

Clarinda Academy treatment criticized



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A third facility for Iowa's troubled youth is allegedly failing to provide the students with adequate schooling, according to advocates for the disabled.

The Clarinda Academy, a privately run, western Iowa school that offers educational and residential treatment programs for boys and girls, is using a "one-size-fits-all" approach to schooling and treatment, according to a complaint filed with the Iowa Department of Education by the nonprofit advocacy group Disability Rights Iowa.

It's the third complaint of that type filed by Disability Rights Iowa over the past year. The group made similar allegations last summer about the on-campus school at the Iowa Juvenile Home in Toledo, and this spring it filed a complaint regarding the State Train School for Boys in Eldora. In both of those cases, investigators from the Iowa Department of Education verified the complaint and ordered the state to take corrective action.

In a formal complaint filed with the state eight weeks ago, Disability Rights Iowa spelled out its concerns pertaining to the Clarinda Academy:

- The three former Iowa Juvenile Home residents all had behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans at the Toledo facility, but no longer have them at Clarinda.
- The behavioral goals for all Clarinda students appear to be exactly the same, regardless of the individuals' abilities. The academy is also using the same process to address the needs of those students.
- Because the academy uses a "one-size-fits-all approach to behavioral goals ... no special education is being provided" at the school.
- In some cases, there has been little or no planning to successfully transition students out of the academy and into the community. For the three former Iowa Juvenile Home students, the academy had developed no goals related to job training, continuing education, employment or independent living.
- The academy staff "does not seem to have a good understanding" of their legally mandated obligation to first identify and then evaluate students with disabilities.

The Iowa Department of Education is investigating the complaint and is expected to issue a response later this week.

The academy is run by a company called Sequel Youth and Family Services and is located on property leased from the state. The academy is adjacent to the state-run Mental Health Institute, but the youth served by Clarinda Academy are not housed at the institute, which serves adults.

The academy's executive director, Reggie St. Romain, did not respond to calls and emails last week from The Des Moines Register. Steve Gilbert, an executive vice president with Sequel, said in a written statement that the company has developed a "corrective plan of action" and is continuing to work "to resolve this issue."

Like the Iowa Juvenile Home, which served delinquent girls until it was shut down in January by order of the governor, and the Eldora facility, which continues to serve delinquent boys, the Clarinda Academy is alleged to have violated state and federal regulations that require a minimum level of educational services for special-education students.

Disability Rights Iowa began examining the Clarinda Academy in January after several girls were transferred there from the Iowa Juvenile Home. After examining the records related to three of those girls, Disability Rights Iowa became concerned with what it perceived as widespread, systemic issues.

The organization says it appears that academy students are not receiving treatment and education tailored to meet their individual needs, as federal law requires.

Disability Rights Iowa is asking the Iowa Department of Education to consider ordering "compensatory education" for all students who resided at the academy during the past year for more than 30 days and were not given the legally mandated services.

The organization is also asking the state to ensure that Clarinda is employing an adequate number of education staff and that the state-run Area

Education Agency is providing adequate assistance.

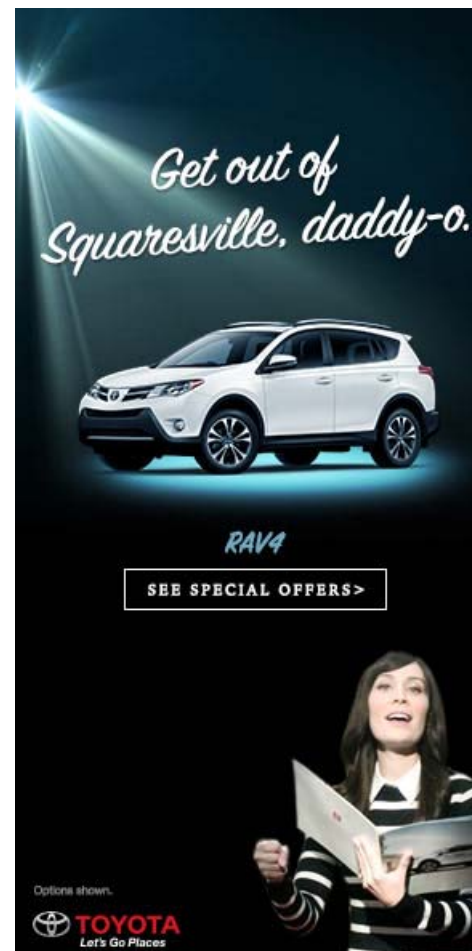
Clarinda Academy was established in 1992 and currently offers long-term residential treatment for males and females, as well as shelter care and transitional living services.

It has a licensed capacity of 266 students and serves youth from several different states.

Sequel Youth and Family Services was founded in 1999, and currently operates a variety of programs and facilities in 17 states.

Among those programs is the Woodward Academy, located on the campus of the state-run Woodward Resource Center. The Woodward Academy is a 248-bed residential treatment program for male youths.

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