

## CONTROVERSIAL DRUG PROGRAM BANKRUPT

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EL PASO, Texas - The controversial KIDS of El Paso County Inc. rehabilitation program ended its stormy four-year existence Monday, citing financial problems in the wake of a state investigation and negative publicity.

"With great regret, I announce that KIDS of El Paso County has closed its doors and is filing for Chapter 7 bankruptcy today," said Rob Hovious, an El Paso businessman and chairman of the center's board.

Under Chapter 7 of the federal Bankruptcy Code, the assets of KIDS will be sold off to pay claims from creditors. Hovious would not specify the program's debt, and the bankruptcy petition could not be filed Monday because federal courts were closed for the Columbus Day holiday.

"The costs of defending our license, and the attendant negative publicity from this and other legal matters, have combined to create a financial situation from which we cannot expect to recover without substantial financial assistance, which we do not see forthcoming," Hovious said.

The center was started in 1985 by parents of teen-agers with compulsive behavior problems, such as drug addiction and anorexia. It has been operating under a provisional state license.

Last year, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse recommended revoking the center's license after finding the center had abused clients and violated state regulations. But a state judge in Austin allowed KIDS to continue operating until an administrative hearing on the matter was completed.

Last spring, the state commission agreed to reinstate KIDS' license for a year, provided it complied with state standards.

Critics of the program claimed that some patients were held against their will and were abused physically and psychologically.

Proponents, including many prominent El Pasoans, said the program was the last resort for families who had exhausted other methods in trying to help their children.

Miller Newton, founder of the treatment program in Hackensack, N.J., said parents have the option of sending teen-agers enrolled at the El Paso center to affiliated programs in Salt Lake City or New Jersey.

"It's kind of sad," Newton said. "(El Paso's center) got nit-picked to death, and the financial toll on it was too great."

Newton said 36 patients were enrolled when the El Paso center closed.

"Five or six families sent their children to the center in New Jersey, but I don't know how many chose to send their children to Utah," he said.

Even with its doors shut, the program's problems apparently are far from over.

Glenn Zimmerman, a private detective who's representing 23 former El Paso KIDS patients, said a federal lawsuit alleging civil rights violations is being prepared and will be filed soon.

Zimmerman said he's investigated the program since 1986 and is intimately familiar with its operations.

"Nothing's changed," he said. "The problems, policies and procedures that were investigated by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse merely have been transferred to another state."

Bill Ellis, an El Paso lawyer who represents former KIDS patients, said he helped a 19-year-old who had been taken to the New Jersey center against his will three weeks ago.

(Diana Washington writes for the El Paso Times.)

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