

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

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HEADLINE: Students allege abuse at Rockland alternative school

BYLINE: By SAMUEL MAULL, Associated Press Writer

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BODY:

Six current and former students of a school for troubled youths in Rockland County have filed a lawsuit alleging the staff subjected them to the worst abuse they ever experienced.

The lawsuit, filed Thursday in state Supreme Court in the Bronx, said, "Incidents of violence resulting in broken bones or severe lacerations requiring hospital admissions or significant medical treatment were common occurrences" at the school, the **Edwin Gould Academy**.

Mark Albert, a lawyer representing the six students and the parents of four of them, said that the youths were beaten, choked and illegally injected with drugs by staffers and that officials who were in charge did nothing to stop the abuse.

Staffers sometimes smoked marijuana while on campus and offered it to students, court papers say. The papers say that on occasion staffers were under the influence of alcohol and would become violent while intoxicated.

Albert said police were investigating allegations about staffers at the school, which is in Chestnut Ridge, N.Y., but he did not believe anyone had been arrested.

The majority of Edwin Gould's 170-plus students, who are aged 12 to 20, have had troubled childhoods, court papers say. "Many were subjected to broken homes or abusive parents, while others encountered trouble with the law at an early age," the papers say.

The stated goal of the school and of the city, state and court programs that put the young people there is to provide a safe environment in which they can grow, receive education and get a new start.

"Unfortunately," say court papers, "not only was this goal not accomplished at the **Edwin Gould Academy**, but the children were generally subjected to treatment and/or conditions that were far worse than they had ever experienced prior to their placement there."

The lawsuit alleges negligent hiring, retention and supervision of employees by the academy, as well as assault and battery. The suit asks unspecified damages.

"They hired guys taking no care at all," Albert said. "They hire guys with drug and alcohol problems and with anger management problems."

Thomas L. Webber, Edwin Gould's superintendent and director, said he had not seen the lawsuit. But he said state officials had investigated allegations of abuse at the academy. "We call them (the complaints) in as soon as we get them," Webber said.

Webber said there also had been an investigation involving allegations against a staffer named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

"He no longer works here," Webber said.

Albert said that of the six student plaintiffs, all of whom are from the Bronx and Brooklyn, two are still at the academy.

The lawyer said the school is at least partially state-funded.

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