Office named Hope Hyrons attended a sibling interview at Straight, Inc. so she could visit her brother. Staff members tried to force her to sign herself into the program. She resisted and was made to walk/hitch hike back to Longwood, Fl—a 2-hour drive. A month later she was kidnapped by her mother, father and two strange men and taken to Straight, Inc. She fought to get out of the intake room and was restrained. When she told her captors her legal rights were being violated, she says Miller Newton walked in and said, ""Well, I don't give a damn about your legal rights."
Two days later a social services official secured her release. Miss Hyrons subsequently filed a lawsuit against Straight, Inc. and Miller Newton.[(10)]

[Twelve years later, in 1995, Marilyn Kearns' intake at KIDS of North Jersey sounds remarkably similar to the experience of Fred Collins, Arletha Schauteet, and Hope Hyrons. Ms. Kearns alleges that when she was 23 years old, she attended a sibling interview at KIDS, preliminary to visiting her sister. She says she was held in an intake room for hours until she agreed to sign up for treatment. [From author interview]

May 1983 – Fred Collins sued Straight, Inc. for false imprisonment and was awarded $220,000 in damages. Miller Newton and Chris Yarnold testified during the trial.

August 1983 - Miller Newton and Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg settled separate suits with Arletha Schauteet and Hope Hyrons.[(11)]

August 1983 - Martin Brashears, an adult, sued Straight, Inc.-Atlanta for false imprisonment.[(12)]

September 1983 - Larry Williams sued Straight, Inc.-Sarasota.

September 1983 - Benson Williams sued Straight, Inc.-Sarasota. The charges included beatings, pulling him by his hair, hanging him by his underpants from a bedpost, and torture.[13]

September 1983 -The Florida State Attorney's office for Sarasota County released a damning 600 page criminal investigation of Straight, Inc.-Sarasota including statements from current/former counselors admitting to kidnappings, false imprisonments, threatening clients with a court order unless they voluntarily enroll, enrolling clients who were not drug dependent, pulling clients' hair, grabbing clients by the neck, and throwing children against walls.[14]

September 3, 1983 - a boy named Charles was brought to Straight, Inc. Charles had been grabbed in Albuquerque, New Mexico by two private detectives hired by his mother, and placed in leg irons. A Florida judge later ordered his release because proper commitment procedures had not been followed, and because the judge found no evidence of drug addiction or abuse.[15]

October 1983 - Michael Keen sued Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg for false imprisonment[16]

October 1983 - Jacqueline A. Stallings sued Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg for physical assaults and false imprisonment. She eventually won case #83012161C1. The judge ruled that Straight, Inc. committed a "malicious act" against her.[17]

Nov 15, 1983 - Miller Newton and his wife Ruth Ann resigned from Straight, Inc.[18]

Sarasota, Florida	July 19, 1983 Closed	Closed after state prosecutors produced a report of multiple counts of violent criminal acts substantiated by Straight, Inc. counselors who had been granted immunity for their testimony, and after several former clients sued.

1984

60 Minutes (CBS) did an expose on the allegations of abuse at Straight, Inc.

May 1984 – Miller Newton opened KIDS of Bergen County, a Straight-like program in Hackensack, New Jersey. It soon developed into the KIDS Center of America franchise, with programs in El Paso, Texas, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Yorba Linda, California.

1986

Republican congressman Frank Wolf helped bring Straight, Inc. to Virginia.

Former Virginia Governor Charles Robb is quoted in Straight, Inc. brochures, as is former Florida congressmen Charles Bennett.

Former republican Senator from Florida, Paula Hawkins once accused the Washington Post of being a traitor in the war on drugs, for, among other reasons, giving Straight, Inc. bad press. She subsequently lost her senate seat to former Governor of Florida, Bob Graham.

1987

Dr. Arnold S. Trebach devoted an entire chapter to documented abuses at Straight, Inc. in his book The Great Drug War.

Cincinnati, Ohio	1987 Closed	In 1987 the state of Ohio took Straight, Inc. to court to close it down for criminal child abuse. The day the trial was to start, Straight, Inc. voluntarily closed and transferred its clients to Atlanta and Detroit. In 1990 Kids Helping Kids of Hebron, Ky.—a Straight-like program co-founded by former Straight, Inc. officer George Ross—changed its name and moved into the old Straight facility in Milford, Ohio where it operates today as Kids Helping Kids of Cincinnati.

