

A SYSTEM THAT WORKS

The media generally goes for the sensational on any topic, but there was a good balance in the *EW* articles on mental health in Lane County as far as the articles went. However, mental health is much more than schizophrenia and commitment in psychiatric hospitals, and mental health is not just an adult issue.

Despite the quote in the article, “Our system ... is pretty broken,” the fact is that our mental health system in Lane County is exemplary and one of the best in the nation. We are very fortunate in Lane County to have a mental health infrastructure of 17 private organizations helping children and adults with national model programs addressing all levels of mental health needs around the clock and every day of the year.

Perhaps the next mental health article can focus on the many ways we keep people, particularly children, out of hospitals and out of the criminal justice system. Our local mental health system is a community treasure and does its job very well and with little fanfare.

Dave Ziegler, Ph.D.
Jasper Mountain

DUBIOUS DIAGNOSIS

This is in regards to the two articles addressing “mental illness” in the Sept. 24 issue.

I have learned several things in my life, and one is that no article of any length that doesn’t discuss trauma when looking at emotional distress is going to be misleading, and trauma wasn’t mentioned in either article. Another thing is that when people use the term “mental illness” and toss around dubious labels, they are invariably going to sound as if they were coached by Big Nurse herself.

Truth is, while there are many thousands of emotionally disabled people in Lane County, few if any have an illness that can be defined by a medical test. None have an imbalance that requires some powerful mind-control drug, and one huge truth is that there are thousands of us “psychiatric survivors” out here who remember our treatment at the hands of psychiatry and fear for those still lost and vulnerable.

I challenge a Lane County psychiatrist to say that there is a medical test for this thing “mental illness.” You will notice that they don’t. Instead, they rely on family and others to do that. So how can they say that a quarter of us have it? I suggest wandering over to madinamerica.com and look at all the recent studies that show the dangers of the wonder drugs and criminalizing emotionally distressed people.

That “future crimes” criminalization really is frightening. If we had enough housing and decent mental health care,

as well as counseling in schools and prisons, we wouldn’t have so many out-of-control fellow humans. Lane County has no public shelter system, so where are the lost to go? We live in an insane culture, so of course many of us are messed up. But if there is no definition of “mental illness,” stop using those two words.

Hugh Massengill
Eugene

MEASURING PROGRESS

As a teacher with 40 years of experience, I administered my share of standardized tests not only because I had to, but also because I figured that they were useful. I discovered the results of those tests did not help me at all to improve my instruction — because they aren’t designed to do that.

Geoff Barrett’s Sept. 24 Viewpoint “Judging the Quality of Instruction” lays out the three reasons typically given to support the use of standardized tests, and then he expertly debunks them.

A far better way to measure student progress is classroom-based performance assessment where the teacher, in concert with colleagues, designs a task in reading, writing, math, etc. that connects to the unit of study and allows each student to reveal what she or he knows and can do. This informs the student, the teacher and the parent what needs to be done next.

A great opportunity for learning about authentic, appropriate assessment is this week when a teacher from Seattle and a vice principal from Beaverton will be speaking at the Community Alliance for Public Education’s event on “Appropriate Assessment: There Is Life After High Stakes Standardized Tests” at 7 pm Thursday, Oct. 1, at Eugene Friends Church, 3495 W. 18th Ave. Free with childcare provided.

Larry Lewin
Eugene

ILLUSION OF INPUT

It’s tragically obvious that public input is nothing but a token bone thrown to the people to create some illusion that they have a voice. As one can see by looking at the monstrosity that now resides across from the library, by viewing the EmX killing field of 6th and 7th avenues, or by visiting the meadow where the next fiasco is intended by the Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing entitled yuppies who wouldn’t know green if they drowned in it, the wishes of the majority are not remotely considered, and after the public meetings occur, the controllers do what they intended all along. For this reason I’d like to suggest that, should it become necessary, no less than 30,000 of us reverently set up camp amidst the trees that the “Friends” of

VIEWPOINT BY SAM PORTER

Apocalypse Now?

AN ANSWER TO GUY MCPHERSON’S PREDICTIONS

You don’t have to be a fundamentalist, evangelical, Catholic Christian or an ancient Jew to wonder whether we’re in a “culture of death,” “the sixth extinction” or some kind of universal cataclysm.

Historically, in the apocalyptic literature flourishing in Judaism between 175 BCE and 135 CE, the present world age, dominated by the forces of death and evil, is distinguished from the expected future age, prior to which dramatic divine intervention defeats death and evil and establishes a radically new world order. This literature depicts the transition from the Present Age to the Age to Come as a universal cataclysm. The Christian tradition claims the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the beginning of the Age to Come, but the New Age awaits complete realization.

Teachings about the end of the Present Age and the ultimate destiny of humanity include the belief that eschatological expectations are in part already fulfilled in the life of Christ. *Apocalypse* comes from the Greek word for “unveiling” or “revelation,” and specifically refers to the unveiling of the secrets of the end of the Present Age and the inauguration of the Age to Come.

Emeritus natural resources professor Guy McPherson, who spoke recently in Eugene, is certainly not talking about an Age to Come. On the contrary, according to *Eugene Weekly*’s cover story July 16, with admirable honesty and yet an attitude of paralyzing

pessimism — in spite of his vague push for simple living and action — he has some sobering things to say about human extinction. According to McPherson, it is much worse than we ever imagined.

Shortly before the unexpected death of leading UC Berkeley sociologist Robert Bellah in 2013 (robertbellah.com), he sent an email to some friends reporting his response to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk’s 2013 book, *You Must Change Your Life* (the title is a phrase he took from one of Rilke’s poems):

I liked the book though remained ambivalent until the last chapter, containing 10 pages beginning at p. 442. But when I read those 10 pages they descended on me like tongues of fire. The last two pages swept me completely away and it took me nearly an hour to recover. I just sat there overcome. I see now that the whole book was leading up to those last pages, yet I didn’t expect them. Those pages express exactly what I want to do in my next



book [The Modern Project in Light of Human Evolution, which Bellah was working on at his death], though giving me lots more ammunition. Sloterdijk talks about the PRACTICES we will need to meet the ecological Armageddon, about how they are impossible, but the whole of human history is about attaining the impossible. We should not dwell on doom and gloom but on the greatest challenge our species has ever met and how tremendously exciting it will be to meet it. It was like a giant explosion for me, but not a destructive one, rather a global fireworks display that suddenly shed light on

everything. So definitely not a Jeremiad, not denouncing any one, but calling the best in us to rise to the critical occasion.

Bellah provides, I think, a kind of answer to McPherson. ■

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