

Loophole hid troubled past

BY SOPHIA CHANG

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For those who knew him, Kelvin Christie had come far from his troubled youth, when he was arrested several times in one year on misdemeanor or assault charges.

His life now as a college graduate who was working as a home health aide in Garden City was remarkable and inspiring, a stark contrast to his Brooklyn past of gangs, homeless shelters and hospitalizations, friends said.

"He had tattoos before he came to us," said Richard Calton, founder of a Harlem writing program where Christie, 25, spent much of his teenage

years. "But as soon as he came to us, he got confidence."

So the news this week that Christie, of Jamaica, had been charged with assault after police said he punched his elderly, quadriplegic patient, yelled delusional statements and then abandoned the man for two hours saddened Calton, but perhaps did not shock him.

"He admitted that he could go off sometimes, but never with us," Calton said Thursday.

How Christie was able to get a job in the strictly regulated field of home health aides illuminates a legal loophole. Most of the earlier assault charges and a 2001 arrest on criminal mischief and other charges

were dismissed because he was found unfit to stand trial because of mental defect.

It is unclear why Christie, now awaiting trial in the Nassau County jail in East Meadow, was found to have a mental defect or what his diagnosis was. He was sent to a state hospital in three cases after charges were dropped.

Because state law requires his record be expunged of dismissed charges, the background check by his employer, Carelink Inc. of Floral Park, found no mention of the arrests or the psychiatric evaluations.

While convictions are public, the idea of publicizing dismissed charges or arrests can tarnish an innocent person's reputation, one expert said.

"Obviously, people aren't guilty until they're proven guilty in a court of law," said Dr. Ken Hoge, director of law and psychiatry at New York University's

School of Medicine.

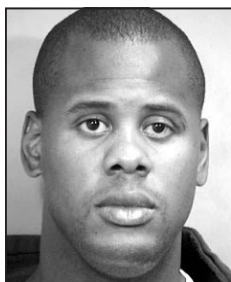
But there was one conviction, on Aug. 17, 2000, when Christie pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct and was released on conditional discharge.

The conviction stems from an arrest the month before when he and an accomplice assaulted an 18-year-old woman, according to the Brooklyn district attorney's office.

That conviction was filed under a misspelled last name of Christie. Still, a Carelink representative said, the company's background check also includes a fingerprint check.

There were "no hits, no convictions, so it was OK," said Sonny Smith, Carelink's accounting manager.

The wife of the quadriplegic patient, Sue Galante, said on Thursday that she wanted Christie to be punished, but, she added, "I hope this time, the young man gets help."



Kelvin Christie, 25, accused of assault



Donating on duty

Nassau County Police Officers Chris Moy, left front, Shawn Smith and Jim Tedeschi donate blood to the New York Blood Center at the Nassau County Police Academy in Massapequa on Friday.

PHOTO BY HOWARD SCHNAPP

Nassau agency cited for car mileage, overtime abuse

BY SID CASSESE

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An audit released Friday by Comptroller Howard Weitzman said overpayments for mileage reimbursements to many Nassau Department of Social Services workers, as well as problems with overtime and bereavement leave, indicated a disregard for rules and poor supervision.

"These actions and inactions cost Nassau thousands of dollars," Weitzman said.

DSS officials said they have a corrective action plan in place. "It includes recouping overpayments and adjusting leave balances where appropriate," said

spokeswoman Karen Garber.

The time and leave audit, which covered the period from January 2005 through March 2007, cited dozens of instances where employees gained the mileage reimbursement for field work that included travel to and from work — a violation of county policy.

"In this day of historically high gas prices, we'd all like to have someone else paying for our drive to work, but that just can't be the case," Weitzman said.

He said the sampling found an 83 percent reimbursement error rate and, thus, recommended that DSS review

claims from 2005 to the present to recover more overpayments.

The audit also said one employee flagrantly manipulated compensatory and overtime rules, earning 207 work days, many of them unjustified. Auditors also found in a sample that proper procedures were not followed 40 percent of the time when authorizing overtime. And in 40 instances employees authorized their own overtime.

The audit also showed Nassau's bereavement leave policy was not always followed, including failing to note a name, relationship and place of internment of the deceased to verify the validity of the request.

Time left for voter sign-up

Nassau and Suffolk County residents who have not registered to vote may do so in person Saturday from noon to 9 p.m. at the county boards of election and 24 other sites across Long Island.

For a list of the locations in each county, call Nassau's Board of Election at 516-571-2411 and Suffolk's at 631-852-4500. The list of sites in Nassau is also available at www.nassaucountyny.gov/agencies/boe/.

CORRECTIONS

In a graphic accompanying an Oct. 5 story about the 2nd Congressional District race, the Family Research Council rating on votes cast by Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) was for 2007 only.

In Friday's Your LI Home story on open houses, a quote from Seth Pitlake, a licensed sales associate with Prudential Douglas Elliman in Merrick, was attributed to another broker. Pitlake said: "Yes, you get the nosy neighbors who drop in, but it's amazing how many people move to another house in their own neighborhood, so these are also potential customers."

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Columbus Day, which is actually Oct. 12, will be observed on Monday.

Government offices are closed Monday. The U.S. Postal Service will deliver Express Mail only. The post office at Roosevelt Field Mall in Garden City is open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Most schools and banks are closed. Long Island Rail Road trains run on a regular weekday schedule.

THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1968: Apollo 7 became the first manned Apollo mission to be launched.
1991: Before a Senate Judiciary Committee, Anita Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment; Thomas denounced the proceedings as a "high-tech lynching."