Just whom did the Second Mile serve?

Questions are raised over how much the nonprofit agency helped at-risk youth.

By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
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The Second Mile, founded by former Pennsylvania State University assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky, has asserted that it served more than 100,000 children statewide last year, but the number who received sustained or continuing attention is much smaller, according to its reports.

For example, the tax-exempt organization counts those who received trading cards featuring photos of Penn State athletes and inspirational messages. It also counts students who watched anti-bullying videos it distributed and foster children who got tickets to amusement parks or baseball games. A child welfare expert described the activities as "low-dose" services of questionable value.

Although the Second Mile holds state licenses as a foster-care service and private provider of services to children and youth, annual inspection reports from the Department of Public Welfare dating to 1998 have repeatedly said it served no children pursuant to those licenses.

The most recent report says "the mission of the agency has changed from directly providing foster-care placement services to an intensive foster family support program" with 69 events, "including amusement park outings, theatrical performances, puppet shows, minor league baseball games, snow tubing, and holiday parties."

Anne Bale, spokeswoman for the Welfare Department, said records show the organization stopped providing foster care in the 1980s but maintained its license to help it raise money.

Second Mile fund-raising lagged in the year that ended Aug. 31, 2010, the most recent for which it has filed a required return with the IRS. Contributions fell to $1.2 million, down more than $1 million from the previous year. The organization generated $960,000 in additional revenue from events.

The salaries of two top executives - former president and CEO Jack Raykovitz and his wife, vice president Katherine Genovese - totaled $233,503, consuming more than 10 percent of the organization's annual revenue.

The Second Mile faces an uncertain future since Sandusky was charged with 40 counts of sexually abusing eight boys over 15 years. Many of its donors have pulled their support. Sandusky's lawyer, Joseph Amendola, said last week there were two new claims of child sexual abuse against his client. He said both were unfounded and would be vigorously contested if they resulted in more charges.

Second Mile's new CEO, David Woodle, said the group might shut down by year's end.

Richard Gelles, dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice and an internationally known child welfare expert, said the organization couldn't possibly survive the scandal and the lawsuits it will spawn.

But its demise is "not going to leave much of a hole," Gelles said.

It was not unusual for nonprofits to overstate their work in annual reports and other fund-raising materials, he said.

Second Mile officials would not be interviewed for this article. They had a public relations company reissue an earlier statement from Woodle that said, "We are focused on cooperating with law enforcement and
saving the programs for the children who have benefited and will continue to benefit from the programs offered by the Second Mile.*

Based on a review of the organization's reports and interviews with child-care professionals, the Second Mile has strayed over the years from the mission Sandusky stated: giving a second chance to disadvantaged children.

Instead, it distributes a large volume of educational material that is not necessarily targeted to at-risk youth, holds leadership seminars for high school students that last up to a week, and gives foster families tickets to attractions and events.

Officials of children and youth services agencies in nine counties where the Second Mile said it was most active told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette they did not contract with the organization and had little or nothing to do with it.

For example, the Allegheny County Children, Youth and Families agency has more than 300 contracts with service providers. The Second Mile is not one of them, said Jon McKain, an assistant deputy director of human services.