

Girls told to leave group home

By Roger K. Lowe

Post Staff Reporter

Several girls who stay in a Wyoming home as part of a drug treatment program have been told by city officials to leave by May 9.

The girls spend each day at the Mt. Repose drug treatment center of Straight Inc. and spend only nights at the foster home, said Jerry Rushing, Straight director.

But even that violates the city's zoning requirements in two ways, City Manager Randolph Forrester said.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD is zoned for single-family residential dwellings. But Forrester said the house at [redacted] does not contain a single family and thus is a boarding house, because some girls reportedly pay for living there.

Rushing said the temporary home for the girls is caught in the middle of the city council's struggle with defining group homes and foster homes.

"We're an unusual animal as far as the set-up," he said.

Straight is negotiating with city officials on the home, and "I feel that something can effectively be worked out," Rushing said.

IF IT CAN'T, Straight still can appeal Forrester's administrative order to Wyoming's building and zoning appeals board.

"Families aren't paid for keeping kids," Rushing said.

But he said the girls' families sometimes give food or other help to the owners of the house.

Straight has housed girls in the program at the Wyoming home of Margaret Freedman off and on for "quite some time," he said. He would not be more specific except to say it was for more than two months.

Forrester said five or six girls were staying in the house, but Rushing said the number varies.

He said similar homes are used throughout Greater Cincinnati, but said the group's confidentiality requirements



Photographer: ROBERT DICKERSON

Zoning dispute surrounds this home at [redacted] Wyoming.

prevented him from giving more details.

Straight, supported by private donations and by \$2500 fees charged to youths, operates drug rehabilitation centers in Mt. Repose, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Sarasota, Fla., and St. Petersburg, Fla.

THE PROGRAM includes intensive counseling for chemically dependent persons from 12 to 22. It is based on the premise that if peer pressure gets young people on drugs, then it can get them off drugs. The average

stay in the program is 11 months.

Rushing said those entering the program stay in foster homes, where others who have been in the program longer take care of them and enforce rules, which include not being able to talk to anyone who has not learned Straight's rules. The minimum stay in the house is 14 days.

In the second phase of the program, people return to their homes at night if their families live nearby. If families live out-

side the area, the people stay in foster homes, Rushing said. Some people stay in the Wyoming home under this arrangement, he said.

Forrester said runaways from the program focused the city's attention on the house. The girls still in the house would not talk to a police officer investigating the runaways, because he did not know Straight's rules.

Rushing said the officer should have contacted Straight for help in getting the information. He said there have been few runaways.