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CEDU crisis could mean opportunity, or...?

Janyce Lastman LL.B.

Educational Consultant, Case Manager

Toronto ON CANADA

janycelastman@hotmail.com



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In the last 10 days we have witnessed a major shake-up in the youth residential treatment program industry.

Liquidating so many children at risk without notice to parents lacking the tools to cope, terminating long-term and loyal staff without remuneration owed, and literally locking doors within 48 hours of a terse press release confirming bankruptcy...

To this Canadian consultant at least, the scenario was shallow, callous and cold-hearted - not to mention surreal. In retrospect, perhaps it actually reflected simply very poor business practices, an absence of professional courtesies left to call in, and highly irresponsible disaster planning.

I empathize with the many families now scrambling to re-finance, book transports and find new placements for their vulnerable teens. By sheer luck, none of my clients were directly affected. Like most other ed consultants, I've had my share of students at CEDU/ Brown programs in the past. Frankly, CEDU's pre-packaged marketing and programming, and top-down management style never matched my personal fondness for smallish, individually operated, unique programs with character. Yet CEDU had always served a certain niche, rather effectively at that, for 30-odd years. The students I did place at CEDU programs all benefited - some greatly so - as did their families.

Bottom line folks, it'll take a while for this dust to settle. None of us, not consultants, escorts, admission directors nor CEO's, can be sure of the big-picture implications, though I suspect they

may be substantial. The good news is that some really excellent staff are unexpectedly available and likely quite motivated to seek employment with other programs, sadly stiffed of end-of-month paycheques and severance pay, and left with frozen pensions. And of course, a potential business boom awaits transport agencies and ed consultants alike, as well as many top-notch programs whose admissions numbers are currently at low tide. Reading the "letters of support" on StrugglingTeens.com, one senses not only the genuine concern, but the equally strong "come hither" sales pitch running through most of them.

Which brings me to the vulture effect. We should focus on assisting those in distress, not on re-slicing the pie to give ourselves bigger pieces. We owe a duty of care to our current clients: patients, students, families and staff alike, and an ethical responsibility to ourselves to remain prudent and responsible in our work. Hopefully, the more stable RTC's etc. will not short-circuit their staff screening and hiring process, or their clinical and educational admission reviews. Hopefully, new parents about to place children in Wilderness, EmG's or RTCs will not be scared away en masse by the whole CEDU mess. And hopefully, the private health care insurance providers and out-of-state funding dollars that allow so many access to quality help, will neither be compromised nor withdrawn.

My optimistic side tells me none of this should transpire. But instinct and caution remind me that anything is possible.

Those of us who care deeply about the people and issues within our industry should not only weather the storm, but grow stronger despite it. In the interest of being "better safe than sorry" however, a sensible ed consultant's recommendation to one's existing clients may be to avoid advancing or tying up large sums of money with any program at this time, regardless of incentive discounts offered. To clarify, I am not suggesting that families hold back fees or deny payment for agreed-to costs or expenses. However, this is the ideal time to pay only as they go, even if it costs a bit more in the end, and reduce their total exposure.

In any event, it sure will be an interesting landscape to explore once the dust clears away. I'd be interested in hearing others'

thoughts on these issues.

Janyce Lastman LL.B.
Educational Consultant, Case Manager
Toronto ON CANADA
janycelastman@hotmail.com

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