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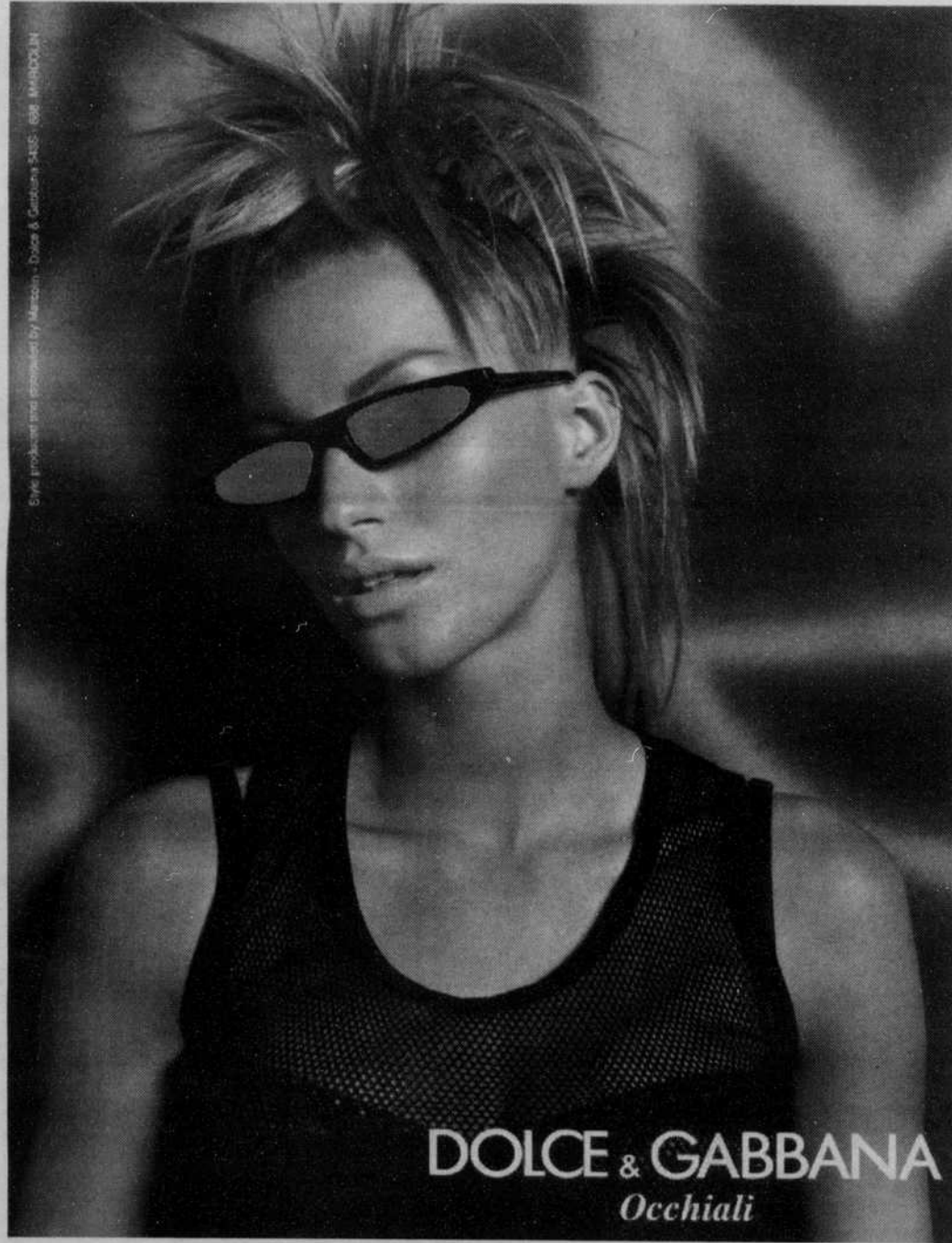
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## RIGHTS

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are trained by the program, are case managers working on problems with discrimination in housing, employment or public accommodation.

"We'll help to resolve the issue through mediation, administrative action or legal action," Rikhoff said. The program also works in collaboration with the Lane County Human Rights Advisory Committee.

Its roles include advising city government on different policies and training employees to be sensitive to situations affected by race, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation and age. The program also provides community education through workshops and cultural events and responds to reported discrimination and harassment.

"The most serious crimes are hate crimes and acts of hate," Rikhoff said. "In Eugene many of those take the form of assault, intimidation or harassment." He added that many attacks are based on race, sexual orientation and religion, predominantly anti-Semitic activity.

Recently the program has been dealing with the Aryan Nation, which distributed literature claiming the superiority of the white race.

"It's all First Amendment-protected speech, but it's hurtful; it's very scary when you find it on your door step or your windscreen, and we'll help the community respond to that," Rikhoff said.

One of the city's most prominent, ongoing programs is the Human Rights Support System.

"It's a system that makes a difference in people's lives literally on a daily basis," Rikhoff said.

People who feel they have been discriminated against may call and the program will assign an advocate to investigate the case, offering both technical and emotional support.

Clients are then given different options on how they could deal with a particular situation, according to HRSS program specialist Francisca Leyva-Johnson.

"We don't fix the problem," Leyva-Johnson said. "Our goal is to empower folks to make decisions for themselves." At times, Leyva-Johnson said, people simply want the accused to validate that what the victim experienced should not have happened.

The program dealt with 129 cases in 2002. A large percentage of the complaints were against Eugene police — 36 cases — followed by complaints related to employment — 17

cases. Bias because of race or ethnicity drew the highest number of complaints, with 42 total cases in 2002.

"Discrimination should not be allowed, (nor should) unfair treatment," Leyva-Johnson said. "There needs to be a place where you can report it (and) where you can get assistance."

Other marks of the program's work are evident. In 2001, the program organized Oregon's first Hate Crimes Conference, which attracted more than 600 participants, Rikhoff said. Earlier this year, it pushed for amendments in the city's human rights ordinance to create a domestic partner registry, which allows unmarried couples to officially document their relationship. Currently, the program is working to get a ramp included in the construction of the new Federal Courthouse to make it more accessible.

Rikhoff said community police relations are another area of concentration, adding that creating greater communication and respect between law enforcement, communities of color and youth is a big challenge. He said the program was a key supporter of a police study on racial profiling released in August, adding that there is reason for concern with some police practices.

"The documentation shows that young men of color are often stopped in greater numbers by percentage of population, are held longer at the car stop and are more often asked for consent to search," Rikhoff said. He said many students have also complained about youth profiling from the police and local businesses. The program participates in pre-service and in-service training for police officers.

Leyva-Johnson said making people aware of the commission's presence and benefits is also a big challenge. She said some people may not realize they have a channel for recourse or may be reluctant to make complaints against government agencies through a city-funded office.

She said it is necessary to bring issues to the forefront, however.

"We wouldn't want our children to carry the burden that we do," she said.

Human Rights Commission Chairman James Dean agrees.

"It's a watchdog for our community to see that we are least attempting to do better," he said.

The program plans to train new volunteers on Nov. 1. For more information on the Human Rights Program, call 682-5177.

Contact the news editor at [ayishayahya@dailyemerald.com](mailto:ayishayahya@dailyemerald.com).

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