

WEST MILFORD

Local woman's shelter at odds with DYFS over teenage moms

2006

BY DONNA ROLANDO
Staff Writer

Children raising children is no easy task. And it's one that got tougher recently for nearly 15 families who feared they might be separated from their babies in what some called a bureaucratic glitch. "I don't think it's right to move us now because we've been here for two years," said a 17-year-old Newark area girl who sought refuge in West Milford from what she described as a "hard" life.

With her son now about 2, she will be moving again to "stay with my sister."

"Wrong" is the word she used to describe the state's decision to relocate the families from the West Milford and Wanaque women's shelters run by Strengthen Our Sisters.

The relocations stem partly from the lack of a contract to care for teens and their babies, which is why SOS program director Karin Westdyk chalks it all up to

"bureaucratic nonsense."

Andy Williams, a spokesman for the state Division of Youth and Family Services, admitted that it was a contractual matter that prompted the decision to move the families.

But he said that physical problems also came to light, which brought more urgency to the move. Williams said that the agency had concerns that fire safety measures at the shelters did not go to the extent DYFS wants to see with infants. Programs and supervision at the sites also fell short, he said, of what DYFS would want for teens and their infants.

Williams said that the concerns are not meant to be an indictment of SOS and that DYFS would continue to work with the shelter agency on other cases.

Although Williams says that DYFS never intended to separate the young moms from their babies, Westdyk said that SOS had to make the case for the families to stay united.

"We had told them they couldn't take the babies from the mothers, which initially they were going to do," she said.

"It's all to do with bureaucratic nonsense, something didn't get faxed to them in time," she said.

Sandra Ramos, founder of the shelters, also pointed to the bureaucratic nature of DYFS.

She admits that SOS doesn't have a contract with DYFS for babies, only for teens.

But SOS had cared for the families for a few years before SOS sprung into action, moving the majority of them to other quarters in recent weeks.

SOS hoped to amend its contract with DYFS to include babies, but is making no headway with its argument. Ramos had to watch as the majority of the families faced relocation.

Williams said that the state has no complaints against SOS or its

services.

However, Williams said that DYFS has housing more suited for teens and their babies with specific programs like parenting classes geared to the needs of a young mother. On Monday afternoon, Williams had confirmed that the babies had not been separated from their moms.

"That was not our intention," said Williams.

"It's not our policy and we don't have the authority to remove kids from their mothers without a court order"

Such orders tend to be based on evidence of abuse, he said, which is not the case in the West Milford or Wanaque shelters.

He said that more than 80 percent of the children in DYFS cases do remain in their own homes with monitoring or other provisions to improve the quality of family life.

RIVERDALE

Special needs students get mainstreamed

BY LESLIE SCOTT
Staff Writer

Special needs preschoolers will

The inclusive class is based on the state-recommended Creative Curriculum program model.

Wyks said this program has

BY LESLIE SCOTT
Staff Writer

The Riverdale School is advertising for a new principal.

At its Sept. 20 meeting, the Board of Education announced that Diane Wilton resigned and her last day with the district will be Dec. 31.

Wilton began her third year with the district this fall.

RIVERDALE

School principal resigns

would begin an interview process and I might not need an interim (principal)," she said.

Otherwise an interim principal would serve until a candidate is found to fill the vacancy.

Some of the duties of principal are evaluating staff, disciplining students, and meeting the demands of core curriculum content.

Wyks said Wilton is leaving for personal reasons.

West Milford: Planning Board 7:30 p.m., Town Hall

Riverdale: Planning Board, 7 p.m., Municipal Building

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10
Lincoln Park: Board of Education, 7:30 p.m., middle school media center

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