

Physical therapist charged with sexual abuse worked in Versailles

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By Jeff Burkhead
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Every week for the past three years, a physical therapist would come into the home of a family in Versailles and work with their son.

Last month, the physical therapist was accused of sexually abusing a disabled student in Marshall.

The Versailles mother was shocked to learn about the charges of sexual abuse against the man who had worked with her son on a regular basis.

"I look back now at things and it makes me cringe," the mom said. "This was a man we have known for almost three years."

Paul Chang, 61, of Blue Springs, had worked with the Versailles boy on a contract basis through First Steps, which offers services to young children with special needs.

Chang was arrested May 21 at Prairie View State School – a school for severely disabled students.

Police said he sexually assaulted a 19-year-old student he had been working with for the past 18 years.

The student is severely handicapped and can't talk or defend herself. Chang had worked with the Versailles boy since he was 3 months old.

"We never suspected anything," the mom said. "We never left our kids alone with him, so we don't have that worry."

According to police, a teaching assistant at the state school in Marshall witnessed Chang, who is also a martial arts instructor, molesting the student. The teaching assistant reportedly kicked Chang, and he stopped.

Investigators have asked for assistance in identifying other victims.

At one time, Chang was contracted by the Versailles School District, said Superintendent Joyce Ryerson, who did not know of Chang before learning about the charges.

"I have found out that he is a privately contracted person that might have been a therapist for some of our students that attend here through the First Steps program," Ryerson said. "It is my understanding that First Steps has no therapist now because he was their contracted service provider. He is not contracted by our district to provide therapy services but a long time ago he was. I'm still researching how long ago it was that he was contracted here, but my special services director does think it was prior to me coming to the district, which is more than 12 years."

Chang was charged with two counts of class C felony of sexual abuse and two counts of class D felony of sexual contact with a student by a teacher, student teacher, employee, contract employee, school official or volunteer.

Anyone with information regarding this investigation can contact Missouri State Highway Patrol Sgt. Darron Blankenship at 816-622-0800, ext. 3166.