

A day to remember those lost to addiction



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BY HAVEN WHELOCK
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Friday August 31st is International Overdose Awareness Day. It is a day when we come together to honor the people we have lost because of drug use and to stand committed to reducing the stigma that results in so many people suffering in isolation. It is a day where we acknowledge that the people we have lost were valued members in our community, commit to standing with people who are still using and fight for the lifesaving services that this community needs and deserves.

In the past 5 years, more than 2,700 people have died in Oregon from overdose. While this number is heartbreaking and staggering on its own, it does not paint the complete picture of loss that our drug-using community is dealing with. This number does not include the people who died from other drug-related causes, such as HIV, hepatitis C, or soft tissue infections. It does not speak to the people who have died by suicide because they could no longer cope with living with their addiction.

It does not measure the heartache and trauma people surviving are living with.

They were our friends, neighbors and family members. Each of these people were part of the fabric of our community. They were people who are gone too soon from causes that are often preventable and treatable.

People who use drugs, especially people struggling with a substance-use disorder, often carry so much pain, trauma and shame with them through the world.

They are living in a time when death from drug use is continuing to climb and there is not often time to grieve one loss before the next loss hits.

They are afraid not only for their lives but for the lives of their friends and family. They are operating in a world that views them as

less deserving and less human than others in the community.

Even with all of this stigma, it is people who are using drugs that are stepping up to save lives in our community.

People who use drugs are regularly using naloxone, the antidote to opioid overdose, in our community. There are thousands of people who use drugs in the Portland metro area who are trained to prevent overdose death by using naloxone, and more than 3,200 overdoses have been reported to staff at local syringe exchanges. These people are saving the lives of friends, family members and strangers every day. They are unsung heroes in our fight against the overdose crisis in our city. Without these people, our overdose death rates would be far worse.

People who are using drugs do not need to die. These deaths can be prevented by lowering the stigma against people who use drugs and bringing these people to the forefront in efforts to end our

addiction crisis.

They can be prevented by ensuring the people who are most likely to overdose or to see an overdose have naloxone.

They can be prevented by having access to inclusive trauma-informed healthcare that can treat many of their infections.

They can be prevented by having low-barrier, evidence based access to treatments for their substance use and mental health issues.

These deaths can be prevented by creating spaces for people to feel cared for and empowered. We can all work to prevent these deaths.

In honor of International Overdose Awareness Day, Outside In invites you to join us 6-8 p.m., Friday, Aug 31 for our annual memorial for those who had died from drug use. We will honor those we have lost and work to build a safer healthier world for people who use drugs.

These deaths can be prevented by lowering the stigma against people who use drugs and bringing these people to the forefront in efforts to end our addiction crisis.

Untitled

by Lori Boettcher

Sitting by the waters edge
I search for calmness
An escape from my mind, racing
Roaring, slashing me to pieces

My thoughts, emotions, raw with
Pain, I cannot endure
Need to hear a kind word
Observe a thoughtful gesture

I pray to God, fill me with
Love, empathy for others
This life spits poison at me, killing me
Why? I lay awake for hours

Turmoil engulfs me, smothering me,
Slowly devours me
Regurgitate the sorrow, see
The light, escape this madness

The golden rule don't be a fool
Stay the course without remorse
Like most people do
Righteousness, judgement for whom?

Slither with the snake
Follow others who do
Coil and wait, strike with venom
Before they do

An eye for an eye, ignorance intolerable
Trust thy father's love, believe thy
Holy spirit, surrender
All sins, just as they do

Morality lost, anger at what
Cost?
Come hither with me into
The darkness

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Give to donate
bottle and can
deposits to great
non-profits like
Street Roots.



Learn more at
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Photo By: Joshua Meador