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Outcry Over Drug Center Closing

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When Kids Helping Kids, also known as Pathway Family Center, closed its doors in suburban Milford in Clermont County, a group of parents and former clients cheered, saying the program's controversial methods scarred them for life.

But another group of parents and graduates of the program we first featured in 2005 call the shutdown a huge loss to the community.

Michael, who won't use his last name publicly, says "This is definitely the only program that would have worked for me." He graduated from the program and says he's sober because he continues to embrace what he learned there.

Michael and his mother represent more than a dozen people who emailed the I-Team after we reported the program's closing. What Michael says saved his life, Mark West told us is endangering his son, who is currently receiving treatment at Pathway in Indianapolis, where some of the Milford patients have moved.

West's ex-wife enrolled their son, but he's worried. "He's really, really depressed. He's not eating now."

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The program uses controversial methods. Newcomers don't go to their own homes or to school for months. They don't listen to music or TV and have to get permission to speak.

West says he hasn't been able to talk to his son, but Michael says that's part of the program. "It was hard," he says, "But then again, I saw all of my privileges being taken away. I saw my family taken away from me. I couldn't talk to them. I couldn't speak to them. And that's what gave me the motivation. And you know, a lot of times you don't realize how much these things mean to you until they're gone."

Michael spent eight and a half months in the program. His mother enrolled him as a last resort after he overdosed. Previous outpatient programs, even jail, hadn't stopped his drug use.

His mother, Meg, says she had no other choice. "I wanted to save my son's life and that was my only alternative because he was heading in this downward spiral and no matter what we did it didn't stop."

But what Meg found a lifeline, West calls abusive. "It denies kids basic human rights, basic rights that you'll have even in detention."

West says his son now sits back in phase one of five stages you need to complete in order to graduate. "I've been in this over a year. It's very controlling. It's very manipulative. They must sing songs as we come into the meeting and leave. Those songs aren't happy songs. You look at those kids' faces, they're tormented."

But Michael says there's a reason for the repetitive tunes. "The chanting and the singing is a big part of group

work and how it builds trust within the group."

Records checks show Pathway is structured as a 501(c) (3) public charity. The most recent tax records on file show revenue shot up from \$2 million to more than \$3 million a year between 2005 and 2006 even though admissions and services dropped 37 percent. Fundraising including gifts and grants had shot up dramatically.

But parents say those grants dove with the economy, forcing Pathway to close in Milford and another center in suburban Detroit.

Meg says she mourns that loss for parents as desperate for help as she was. "It's just a shame that we don't have it here in our community any more. It's a tremendous loss."

But West says he's glad and hopes the Indianapolis facility shuts too. "It's hurting kids. These kids need help. They need good, solid, Chevrolet, Buick, Mercedes Benz help. They do not need wacked-out, confrontational, supposedly cognitive behavioral therapy. It's not."

Pathway Family Center sent us a statement saying its "clients choose Pathway for the positive, life changing program" it offers and its "excellent track record".

In an email to the Ohio agency that regulates treatment centers, a representative of Pathway confirmed the closing in Milford but said Pathway hoped to re-open in Ohio when economically feasible.

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