

The Palm Beach Post

JUPITER

Behind a Jupiter couple's child abuse charges: A secret locked room and a troubled family

The arrests of Timothy and Tracy Ferriter allow a look at how adoption systems can fail families and the issues reactive detachment disorder can pose.



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JUPITER – News that a Jupiter couple was accused of locking their 14-year-old in a specially-built room in their garage for up to 18 hours a day sent shockwaves around Florida and the world.

The community scrambled to figure out what happened — and how it could happen in a quiet neighborhood such as Jupiter's Egret Landing.

Slowly, information started to come out: The teenager had been adopted by Timothy and Tracy Ferriter, who'd moved back to Jupiter after a four-year stint in Arizona. Tracy told police the teen had severe behavioral issues.

Now, The Palm Beach Post goes deeper.

In four stories, reporters examine how adoption systems can fail families who need help, what life is like with a child with reactive attachment disorder and how public records show that trouble followed the Ferriter family wherever it went.

A Palm Beach Post investigation: A Florida couple kept an adopted teen locked in the garage. Their lawyer says they had no choice

Who are the Jupiter parents who locked their teen in a garage room?

Timothy and Tracy Ferriter lived in Palm Beach Gardens and Jupiter from 2004 until 2017, when they moved to a new home outside Tucson, Arizona.

In late 2021, the family moved back to Jupiter, just a few streets away from their previous house in Egret Landing.

Timothy Ferriter once worked as vice president of publishing for a Catholic media company and then started a health care and business podcast. Tracy worked as a classroom aide at a nearby church.

Dig deeper: Did Florida's adoption system fail Jupiter teen forced to live in a locked garage room?

What was life like inside the locked garage room?

The room the Ferriters built and locked their teenager in was 8 feet long by 8 feet wide. It had a twin-sized boxspring and bed with gray sheets and a pillow when police found it on Jan. 30, nine days before the Ferriters' arrests.

The room also had a small desk that had children's books on it and a foldable chair. Mounted on the ceiling of the room was a doorbell camera that the Ferriter parents could use for surveillance, police reports show.

The teen had a large bucket to use as a bathroom in the room, which had a wall air-conditioning unit and a single light on the ceiling, according to police reports.

Keep reading: Jupiter parents say adopted teen locked in garage room had attachment disorder. What that means

Who was the Jupiter teen locked in the garage room?

The Palm Beach Post is not identifying the teen or their gender.

They were a student at Independence Middle School and have three siblings. Tracy told police in Arizona that they adopted the teen when they were just under 2 years old.

All four children were put into the custody of Florida's Department of Children and Families after their parents' arrests.

'They were in such a rush': After arrests, Florida couple demolished garage room where teen lived

When will the Jupiter parents go to court to face child abuse charges?

Timothy and Tracy Ferriter, both separately charged with aggravated child abuse and false imprisonment, have pleaded not guilty. They have had multiple hearings in-person at the Palm Beach County Courthouse and on Zoom.

Timothy's attorney, Nellie King, and Tracy's attorney, Jennifer Marshall, most recently issued three subpoenas targeting communication between DCF investigators and the Ferriter children.

Circuit Court Judge Howard Coates has said he'd like the case to go to trial in fall this year.

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