

Our View

Progress in improving child welfare in Oregon

The reports from the Department of Human Services Critical Incident Review Team are some of the most heartbreaking items the state of Oregon produces.

The team reviews child fatalities when there is a connection to the state's child welfare department within a year of the death. The CIRT reports aim to understand what happened and consider what, if anything, can be learned.

A CIRT report from 2020 looked into what may have been a suicide or accidental overdose by a 16-year-old in December 2020.

Rewind back to 2016. DHS received a report about the child. The child was then 12 and struggling with mental health and self-harm. That investigation was closed because no evidence was found of parental abuse or neglect.

Then in December 2019, DHS received a report when the child was 15. The allegation: The child was struggling with suicide and it was not being adequately addressed by the parents. There also was information that the parents let the child drink at home.

The parents initially denied the caseworker access to the home. Later, the caseworker was able to meet with the parents and learned they were aware of the child's problems. The mother told the caseworker the school contacted her with concern about a social media post from the child in December 2019. The mother said she stayed home with the child to ensure the child's safety.

The family had no health insurance. They did have resources through the child's school to access counseling. The caseworker interviewed multiple other people, including school staff, family members and the child's therapist. They did not report concerns. Based on the investigation, the allegations of neglect were ruled unfounded. The parents seemed to be taking appropriate action. A year later, the child was dead of suicide or accidental overdose.

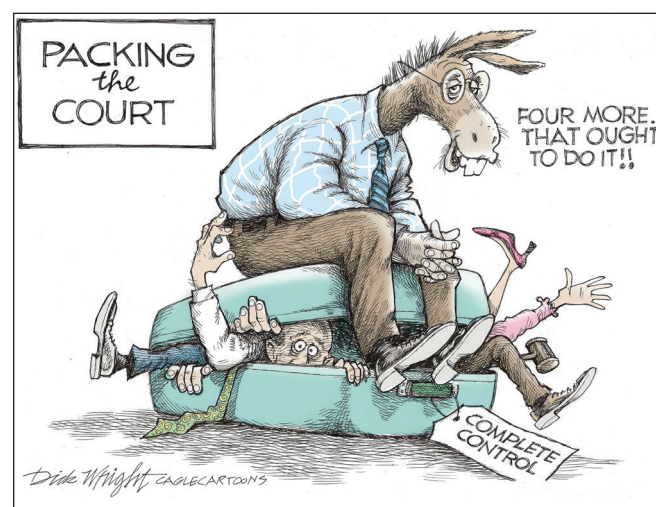
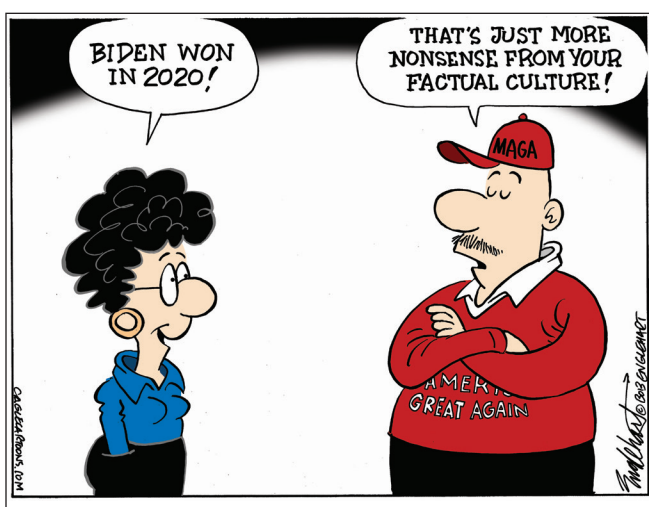
In child abuse and neglect, there are often missed chances to intervene or help. It's hard to point fingers and know for certain what more could and should have been done in this case, at least from the detail in the report. It doesn't really answer that.

Some, perhaps most, child abuse is preventable. What can make a difference is giving families in need the support — economic, mental health and more — they need to stay together and prevent children from being harmed.

