

Portland controversial program offered as example for nation

STAFF REPORTS

On Thursday, July 30, two Portland Police officers in charge of the controversial Service Coordination Team presented a workshop in Washington D.C. at the National Alliance to End Homelessness Conference along with representatives from Central City Concern and Volunteers of America.

The workshop was titled "Addressing the Jail-to-Homelessness Pipeline: Adult and Youth Re-Entry and Diversion Services."

The workshop description stated: "Discharges from jail and juvenile detention are pipelines to homelessness. Local police, homeless service providers, and treatment providers have not always worked collaboratively. Congress' recent enactment of the Second Chance Act has increased the need and opportunities for coordination. Portland's Service Coordination Team is an innovative program that reduces crime through a comprehensive strategy coupled with community police resources. The intent is to end homelessness and recidivism by treating drug and alcohol abuse as the root cause of criminal behavior. The diversity of professional discipline on the team enhances its effectiveness."

The Service Coordination Team is a five-and-a-half-year program aimed at reducing crime and improving the lives of people caught in a cycle of addiction and criminality.

The strategy of the program, according to police, is to weave a comprehensive strategy by providing jail beds, supportive housing, and drug and alcohol treatment to Portland's top offenders. The coordination team works in a partnership with government agencies, the private sector and social-service agencies throughout Portland.

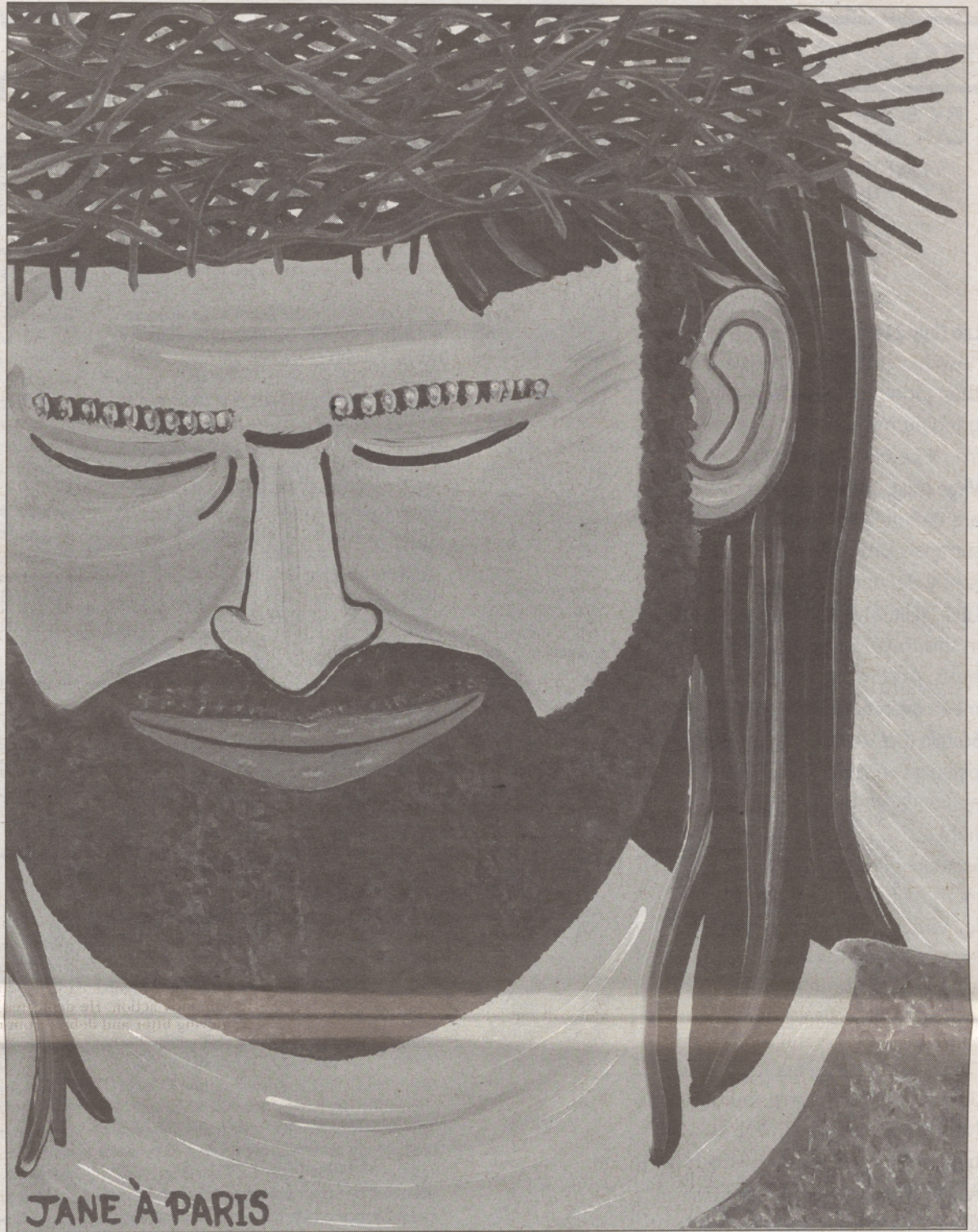
The program has come under scrutiny from homeless advocates and attorneys who say the program violates individuals civil rights by forgoing an individuals right to council and being put on a "secret" list made up of repeat offenders.

The individuals targeted through the program belong to a list called the "Neighborhood Livability Crime Enforcement Offender List," many of which are homeless and/or experiencing a mental health issue. The list is made up of individuals that the city deems chronic offenders.

To identify chronic offenders the police bureau does blind data run on the top 35 repeat offenders in ten neighborhoods at the city's core over a three-month period. The data runs target arrests for larceny, fraud, forgery, possession or distribution of a controlled substance, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle and probation violations. Once an individual on the list re-offends, they can be picked up anywhere in Portland. More than 400 people are now on the list.

Because the program allows the police to detain people on the list for a one- to three-day holding period while they're being charged for a crime, and then given treatment options, some critics charge that the program supercedes the normal criminal justice system and therefore strips individuals of their rights.

In April, the secret list was challenged by a group of attorneys affiliated with the American Civil Liberties Union, but a Multnomah County Judge ruled the program to be constitutional.



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