1988

Mel Sembler served on the National Finance and Steering Committee for the George Bush campaign.[19]

Even though Straight, Inc.-Cincinnati closed, the organization based in St. Petersburg, was sued by Cincinnati area individuals and corporations for 1.5 million dollars contributed to Straight Inc. back in 1982. The class-action suit claimed the donations were made with the understanding that Straight, Inc. would start and maintain a program in the Cincinnati area.[20]

1989

Mel Sembler was Finance Co-Chairman for President Bush's Inaugural.[21]

Florida State prosecutor David Levin described the program for ABC-TV's 20/20 as " a sort of private jail, utilizing techniques such as torture and punishment which even a convicted criminal would not be subject to." (Article by Tim O'brien)

Joseph Zappalla stated under oath during senate hearings that he was one of the original founders of Straight, Inc. in 1979. However, Straight, Inc. was founded in 1976 and Joseph Zapalla was not

on the original board of directors. He claimed a three-week Spanish language course as one of his qualifications for the ambassadorship to Spain.[22]

Joseph Zappalla was given the ambassadorship to Spain.

Mel Sembler was given the ambassadorship to Australia.

Information about Straight, Inc. was sent to the Foreign Relations Committee.

August 1989 - According to an audit, an HRS licensing team was prepared to recommend Straight, Inc.'s new operating permit be denied after inspectors discovered abuse. Among the allegations were the withholding of medication and food, depriving clients of sleep and using excessive force against them.

August 22, 1989 - At a follow-up site visit to the Straight, Inc. St. Petersburg facility (after HRS had approved the license), the HRS licensing team was again prepared to recommend that the program's operating license not be issued due to a lack of compliance on issues that surfaced during an earlier site inspection. While at the facility, the licensing team received a phone call informing them that no matter what they found Straight, Inc-St. Petersburg would receive its license. The operating permit for Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg was renewed, despite objections from HRS personnel. [23]

1990

Two Canadian psychologists from Simon University visited Straight, Inc.-DC (Springfield, Virginia) for a first hand look. Professor Barry Beyerstein subsequently published the paper "Thought Reform Tactics: The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions" He noted 17 methods that cults employ on their unsuspecting members, and concluded that Straight, Inc. was guilty of using every one of them. Beyerstein further stated that Straight, Inc. could be fairly compared with prisoner-of-war camps.

Southern California	August 1990 Closed	Straight, Inc.'s former national clinical director, Dr. Miller Newton, ran one of his KIDS programs in Yorba Linda, California. KIDS closed in 1989 under criminal investigation; Straight, Inc. moved into the facility and took over KIDS' clients. California closed Straight, Inc. in 1990, charging child abuse, and all its clients were transferred to Straight, Inc.-Dallas. The failure of Straight, Inc.-Southern California probably stopped the formation of Straight, Inc.-Seattle.

1991

Straight, Inc. represented Linda Creighton (Executive Staff) as a psychiatrist to Boston, Massachusetts' officials. She was actually a registered nurse.

Virginia Beach, Virginia	February 1991 Closed	Straight, Inc.-Virginia Beach closed under allegations of child abuse.
Boston, Massachusetts	July 1991 Closed	Straight, Inc-Boston closed when the state of Massachusetts revoked its foster care license.
Greater DC Area (Springfield, Virginia)	July 26, 1991 Closed	Straight, Inc.-DC was under criminal investigation in Virginia when the state health department decided not to renew its license. Straight, Inc. officials demanded a hearing before a judge, but voluntarily closed the day before the hearing. A new Straight, Inc. facility opened just 3 days later in Columbia Maryland, comprised of the clients and staff from Virginia.
Dallas, Texas	October 31, 1991 Closed	Straight, Inc.-Dallas was reportedly under investigation for child abuse when it closed.

1992

State health officials cited Straight, Inc.-Maryland for not having a single certified drug or alcohol abuse counselor on its entire staff.

Straight, Inc-Atlanta was cited for employing a counselor who possessed only a general equivalency diploma (GED).

The US attorney filed suit against Walter Loebenberg, Bernadine Braithwaite (both former Straight, Inc. executives) and a third person. All three were executives at U.S. Health Care. It seems that Medicare was to have reimbursed USHC a portion of $300,000 required to pay medical malpractice insurance, but had made a mistake and paid $950,000. In the meantime, U.S. Health Care had dissolved, without refunding the overpayment.

Greater DC Area 2 Columbia, Maryland	February 28, 1992 Closed	Straight, Inc.-Maryland officials walked off the job leaving their clients to fend for themselves when the program closed.
Orlando, Florida	August 14, 1992 Closed	On August 14, 1992 Straight, Inc.-Orlando officially closed. On that same day, with the same clients and using the same facility, Executive Director Michael Scaletta incorporated SAFE Inc. along with Straight,

		Inc.'s marketing director Loretta Parrish. He leased the building from Straight, Inc. Today Mrs. Parrish is the owner and Executive Director of SAFE.

