

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS THREATEN DRUG CENTER

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Possibilities Unlimited, a controversial drug-treatment program in Lexington, may be forced to shut down because of financial problems and a drop in enrollment, two board members said this week.

But others, including the program's founder and director, George Ross, said they were optimistic that the program could be saved.

After an eight-day trial in Fayette District Court last month, Ross was cleared of unlawful-imprisonment charges brought by three people who said they had been held in the program against their will.

Ross and several board members blamed publicity surrounding the trial for frightening off potential clients at Possibilities Unlimited.

"It's been rather slow since the court case," said Joe Hawkins, vice chairman of the board. "If we don't get some contributions pretty soon, we'll have to close. We probably need \$100,000 to \$150,000 immediately."

Another board member, Urban County Councilman Roy Durbin, described the program's prospects as "pretty dim." Durbin said the board would meet Oct. 15 "to decide which direction we're going to go."

Ross, however, is taking an upbeat attitude toward what he calls "a financial challenge." And board chairman James Alcorn said he thought Possibilities Unlimited would overcome its current financial dilemma once enrollment in the program picked up.

"We're alive and well and functioning," Ross said.

Several prominent business leaders, including James S. Mahan III, the chairman of Citizens Union National Bank and Trust Co., are trying to drum up community interest in Possibilities Unlimited. Mahan said the effort was more educational than a matter of fund raising, however.

"We think the community needs a program like this run by a guy like George," he said.

Six other people at Possibilities Unlimited still face charges of unlawful imprisonment, although county prosecutors will probably drop charges against three, said Assistant County Attorney Phillip Moloney. A November trial date is likely for the remaining three, he said.

Ross would not comment on the pending charges, but he said at least two of the people who might stand trial were program participants and not staff members.

Ross said no significant changes are planned for treatment procedures in the program.

Restraint policies and documenting procedures that are used when a child is signed into the program are being "fine-tuned" but remain basically the same, he said. And since January, he has had assistance from a psychiatrist and a pediatrician to help determine whether a person in the program is psychotic or is medically addicted to drugs.

Last month, Brad Hughes of the state Cabinet for Human Resources said that agency had completed an investigation of the program and had discussed its concerns with Ross. Hughes said that he could not discuss the contents of the report.

Ross said he would meet with Human Resources Commissioner Anna Grace Day this month to talk about the recommendations.

Ross said the department interviewed every juvenile enrolled in the program in June and found no evidence of gross abuse or neglect.

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