

ACQUITTED DIRECTOR PLANS FEW CHANGES IN DRUG PROGRAM

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Cleared by a jury last week of unlawful imprisonment charges, Possibilities Unlimited director George Ross said yesterday that only minor changes were warranted in his drug treatment program.

Ross, who was acquitted Friday on three charges of unlawful imprisonment, was given a unanimous vote of confidence Tuesday night by the board of directors of Possibilities Unlimited.

The directors, Ross said, "emphasized how proud they were to be associated with an organization that attempted to remove the psychological and physical restraint of drug abuse from a young person's life."

In an interview, Ross said his 8-day trial in Fayette District Court reinforced the directors' "previous convictions that Possibilities Unlimited provides a vital and necessary resource in helping young people escape from the grasp of drug abuse.

Despite Ross' acquittal, county prosecutors apparently still plan to prosecute six staff members at Possibilities Unlimited, each of whom faces one count of unlawful imprisonment. An October trial date has been set for the six cases.

Ross is the founder and clinical director of Possibilities Unlimited, a drug rehabilitation program for people ages 12 to 25. Three former participants filed charges of unlawful imprisonment against Ross, charging that they were kept in the program against their will.

Ross said only one change in the program had been made since the charges were filed in late May. One other change - dealing with when restraint will be used - went into effect earlier this year.

The latest change involves documenting procedures used when a child is being signed into the program. Ross said he is more thoroughly documenting what he tells parents of potential participants.

One allegation against Ross stemmed from an incident in which a Frankfort youth was carried from his home and transported back to the Possibilities Unlimited headquarters on Wilhite Drive.

Ross repeated yesterday that such an action was wrong and that a policy concerning restraint was adopted shortly after the incident in February.

"We've outlined a very clear policy . . . when restraint can and cannot be used . . . and our policy is restraint will be used when a person becomes sufficiently violent to either cause harm to themselves or another participant in the group."

During his trial, Ross was criticized for his one-opinion method of determining whether a person was addicted to drugs. Ross said yesterday that, since January, a second review by a licensed psychiatrist is being made of every child coming in the program.

The psychiatrist administers a mental status examination to determine "the appropriateness and the fitness of that child for this program."

There are now 59 young people in the program, compared to about 85 when the allegations were first made. "The number of intakes have significantly been reduced as the result of the adverse publicity," Ross said yesterday. However, he said, \$65,000 was donated to the program during the time the charges were pending.

"I think the fact that we have raised over \$65,000 from this community . . . after . . . these allegations were made tells you that the community wants this program, sees a need for this program and will make referrals to this program."

Ross said there were no present plans to increase the program's professional staff, adding that the staff could grow as the program grows.

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