Section Five

1993 - Present

1993

Saint Petersburg, Florida	April 24-25, 1993 Closed	Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg survived multiple state health investigations, warnings and probations; civil suits including a $720,000 judgment for abusing former client Karen Norton; and criminal investigations before finally transferring its remaining clients to Straight, Inc.-Atlanta, then closing. The FBI investigated this branch for fraud after it closed but no indictments were ever issued. The Florida state health department investigated Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg after it closed for allegations that Mel Sembler had interfered with a state health team that had wanted to close Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg in 1989 for repeatedly failing to comply with state health regulations.
National Headquarters in St. Petersburg, Florida	May 1993 Closed	
Atlanta, Georgia	July 1-2, 1993 Closed	Straight, Inc.-Atlanta was founded in Marietta, Georgia in August 1981 as the second Straight, Inc. expansion program. In April 1993 Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg closed its flagship program in Florida and transferred its clients to Straight, Inc.-Atlanta. The national corporate office was also transferred to Atlanta. This branch (the last operating Straight, Inc. facility) closed on July 1 - 2, 1993. But on June 21, 1993, just 11 days before closing, Straight, Inc. official Kathleen M. Cone incorporated a Straight-like program called Phoenix Institute for Adolescents, 4 ½ miles from Straight, Inc.-Atlanta.
Detroit, Michigan	1993 Closed	On June 18, 1993, former Straight official Helen Gowanny, helped found Pathway Family Center only 15 miles from the old Straight, Inc facility near Detroit, Michigan.

Robert DuPont, a paid consultant for Straight, Inc., testified that the originator of the Straight, Inc. treatment method was a place called Synanon, which he admitted, was a cult.

Mel Sembler became finance chairman for the Republican Party of Florida and held the position until 1995.[24]

On two occasions, prosecutors escorted clients out of Miller Newton's program, KIDS of North Jersey and an FBI agent wielding a subpoena removed an adult client.

Three counselors at Miller Newton's KIDS program were convicted of beating a client.

HRS sent a letter to Acting Inspector General Lowell Clary with the following findings:

- A definite pattern of abuse or excessive force was used against clients while at Straight, Inc.
- Indications are that outside influences and or pressure were involved in Straight, Inc.'s licensing issues back in 1989 and that it appeared the pressure may have been generated by Ambassador Mel Sembler and several unnamed Senators.[25]

Three counselors at Miller Newton's program KIDS of North Jersey were convicted of beating Channery Soto. Soto testified that Miller Newton had authorized the beatings. Judge DelBaglivo said it was "almost unbelievable" that the director of the program a man with "supposedly" strong credentials would allow and condone the use of violence. "We find this institution (KIDS) highly questionable and someone should look into it. We think there is something radically wrong".

Referring to the assault on Soto, a former staff member at KIDS said, "I knew what we were doing was wrong but Newton did tell us to do it."[26]

May 1993 -The FBI investigated Straight, Inc. for insurance fraud.[27]

May 1993 -The St. Petersburg program was closing under lawsuits and allegations of criminal child abuse. The St. Petersburg Times contacted Mel Sembler's office. Sembler's secretary told the reporter "He will not answer any questions regarding Straight."[28]

September 1993 - Miller Newton received his clinical neuropsychological doctorate. It, like his Ph.D. in anthropology, was awarded from the Union Institute in Cincinnati – a correspondence school with no campus or attendance required. This was 13 years after he became clinical director of Straight, Inc.[29]

1996

The horrors of Straight, Inc. were documented in the books Smoke and Mirrors by Dan Baum and Drug Warriors and Their Prey by Richard Lawrence Miller.

There was another barrage of criminal complaints against Miller Newton and his counselors, including another complaint against one of the counselors who had been convicted of beating a client in 1993.

Dr. Newton agreed to pay the federal government $45,000 in return for not prosecuting him for 254 counts of insurance fraud.[30]

1997

Mel Sembler served on the board of the Holocaust Memorial Museum and as a trustee to the George Bush Presidential Library.[31]

1998

Another counselor at Miller Newton's KIDS program was convicted of assault.

A former KIDS client sued Miller Newton, KIDS of North Jersey, and their psychiatrists for abuse. The client was awarded $4.5 million.

The Sembler Company and the Huizenga Family Foundation both gave $5,000 or more to Jeb Bush's Foundation for Florida's Future, as shown in this annual report (former drug czar and paid Straight, Inc. consultant Robert DuPont sits on the board of Psychemedics, a Huizenga's drug hair testing company).

In her continuing efforts to affect the nation's drug policy Betty Sembler formed a new tax exempt, anti-drug foundation called Save Our Society from Drugs or S.O.S.

