Abusive Group Home is Stopped, Victims Freed and Laws Changed
Kaufman House Case Example

In the fall of 2004, headlines broke out across the nation about a mental health group home, the Kaufman House, which was abusing persons with mental illness in Newton, Kansas. The Disability Rights Center of Kansas (DRC) assisted several residents of the group home to leave that abusive situation. For over 20 years, the victims were subjected to bizarre and terrible sexual abuse, physical abuse and what prosecutors described as “involuntary servitude.”

DRC initially assisted one of the residents, whom we call “Barb” to protect her identity, in leaving the Kaufman House in May of 2004. Arlan Kaufman was the so-called therapist, landlord, service provider and guardian/conservator of Barb. Though these are clear conflicts of interest, they are allowed under Kansas law. After the horrible events at the Kaufman House were brought to light, there were thankfully many changes made to the laws in Kansas, including enhanced reporting of guardians’ conflicts of interest to the Court and greater oversight and licensure of these types of settings.

As the officially designated Protection and Advocacy agency for Kansas, DRC has special powers under federal law to investigate abuse and neglect perpetrated against people with disabilities. DRC used those powers in 2004 to gain access to the Kaufman House and investigate the allegations of abuse. DRC’s investigation confirmed the terrible abuse.

When DRC helped Barb courageously leave the abusive Kaufman House, Federal prosecutors finally had their first witness free from the Kaufman’s influence. This created a snowball effect where just five months later on October 26, 2004, DRC returned to the scene with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and helped the other six residents still in the group home to move out. At the same time the FBI executed its search warrants and arrested the Kaufmans during the raid. Federal authorities seized over 30 videotapes from the Kaufman’s bedroom, which vividly showed sexual abuse perpetrated on both male and female patients, including “Barb.” The videotapes provided direct proof of the abuse. DRC then continued to work on behalf of the former Kaufman House residents by providing legal representation and advocacy to the residents, in order to ensure their rights were protected and necessary supports and services were in place immediately.

The Kaufmans have since been convicted on over 30 federal charges including involuntary slavery/servitude, Medicare fraud, mail fraud, and conspiracy.

One of the most troubling aspects of this case is the fact that the State of Kansas knew about the terrible abuses for over 20 years, but state agencies were never able to get residents out of the Kaufman house. Over 12 reports of abuse and neglect were made to the State, including four reports from former residents or their families, yet the State seemed powerless to stop the
abuse. DRC’s special investigation authority, as the Protection and Advocacy agency, allowed DRC and federal authorities to shut down the Kaufman house in six months, whereas other agencies couldn’t stop the abuse for over 20 years.

Additional red flags of the abuse should have risen when Mr. Kaufman had his license to practice social work suspended in 2001. His wife Linda Kaufman, was a Registered Nurse (RN) and administered medication and medical treatment to the residents, had her nursing license suspended in early 2004. Despite these professional license suspensions, no government agency was able to help the residents with mental illness out of the harmful environment they faced at the Kaufman House and to safety until DRC intervened in May of 2004.

Since the Kaufman’s have been brought to justice, DRC attorneys represented the victims to ensure that they received as much restitution as possible.