A twinkle of hope comes from the Family First Prevention Services Act. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, worked on and got it passed in 2018. Child welfare advocates had long complained the federal government was getting child welfare funding wrong. Federal money was available, though the majority of it was only available once a child was removed from a family. Shouldn't the government put more effort into giving families what they need to succeed? The act enabled Oregon and other states to get reimbursed for services outside of foster care.

The state of Oregon just received permission from the federal government to move ahead with its version. That is very welcome news. Oregon's plan includes offering families programs for mental health, addiction and recovery, resources for pregnant and parenting teens and residential treatment requirements. Will it prevent more child abuse? We don't know. We hope so.

There is more work to be done by Oregon's DHS to ensure it succeeds and fewer CIRT reports must be written.



Other Views

Can we laugh about seasonal allergies?

DANNY TYREE
COLUMNIST

Tree huggers, are you contemplating a Zoom meeting with Mr. Elm instead?

Yes, this is dedicated to the millions of you who share my susceptibility to seasonal allergies.

(Seasonal allergies? Yes, "When is allergy season?" is a popular Google question. I don't mean to be ungrateful for fleeting symptom interruptions around Christmas, but that question is as pollyannaish as asking "When is double-chin season?" or "When is robocall season?")

Hopefully, this column will also have a little something for the lucky stiffs who AREN'T bothered by pollen. Perhaps you can pause your fairy-tale existence long enough to ponder it. Hmm ... I hadn't realized just how lucky we are that our fairy tales aren't marred by allergies. ("Fee fie foe fum ... I smell the ... I smell the ... actually, I can't smell anything. By dose is all stobbed ub.")

Although we adults whine about the "return" of allergy season, we've known forever that it's part of earth's life cycle. Our biology teachers taught us all about stamens and pistils —

although, in retrospect, they should have been telling us more about CVS and Walgreens!

We're resigned to the fact that pollen-based, bee-enabled plant reproduction is a necessary evil. It's just that sometimes, when we want to enjoy the Great Outdoors without coughs and sneezes, we'd like to tell Mother Nature's flora and fauna, "Get a room!" Too late — the dust mites and mold have already claimed all the indoor accommodations. ("Bermuda grass, did you not see the 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door, dude?")

Yes, I googled "Do bees have allergies?" That search brought up astonishingly few results. I guess we just have to IMAGINE those rare worker bees sniffing and putting in for sick leave — and the queen responding with, "We are not amused. Off with their heads and thoraxes and abdomens!"

I did encounter lots of advice about surviving allergy season. After you've been outdoors, leave your shoes by the door, wash your face and hands and change clothes — or, better yet, take a full shower. And if you can stand the pet dander, maybe encourage your cat to lick off the top several layers of skin. (Admit it — you've never seen a skeleton using Flonase.)

Allergies like to add insult to injury. We are advised to pick out

the medication that is right for US; but when your eyes are red and itchy, it's difficult to decipher all the fine print about durations, side effects and whether your 4-year-old will be operating heavy machinery.

It gets worse. We suffer with pollen during the growing season. Then we must deal with food allergies when consuming the finished product. I'm surprised Mother Nature hasn't bankrolled the introduction of "new Charmin with poison ivy."

Allergies present us with the double whammy of constant reminders AND unpleasant surprises. It's bad enough to experience never-ending nasal drip or itchy skin, but phlegm and other allergy manifestations show up at the most inopportune times. ("I'm sorry, caller number 12, but our station call letters are, in fact, NOT 'Akka! Gulp! Haarrkk! Ptooyey!' Guess those backstage passes to the Rolling Stones concert are still up for grabs.")

Oops. Out of space. Go on back to your medicine cabinets or your fairy tales, as the case may be.

"Not by the hair of ... Hey! This new cologne is messing with my chinny chin chin! It burns!"

Columnist Danny Tyree welcomes email responses at tyreetrades@aol.com and visits to his Facebook fan page "Tyree's Tyrades."

Letters deadline for May 18 elections

The Observer does not run endorsements of more than 400 words.

The Observer will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the let-

ters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary.

We run local letters of endorsement on a first-come, first-served basis.

Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. Friday, May 7.

You can email them to let-

ters@lagrandeobserver.com, or mail them to The Observer, c/o Phil Wright, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande OR 97850.

We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run.

Election Day is May 18.

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