1999

In a 1999 article in Trend Magazine…

Mel Sembler defended the practice of politicians favoring big-money donors. He said he tries to influence politicians all the time, by promoting his anti-drug message.

Mel Sembler spoke proudly of an ACLU lawsuit filed against Straight, Inc.-Atlanta.

Mel Sembler freely admitted to leveraging his reputation within the Republican Party circles to air his drug policy concerns.

Mel Sembler said, "Senators never get elected president because all they know how to do is compromise."

When asked about program detractors, Betty Sembler replied, "Anyone who fully understands the dangers of drugs will agree that drastic measures are sometimes needed."

All medical directors at KIDS, Miller Newton's Straight, Inc spin-off, admitted in depositions that they allowed program staff members or senior patients at the Hackensack rehabilitation facility to stamp their signatures on necessary regulatory forms and charts, letters and insurance claim forms.

Miller Newton conceded that he could find no published study, report or book that advocated his treatment protocol.

Defendant Wancier admitted that he signed treatment plans for a client eight months after the plan allegedly was put into effect and admitted to never actually meeting with the client.

Psychiatrist Edleman said in depositions that he tried to get Miller Newton to change his methods but Newton would not take the advice of a doctor.

In a deposition, a former staff member said Newton altered and withheld records.

During litigation, former KIDS staff members said they were ordered by Miller Newton to throw away client-requests to leave the program.

The State of New Jersey filed suit against the KIDS program regarding one million dollars in Medicaid over-billings. (Article by Tim O'Brien)

A reporter from Canadian Advocacy Magazine asked Betty Sembler in person about the horror stories he'd read from Straight, Inc. survivors. Sembler replied, "They should get a life. I am proud of everything we have done. There's nothing to apologize for. The legalizers are the ones who should be apologizing." (Source: Radley Balko)

2000

Betty Sembler served on the Governors task force (www.dfaf.org/post/sembler.html Date: October 21, 2000)

Straight Foundation, which now calls itself the *Drug Free America Foundation (DFAF),* in collaboration with PHR Associates, Inc. and Drug and Alcohol Testing, Inc., was awarded a **$314,539 grant** by the U.S. Small Business Administration in December 2000. The grant is to help 200 small businesses in the Tampa area to setup drug-free workplaces.

In court depositions Miller Newton stated that his former business partner was Bob Grahams Chief of Staff when Graham was governor of Florida and Newton claimed to be good friends with Bob Graham[32].
Note: Bob Graham was Governor of Florida when Straight, Inc.-St. Petersburg was investigated by HRS on July 6, 1982.

2001

"Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I believe that I have the qualifications necessary, if confirmed, to lead our diplomatic mission in Italy, to modernize it, and to strengthen it as an instrument to promote American interests in Italy. During my career in business, public service, politics, and diplomacy, I have worked hard and accomplished much. . . For the last quarter century, along with my wife, I have fought vigorously against the plague of drug abuse. In 1976 Betty and I helped found STRAIGHT, a non-profit, adolescent drug treatment and rehabilitation program with branches across the U.S., which successfully treated and graduated more than 12,000 young people nationwide. For 17 years, I served as chairman of the board of STRAIGHT. Other than our children, nothing was more rewarding than this effort. Betty and I initially agreed that if we helped one child it would be worth all the effort. With 12,000 successful graduates . . . It was a gratifying accomplishment."

Ambassador Melvin Floyd Sembler, AO addressing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Oct 31, 2001, on the occasion of his hearing as George W. Bush's nominee to be ambassador to Italy.

November 16, 2001 - Mel Sembler was given the ambassadorship to Italy.

During a protest at the Sembler home in 2001 it was noted that Miller Newton and the Semblers had security guards from the same company on the same day.

2002

The Mulitjurisdictional Task Force has a class on investigative techniques and elements to investigate and prosecute the criminal enterprise as a whole. This is to enforce the RICO Act. Betty Sembler sits on this board with James McDonough.

Final Note

Straight, Inc. co-founders Melvin Sembler and Joseph Zappala were major contributors to George Bush's presidential campaign in 1988 and in return President Bush nominated them for ambassadorships. In this **link** Maryland's Democratic Senator Paul Sarbanes acknowledges the importance of the up-coming Barcelona Summer Olympics. Despite Senator Sarbanes protest, Zappala became ambassador to Spain, and Roy Spear, owner of Home Shopping Network and another Straight, Inc. board member, got the concessions to the Barcelona Olympics. Also in this link Senator Sarbanes points out that at one place on their application forms, Sembler and Zappala filled in almost identical answers to one of the questions asked. This prompted Senator Sarbanes to question whether the two can be trusted to enter into dialogue with their host governments, if they, apparently, cannot be trusted to write a few lines on their own qualifications.

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