

# Seed's Retreat: Kids the Losers

Dade County is going to lose The Seed — unless there is an 11th hour reversal of Seed Director Art Barker's decision to pack up and go back to Broward County.

Barker's somewhat huffy departure makes Seed supporters unhappy, Seed foes quietly glad — but the people who will lose are the hundreds of kids who won't have their problem ended by Barker's mass approach to drugs.

The problem has been that The Seed has never torn loose from a storm of controversy since it came to Dade County. Many sincere people questioned The Seed's method of attacking the drug problem. But much, maybe most, of the opposition to The Seed came from other drug programs.

To put this in perspective, consider: The Seed handles hundreds of young people and claims a 90 per cent cure rate, the other programs involve far fewer people and many of their cure rates are nominal.

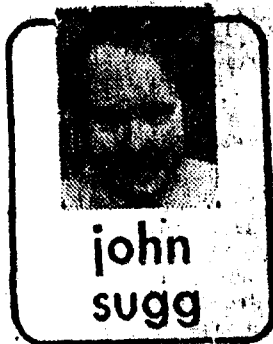
Or: One has to be a little suspicious of the motives of Seed critics. Their criticism often is a self-serving attempt to undercut the highly successful Seed.

Which isn't to say The Seed is faultless. Barker's recent action is typical of his unwillingness to do things other than how he alone feels is right.

Charlie George, an attorney who lives in the Gables, called me up shortly after Barker's announcement of departure. George is an articulate champion of The Seed.

"Art Barker was tired of officials from the other drug programs harassing us," George said. "They have encouraged the county to not let us use Tropical Park."

George also criticized the attempt to create a central intake bureau to decide where people with drug problems would be placed. The Seed enjoys the favor of many judges and officials and it exercises considerable control over the young people in the program. To have a group, probably dominated by other drug programs (i.e. Seed foes), supervise who goes where, would hamstring The Seed.



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"Also," said George, "Seed opponents have done everything to hamper funding. Dade passed out \$3 million to drug programs and The Seed didn't get a dime."

The explanation given by officials for this situation is that The Seed didn't have a license in Dade when the federal funds were applied for. Which may be a reason, but it does sound a bit thin and spiteful.

The federal funds amount to \$2,000 to \$3,000 per participant. The Seed spends about one-tenth that per individual in its program. So, it would seem that a little money sent to The Seed would have been more productive — especially considering The Seed's claimed success rate. Or, so Seed people say.

I asked George what it would take to get The Seed back in Dade County.

"First," he said, "it would take getting off The Seed's back. Then we want to be provided a facility and equal treatment with respect to funds."

Actually, the whole thing stands pretty much where it did months ago — except that there are no Seedlings at Tropical Park. The Seed wants virtual autonomy and the financial benefits enjoyed by other drug programs. Seed critics want either to alleviate what they perceive as errors or, in some cases, they want to "control" The Seed to the point where it no longer threatens their balliwicks.

Barker's move out of Dade is seen as an attempt to club the county into submission. Critics say that he is hoping popular support of The Seed will reach such a crescendo that officials will be forced to bow to Barker's demands.

There doesn't seem to be a way out without one side capitulating. Although it may fall on deaf ears, I'll rephrase what this newspaper advocated months ago.

You can't argue with success and The Seed is successful. The other drug programs in Dade and the state should recognize that fact and study those elements that make the Seed successful. The Seed treats almost as many Dade young people as all the other programs combined.

However, The Seed has to learn that it is dealing with the public. Its lack of professionals, uncooperative spirit, controversial methods, and, most of all, belief that it is the best judge of its own actions — these only give Seed critics fuel.

Recognizing that the fight against drugs must take many forms, and accepting comment, criticism and help, would bring The Seed what it wants: Facilities, funds and the silencing of sour-grape critics.

