

After abuse allegations, CPS officials close Care Cottage girls' treatment center in Willis

By Catherine Dominguez

Updated 4:44 p.m. CDT, Wednesday, July 25, 2018



The Care Cottage is seen along I-45 South on Thursday, May 17, 2018, in Willis.



Jasmin Sabrna Lyons, 23, of Huntsville, faces felony abuse charges in Montgomery County.



Hiram Thigpen, 41, of Houston, face felony abuse charges in Montgomery County



Jada Thompson, 22 of Huntsville, was arrested June 14, 2018 on an outstanding warrant. Thompson is charged with injury to a child.

Two and a half months after police raided a private residential treatment center for girls in Willis, Child Protective Services has closed Care Cottage North. County Attorney J D Lambright said the last girl from the north facility was moved July 13. Care Cottage South remains open with about 25 girls still residing at the facility. "This is not the result of any court order," Lambright said adding CPS officials made the decision following the raid. "CPS started seeing the (extent) of the problems there."

Lambright said he did have concerns about the south facility remaining open but said CPS officials are still present at the facility. "That's a huge success," Lambright said of the closure.

CPS officials could not be reached before press time.

The Care Cottage facilities, which housed more than 50 girls placed by state child care workers in rural Willis, remains under investigation for alleged sexual and physical abuse. The investigation started after officials with the Willis Independent School District contacted Lambright to report numerous incidents involving girls who lived at the facility and attended classes in the district.

Willis Superintendent Tim Harkrider said he was relieved to hear one of the facilities was closed. "We are happy," Harkrider said Wednesday. "Our concern has always been the welfare of the girls and to know they are moved to different facilities our hope is they will be taken care of and provided the counseling they need. We hope the best for them."

Chief of Special Crimes with the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office Tyler Dunman echoed Harkrider. "We are pleased to hear the news of the north location shutting down," he said.

Criminal investigation

Three staff members are facing felony abuse charges including allegedly choking one young girl and breaking the arm of a second. Cottage Care staff members Hiram Thigpen, 41, of Houston, and ex-staffer Jasmin Sabrna Lyons, 23, of Huntsville, were arrested June 12. A third staff member, Jada Thompson, 22 of Huntsville is charged with felony injury to a child, and was arrested June 14.

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 bail and Lyons was released after posting a \$50,000 bond late Tuesday.

Lyons left the facility in June but it was unclear if Thigpen and Thompson are still employed with Care Cottage.

The allegations

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. 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. He allegedly put his knee on the girl's neck affecting her breathing and blood circulation by applying pressure because he believed the girl was lying about taking a shower before going to school, the affidavit states.

School district concerns

Lambright said he was alerted by Harkrider of conditions at the facilities in April after school officials made dozens of complaints to CPS officials regarding the care and treatment of the girls, he noted.

The sworn statement from an investigator used to obtain the search warrant that was executed May 16 at the facilities outlined allegations reported by residents to Willis ISD officials and others concerning 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. Others 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 sworn statement.

The Care Cottage facilities, owned by Howard and Tabitha Taylor, are operated by HTK Care Foundation Inc., which is also 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.