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By: [Dan Scanlan](#)

Couple sues Jacksonville foster agency after prior abuse to adopted son, daughter

Parents claim local foster agency never told them of previous abuse.

██████████ and ██████████ just wanted a "forever family" when they adopted a son and daughter in 2009 through Family Support Services of North Florida.

Then the Vancouver, British Columbia, couple learned the boy and girl, now 6 and 8 respectively, had been in four foster homes and a failed adoption, suffering physical and sexual abuse the agency never disclosed to the Canadian parents.

As they deal with a boy they say punches his nanny and a girl who threatens to kill her adoptive mother, the couple has sued the Jacksonville agency.

Filed Tuesday, the lawsuit seeks money to care for the children, plus damages for pain and suffering. It says the agency failed to keep track of ██████████ and ██████████ as they are named in the lawsuit, or advise the new parents of abuse.

"What FSS did to them and us as adoptive parents is inexcusable, it's horrible," ██████████ said at a news conference. "We are going to demand answers from FSS and the state of Florida."

Family Support Services is a nonprofit organization that handles state adoption and foster care in Duval and Nassau counties as part of a contract with the Florida Department of Children and Families.

CEO Jim Adams said he couldn't comment on the lawsuit because he hadn't seen it. But he said staff members "take care of our kids and always have" and wondered if this might be part of a statewide effort to kill bills in the Legislature that would offer private agencies like his the same limited liability that state agencies have now.

"It is a sad state of affairs for someone to use children for state agenda," Adams said. "If anyone in my organization is responsible in any way for creating a situation for a child, we will immediately terminate them. We ... bend over backward to provide rapid quality care to children."

The children were taken from their birth mother in early 2005 and placed in Annette S. Smith's foster home for 19 months. The lawsuit says they were repeatedly physically and sexually abused and made to eat feces, urine and soap.

They were removed from there in October 2006 after another child in the home told police his "foster mother hit me with a belt," according to Smith's Nov. 29, 2006, arrest report.

The report did not include any indication of the abuse against [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in the lawsuit. The state shut down the foster program at the home after the investigation, said the parents' Jacksonville attorney, Brian Cabrey. Cabrey said he is a former Children and Families attorney.

"My clients were told the reasons why that home was closed were unknown," Cabrey said. "Records reflect that home was closed due to physical abuse on our clients' children and/or other foster children."

Cabrey would not share which records he was referring to, saying it would come out in the litigation.

Children and Families spokesman John Harrell said his agency interviewed the five foster children in Smith's home, but heard no statements of the abuse referred to in the lawsuit.

Smith was later found guilty of child abuse against the 4-year-old boy, according to court records.

The children then spent six months in a second foster home, five more in a failed adoption to a Virginia couple and were sent to two more foster homes in Nassau County.

'Like a waterfall'

In early 2009, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] saw the siblings in an adoption registry and began the adoption process. Only after it was finalized in August 2009 did the children start telling parents and therapists what they had been through.

"They withdrew and then acted out with very bizarre sexual behavior," [REDACTED] said. "... That's when the details of their abuse really began to emerge. It was like a waterfall. Once it started flowing, it wouldn't stop."

Two police information reports were filed in mid- to late 2010 regarding the allegations of abuse revealed by the children after adoption. Nothing further was done by the state, Cabrey said.

[REDACTED] said it became obvious the care their children needed was beyond what they could afford, so they sought a "significant" increase in their monthly adoptive stipend from Family Support Services. It was denied, which led to the lawsuit, Cabrey said.

Harrell said the agency is very concerned about these allegations and whether they are accurate.

"The family has not cooperated with our requests for information," Harrell said. "These allegations were not reported to us until years later, and they accompanied a request for an increased adoption subsidy."

Other agencies may be added to the lawsuit as the investigation continues, Cabrey said.

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