

## Residential Treatment Program (RTP) Licensing Report Non-Compliance: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children

### Residential Licensing and Special Investigations (RLSI)

RTP Regulation 401 was rated as Compliance with Reservations because of the concerns identified in the personnel file reviews, staff interviews, and child interviews. In documentation of personnel actions, at least four house parents were noted demonstrating concerning judgment and other staff had questioned their ability to appropriately manage student behavior and incidents that have occurred. The concerns of specific house parents were reiterated across Kurn Hattin departments. Performance evaluations of the house parents in question and **review of documentation known to RLSI outlined a pattern of concerning behavior with children going back to at least 2015.** The supervisor of one house parent shared that the house parent is “on our radar, but she’s very strong.” It is difficult to reconcile a house parent that is on the administration’s radar for inappropriate behavior but still is considered a strong house parent. **Another personnel concern demonstrated substantial negligence and the possible fraudulent documentation for administering medication.**

**RTP Regulations 404, 419, and 422 are rated as noncompliance** because files were missing resumes and job descriptions and some performance evaluations. Some of the documented performance evaluations used a form titled Job Descriptions to evaluate staff performance but actual job descriptions were not always found in the file. There were also many medication errors documented in individual personnel files. This practice of documenting individual child medical information in personnel files will need to be reviewed.

**RTP Regulation 412 is rated as noncompliance because of the 18 background checks reviewed only 6 had current and completed fingerprint-supported background checks.** Out-of-state child abuse registry checks were not checked for any employee in order to be in compliance with FFPSA. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) self-study noted, “It regularly takes 30-45 days to receive fingerprinting results from the Sheriff’s Department, which means that employees sometimes begin working before their background check is complete, but most problems are discovered via the on-line VCIC system before the employee begins work.” **This lends RLSI to infer that staff are potentially alone with children before their full background check results are received.** RLSI spoke with the Director of Human Resources, Martha Ruffle, to begin a process of obtaining information from current and prospective employees of any state they have lived in within the last 5 years. **It was shared with RLSI that HR received directive from the Executive Director not to follow the background check changes of FFPSA.** Yet, in a meeting to start this licensing visit iteration, Mr. Harrison said he had not received notification about the background check requirement changes.

**All staff interviewed presented an overwhelming concern about Kurn Hattin Homes leadership** and the supervision that houseparents are receiving, which lends a rating of compliance with reservations for RTP Regulation 423. Most staff connected a lower census at the Kurn Hattin to the “staffing issue” and “house parent situation.” When asked about the supervision they receive 1:1, the majority responded that they have to ask for 1:1 time. When RLSI met with house parents in mid-November, one said they had 1:1 supervision with their supervisor three times since the school year started

RLSI focused on the admissions process and child file reviews due to the ongoing practice that Kurn Hattin is admitting students that need a higher level of treatment than what is provided at the program. The admissions committee has are presentative from nursing, residential, school, counseling, and admissions. **Student file reviews indicated that not all admission**

**recommendations from student interviews are followed.** For example, a recommendation of the Director of Counseling to not admit a 6-year-old with significant attachment issues was overturned by the former Director of Admissions and the child was admitted. One student had 28 incidents within 9 months of admission. The incidents included defiance, assault of another student, assault of a staff, and self-harm statements. The admission packet had two reviewers recommending no admission and that *the student would “not be a good fit with a 1:10 ratio” but she was still admitted.*

RTP Regulation 504 is found in compliance with reservation because gaps were identified in the main children files reviewed. Topical information is housed in different locations on campus, for example, medical information remains with the nursing department, educational information is kept with the school and incident reports remain online. However, RTP Regulations 520 and 522 are noted in noncompliance because all SSPs list that de-escalation plans are not needed. In March 2018, **Executive Director, Steve Harrison stated de-escalation plans are not needed and he saw “...no need to waste my staff’s time writing unnecessary individualized plans...”** Additionally, discharge information is repetitive and every student’s is the same and places responsibility on the parent to plan accordingly.

A document dated September 2018 titled, “Reasons for Student Placements” of the student census, 72 were listed as having a “challenging home environment,” 29 students had “mentally or physically ill parent or relative,” and 20 students had “substance abuse at home.” In the New England Kurn Hattin Homes for Children 2018 – 2019 Program Description’s Criteria for Admission states, “ability to interact positively with peers and function well in a residential setting with no overnight awake supervision...Children with demonstrated significant anti-social behaviors (fire-starting, running away, etc.) or educational needs outside of the scope of our academic program generally are not admitted.” **There are multiple examples where children were exhibiting behaviors that are “outside the scope” of the program but were admitted and relates to RTP Regulation 508 noncompliance finding.**

Significant child file review examples are detailed here to outline the noncompliances in this section. Of the child files reviewed, diagnoses listed were ADHD, ODD, CD, MPDD, depression, and anxiety and were prescribed psychotropic medications. Some challenging behaviors listed in admissions packets described anger issues, externalizing problems, runaway tendencies, suicidal ideations, rule-breaking, and a history of school suspensions for touching other kids. The children and families reported histories of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence. Multiple students have placement histories at Howard Center’s Jarrett House and the Brattleboro Retreat psychiatric inpatient unit. One student file reviewed demonstrated a psychiatric hospitalization in April and the child was admitted in June. This information along with that listed above lends a rating of in compliance with reservations to RTP Regulation 502, because **the program is not adhering to its own program descriptions.**

The new Director of Counseling, Christine Reid, holds a small caseload of clients since counselor, Kathy Allen, retired and the administration decided not to fill that position. This further highlights the incongruence between the ongoing recommendations by RLSI to balance the treatment and service criteria for children admitted with that of the treatment and services Kurn Hattin is providing. **Staff are saying that they cannot adequately meet the needs of students, children are saying they do not feel safe.** The profile to the child files reviewed are of children with complex trauma and substantial mental health needs. Kurn Hattin acknowledges the imbalance of accepting youth whose needs they cannot meet in the Enrollment section of the self-study stating, *“In the effort to help as many children as we possibly can, sometimes children are enrolled who require a great deal of individual attention. This can take time away and resources away from other students.”*