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Juvenile Center Raises Concerns

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[KidsPeace](#)

photo by Matt Mann

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Miles away from home, and even farther away from their problems, hundreds of teenagers call KidsPeace home.

KidsPeace officials say the Romulus campus is not a detention center or a juvenile facility, but rather a mental treatment center.

However, runaways happen regularly. This past June, KidsPeace reported 18 runaways in one night. Six of those teens were removed from the facility.

The number of runaways is topped by the number of false fire alarms. Fire alarms are often pulled as a distraction when the children try to flee the facility.

However, the act is anything but a childish prank. In Seneca County, it's a felony.

Seneca County Sheriff Leo Connolly says since January 2003 his department has responded to more than 60 false fire alarms, 30 reported assaults, and 27 ambulance calls. Connolly says his staff has been consumed with calls since KidsPeace first opened four years ago.

"It's almost a daily occurrence where there's responses to KidsPeace," Connolly said.

KidsPeace says although the numbers may seem high, they do not necessarily coincide with the severity of the offense.

"You have to understand that these children have been placed in our care not our custody," said Cara-Leigh Battaglia of KidsPeace.

Battaglia says that KidsPeace clients are under strict supervision at all times.

If a child leaves the sight of staff at any time, the child's referral source, parent or guardian, and the local authorities would all be notified.

In cases of criminal acts, County Attorney Steven Getman also gets a call.

Getman says KidsPeace is much more than just a treatment facility and sites that children who have committed crimes anything short of murder can be placed at the facility.

Getman has tried dozens of cases involving kids at KidsPeace, including assaults against staff and other residents.

"State officials need to really take a long, hard look at what's been going on there," Getman says.

Ten days after the mass runaway incident in June, KidsPeace Executive Director John Treahy announced his immediate resignation.

The search for a new director is now underway, but Battaglia says KidsPeace will not be rushed and will take its time finding a replacement.

Battaglia stresses that with KidsPeace will continue to be the "same solid organization it has always been."

"We want to be good neighbors to our neighbors that surround this campus that never expected that a whole community of over 600 people, including 200 emotionally disturbed children, would land in the midst of their fields."

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