

By Dana DiFilippo
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Victim of Tacony's 'House of Horrors' sues city

BEATRICE WESTON was just 10 years old when the system handed her over to a monster.

Although a judge placed her in her aunt's care with orders that city social-service workers monitor her progress, the system quickly forgot her.

So no one intervened when Linda Ann Weston allegedly chained the girl in closets and basements, beating and burning her niece so often that even a decade later scars mar most of the 20-year-old's body. No one noticed when Beatrice was reportedly starved and forcibly prostituted. No one stopped Linda Ann Weston from allegedly making Beatrice drink and bathe in her own urine.

Since police rescued Beatrice from the infamous Tacony "House of Horrors" in October, she has made small steps in reclaiming a life of normalcy she never thought she'd have.

She took a big step Monday, suing the city and the social worker and assistant city solicitor whose decisions had landed her in her aunt's care. Linda Ann Weston is also named as a defendant.

"There appears to have been a reckless indifference to children like Beatrice," said attorney Shanin Specter, who filed the complaint in Common Pleas Court. "There was just absolutely no adherence to basic guidelines."

Most egregious, Specter notes, was the city's failure to bar Linda Ann Weston as guardian because of her 1983 third-degree-murder conviction. In that case, Linda Ann Weston imprisoned, tortured and starved her sister's boyfriend to death.

Under state law, that incident should have disqualified her from taking custody of Beatrice, Specter said. Yet authorities failed to perform a state-mandated criminal-background check, and social worker Nefertiti Savoy and assistant city solicitor Richard Ames arranged for Linda Ann Weston to take custody of Beatrice in August 2002, according to the suit.

The city's Department of Human Services failed to investigate Linda Ann Weston's home before making the custody arrangement, the lawsuit charges. Later, authorities failed to follow through with any of the interventions a Family Court judge ordered and ignored complaints that Linda Ann Weston was holding children captive in her basement, according to the lawsuit.

Beatrice seeks damages for pain, mental anguish, depression, disability, mental disturbances, bodily deformation and embarrassment; past and future medical expenses; and past and future loss of earnings.

A DHS spokeswoman wasn't available to comment.

Today, Beatrice is a quiet, expressionless woman who rarely smiles, because she remains crippled by the alleged abuse, Specter said.

She's in counseling and plans to return to school this fall, a "grade-school equivalent" that will help her recover years of missed academics, he added.

"She's old enough physically to be a young woman, but she doesn't have the education and the socialization to be a young woman," Specter said. "It's extremely difficult."

Linda Ann Weston and three other defendants are to go on trial Jan. 28 on multiple charges in the case.