

## CONTROVERSIAL DRUG PROGRAM TO CLOSE

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Possibilities Unlimited, a sometimes-controversial drug treatment program that has operated in Lexington for eight years, will close Sept. 14, founder and executive director George Ross said yesterday.

Declining client enrollments and the expense of underwriting clients who cannot afford to pay, caused a financial crunch that the facility could not overcome, Ross said.

"We have simply decided at this point to close the facility to give us an opportunity to regroup and to see whether the need for a program like Possibilities Unlimited is necessitated here in the Lexington area," he said.

The program will complete services to the 23 clients it is serving, Ross said. A number of options -- including moving to Louisville -- would be examined, he said.

"My major challenge to date has been to ensure that our current clients are being adequately serviced," Ross said. "Once that's done I will turn my attention to other avenues to see if the feasibility of Possibilities Unlimited is in the cards."

A number of factors have hurt the ability of Possibilities Unlimited to keep operating, Ross said.

A major one is Kentucky's failure to include drug and alcohol treatment in its Medicaid program, Ross said. Medicaid is the federal-state program that helps pay for health care for the poor.

A second major factor is limited insurance coverage, Ross said. Many insurance policies do not pay for drug and alcohol treatment programs. Often when those services are included, benefits are limited to inpatient hospital treatment. Possibilities Unlimited has offered care during the day and outpatient treatment.

A third major problem, Ross said, is that Lexington does not recognize the severity of the substance abuse problems.

"It's everybody else's kid, not mine," Ross said. "We've had 20 percent of the ninth graders flunk this year. We've had the press, the media, the school system, the school board and many community leaders examine this issue. Not one of those agencies raised the issue of the possibility some of these kids may not be doing well because of their alcohol and drug involvement."

Possibilities Unlimited has many supporters who have seen the program pull their teens out of the depths of drug abuse. The program has served more than 426 clients and offered evaluations to more than 1,500 families. Losing the disciplined, family-style treatment program would be a major blow for Lexington, many of them say.

But there are some who will not be sorry to see Possibilities Unlimited go.

"I'm just surprised it hasn't happened before now," said Minva Gayle Hodgins of Lexington, who once sent two daughters to the program.

One of Hodgins' daughters was one of a handful of Possibilities Unlimited clients who filed charges against Ross in 1985, contending that he kept them in the program against their will. Some program employees also were charged.

Ross was found not guilty in Fayette District Court, and charges against the workers were dropped. At the time, Hodgins spoke favorably about Possibilities Unlimited. But she says she has changed her mind.

"I think there is a great need for a program of some kind," Hodgins said. "I don't think that's the one."

Tim Phillippe, director of United Behavioral Clinics, said that he did not know enough about the specific treatment methods of Possibilities Unlimited but that Lexington needed a good drug treatment program.

"Like everyone else I'm often looking for good alternatives for treatment of adolescents with problems," Phillippe said. "I think what we do lack is alternatives to standard outpatient treatment. We're often looking for more intensive treatment programs like Possibilities Unlimited offers."

- Caption: GEORGE ROSS

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