

Houston man among three arrested on charges for alleged abuse of girls at Willis treatment facility

By Catherine Dominguez

Updated 3:08 pm, Thursday, June 14, 2018

Photos: Montgomery County Jail



Thigpen



Lyons



Thompson

Photo: Montgomery County District Attorney



Thompson

Photo: Jason Fochtman, Staff Photographer / Houston Chronicle



The Care Cottage is seen along I-45 South.

A Houston man and two other staff members are facing felony abuse charges for allegedly choking one young girl and breaking the arm of a second, arrests that followed a raid on a private Montgomery County residential treatment center for girls.

Staff members Hiram Thigpen, 41, of Houston, and Jasmin Sabrna Lyons, 23, of Huntsville, were arrested Tuesday and booked into the county jail, confirmed prosecutors with the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office. Neither Thigpen nor Lyons have any prior criminal history, according to court records.

Jada Thompson, 22 of Huntsville, was arrested Thursday on an outstanding warrant. Thompson is charged with injury to a child and is being held on a \$30,000 bond.

PAST COVERAGE: Authorities raid Care Cottage after allegation of abuse

Thigpen has been charged with a third degree felony of injury to a child, while Lyons is facing a third degree felony charge of injury to a disabled individual. Thigpen is being held on a \$25,000 bond and Lyons was held on a \$50,000 bond but was released after posting bond late Tuesday.

Thigpen and Thompson are still employed at the facility, while Lyons no longer works at Care Cottage.

"These are the first three arrests in a very active and ongoing investigation into the Care Cottage facility. Local law enforcement agencies are committed to protecting these children and we are aggressively pursuing any alleged criminal acts of violence that is or has occurred against these kids," said Tyler Dunman, chief of the DA's Special Crimes Bureau. "On these arrests, we look forward to presenting the evidence to a Montgomery County jury."

The Care Cottage facilities, which houses for more than 50 girls placed there by the state, remains under investigation for alleged sexual and physical abuse. The criminal inquiry was begun after officials with the Willis Independent School District contacted Montgomery County Attorney J D Lambright to report numerous incidents involving the girls who lived at the facility and attended school at the district.

According to the arrest affidavits, on Oct. 10, 2017, Lyons allegedly injured a 14-year-old autistic girl by grabbing and twisting her arm. It wasn't until several weeks later that the girl received medical care after the girl's mother intervened and took her to a doctor where she learned her daughter's arm was broken, the affidavit states.

On Feb. 27, Thompson allegedly grabbed a 13-year-old girl by the neck impeding her breathing and blood circulation by applying pressure to the girl's neck. The girl, the court documents state, told authorities Thompson "choked her" because she would not be quiet. The girl also alleged other girls at the facility has been "restrained and hit on by staff."

On April 11, Thigpen allegedly grabbed and threw a 13-year-old girl at the facility to the floor and put his knee on the girl's neck affecting her breathing and blood circulation by applying pressure to her neck because he believed the girl was lying about taking a shower before going to school, the affidavit states.

A call for help

Lambright said he was alerted by Superintendent Tim Harkrider of the conditions at the facilities in April. Harkrider and his staff had made dozens of reports to CPS officials regarding the care and treatment of the girls, he noted. A sworn statement from an investigator used to obtain the search warrant executed May 16 at the facilities outlined allegations reported by residents to Willis ISD officials and others about abuse and neglect, including leaving students unattended and staff parties involving alcohol.

The investigator said some girls in the residential facility had been injured while being restrained and that others were hog-tied by staff members and placed face down. Other girls were injured after trying to escape by jumping out of a second-floor window that was not repaired.

At least three staff members are accused of having sexual relations with girls in their care, according to the statement. Additionally, girls who spoke to caseworkers with CPS during inspections were later punished by staff, who withheld snacks, phone privileges and other rewards, according to the affidavit.

Stanley Schneider, a Houston attorney who is representing Care Cottage owners Howard and Tabitha Taylor, maintains his clients have followed CPS protocols from its establishment.

Closed hearing

On May 22, State District Judge Tracy Gilbert closed a hearing concerning the welfare of the dozens of young girls who live at the facility excluding not only the county attorney and local school superintendent but the attorney for the center as well. Gilbert cleared the courtroom to hear testimony from Leshia Fisher, regional director of Child Protective Services, after a request from CPS attorney Bridget Smith Lawson, who cited sections of the Texas Family Code that apply to the confidentiality of records relating to minors.

Despite the raid and arrests, the facility remains open and is home to about 56 girls. The Care Cottage facilities, which are licensed for 65 girls ages 6 to 17, are operated by the private HTK Care Foundation Inc., which is registered to the Taylors.

The nonprofit foundation that operates the homes receives up to \$435 per day per resident to provide care. The foundation's annual report in 2016 listed income of \$1.1 million and expenses of \$1.1 million, with the Taylors each drawing salaries of \$80,000.

If anyone has information or knows the location of Jadaniran Thompson, please contact Montgomery County Crime Stoppers at 1-800-392-7867.