

FOCUS - 1 OF 1 STORY

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BODY: The director of the Citizens Freedom Foundation will meet with residents of northeastern Vermont this week to discuss a fundamentalist religious sect recently charged with child abuse.

Priscilla Coates said she and Kingston, N.Y. private investigator Galen Kelly will not meet with members of the Northeast Kingdom Community Church, however, because her mission is education not confrontation. She said the Citizens Foundation, headquartered in Hannacroix, N.Y., is a non-profit group that helps people track down friends or relatives who become members of religious groups accused of using mind control techniques to boost their memberships.

A number of northeastern Vermont residents proposed a support group for disaffected members of the Northeast Kingdom Community Church after one former member alleged the strict sect routinely allows severe physical discipline of children.

Juan Mattatall made the allegation as he successfully fought for custody of his own children, who remained at the church with their mother when he left.

He said members routinely hit children until the youngsters are black and blue.

The group moved to Island Pond several years ago and operates a number of businesses. Its members rarely interact with people of the community.