

Demonstrators blast child protection system

By Jim Mayer
Bee Staff Writer

Picketing an otherwise serene midtown neighborhood Saturday morning was an act of desperation for members of a group called Victims of Child Abuse Laws.

VOCAL members believe adults have been wrongly accused — and children wrongly removed from families — by Sacramento County's child protection system.

They had already picketed county offices housing the bureaucracy they blame for their troubles. Their voices had echoed in Capitol hearing rooms and paneled court chambers.

So they took their protest to the streets outside a Child Protective Services supervisor's home on 40th Street. Although it appeared that nobody was home, the demonstrators walked in circles with their signs, drawing the wrath of some neighbors.

"How else do we get our message across?" asked one grandmother who said she cannot see her grandchild because her son has been jailed for molestation.

The group was angry with the social worker for not ferreting out what they believe is the truth.

"This supervisor terrorizes people," said VOCAL member Kevin Aslanian, an immigrant from Soviet Armenia and a spokesman for the California Welfare Rights Organization. "Even Stalin didn't do this kind of thing."

Peter Hanson, whose impoverished niece lost her three children a year ago for being "criminally negligent," said social workers should be made accountable. "Let them stand up in their neighborhood if they have done no wrong," Hanson said.

Neighbors were angered by the protest. Many berated the demonstrators for invading their neighborhood and singling out their neighbor.

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— Kevin Aslanian, VOCAL member

"Do you have a permit?" asked one upset woman. "Do you have a parade permit?"

"Yeah," responded Steve Konhoff, who has waged a two-year court battle to regain custody of his 13-year-old son after being arrested for spanking and bruising him. "It's called the First Amendment — freedom of speech."

Jurors deadlocked twice during deliberations on the misdemeanor charge filed against Konhoff.

The protesters tried unsuccessfully to convince residents that they were working on behalf of tomorrow's victims.

"The next family destroyed may be yours," read one sign.

"CPS equals KGB," yelled one protester.

Several cars driving through the upscale neighborhood stopped for a flier explaining the group's complaint, but none of the immediate neighbors offered solace to the cause.

"No, I don't want it. I think it's trash," said a woman who lived across the street. "And I don't like you in front of my home."

The protesting grandmother, who asked that her name not be used, said maybe the latest strategy was a mistake.

"I don't want people to get angry," she said. "I don't want VOCAL to get a bad name. How do you educate somebody when they won't listen?"