



OPINION

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The Portland Observer

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dispel Mental Health Ignorance

Regarding the article in your May 1 edition, page A5, entitled "Agency Mergers Helps Mental Health Clients," may I offer some enlightenment?

First of all, on a personal note, I expect to graduate this December, not next December. On a quite personal level those who struggle with a mental health issue prefer the term "consumer" or even "client." Your use of the term "mental patient" reflects a Bedlam-mentality that intimates that the mentally ill should be locked away in hospitals. The caption reads "Grant is a mental patient and Concordia student who is recovering from her disability." This is unfortunately untrue also. At this point, bipolar affective disorder is not something from which one "gets over." Learning to function, sustain and live knowledgeably with the anticipation of event recurrence is a lifelong challenge.

And last, Unity's New Mezz Connection is not actually a place of study, but a drop-in center for individuals with mental challenges at which I did an AmeriCorps stint and a practicum (internship) required for my social work major. The Mezz is open only to Unity clients with referrals from their case managers.

The reason the merger affects our community is because many people who live in the north and northeast community receive mental health services from what is now Unity NE Mental Health at 5432 N. Albina. That is only one of several Unity clinics in Portland Metro area that is part of the merger.

As of July 1, former Network and Mt. Hood mental health agencies will officially merge to form Cascadia, the most comprehensive mental health agency in Multnomah County. The merger is expected to increase available services, and consumers should see an improvement in what is offered in services, support and treatment, countywide. The director is Leslie Ford. The main Cascadia number is 503-238-0769.

I hope that any and all those requiring additional information will not hesitate to call. To dispel ignorance is to ease the transition. Thank you for allowing us the forum to do so. Your service to the community is, as always, invaluable.

Rev. Lindsey Morrison Grant
La Casa de Paz, director

Make a Difference on Teen Drinking



Barbara Cimaglio

By BARBARA CIMAGLIO

We would never lead our children in front of a moving car and yet many of us unknowingly place our youth in harm's way everyday.

We do this with our perception that underage drinking is nothing more than a harmless rite of passage. We also do this by thinking that we, as parents and adults, cannot influence the actions of our teenagers.

Wrong on both counts!

American teen-agers consume alcohol more frequently than all other illicit drugs combined and alcohol is the drug most likely to be associated with injury or death.

Underage drinking is at epidemic levels in Oregon. More than 43 percent of our eleventh graders and nearly 25 percent of our eighth graders are likely to consume

Unless we work together and take responsibility as parents and concerned adults to stop the cycle of teen use and addiction, we are creating future generations of alcohol and drug abusers.

—Barbara Cimaglio, special assistant for
child and adolescent health services

alcohol within the next 30 days.

This activity is not harmless. The younger the drinkers, the greater the risk to the development of their brain. They are also twice as likely to develop alcohol-related problems, 10 times more likely to use marijuana and 20 to 30 times more likely to use tobacco.

In addition to addiction to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, we know that excessive underage drinking can lead to health problems, poor grades, car crashes, drowning and other accidents, date rape and teen pregnancy, criminal activity including violence, suicide and even death of oneself and others.

All this is proof that alcohol is not harmless and cannot be treated casually.

Parents must take the lead in conveying accurate information about alcohol use to their children — this includes setting a positive example.

The good news is that our Healthy Teen Survey told us that parents do make a difference. In fact, when parents do not enforce clear rules, Oregon teens said they are twice as likely to drink alcohol and do drugs.

Our state research, as well as national research, indicates that teens are listening to their parents even if they don't show it. They want their parents to show they care and they want their parents to

get involved in their lives.

This means that parents need to take the responsibility for discussing alcohol with youth, acting as a role model and laying down the rules.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University has a great checklist for parents:

Set rules and expectations and enforce consequences; eat dinner together; monitor TV and Internet use and CD purchases; know your child's friends and where they go; send clear messages about alcohol use; discuss negative consequences of drinking; give youth perspective on media messages; don't show your children that it takes a drink to relax or celebrate; don't accept underage drinking as a rite of passage; and when your child needs help, get treatment — fast.

In Oregon, help is only a toll-free telephone call away. Call the Oregon Partnership Help Line at 800-923-4357 or the Youth Help Line at 877-553-TEEN.

Unless we work together and take responsibility as parents and concerned adults to stop the cycle of teen use and addiction, we are creating future generations of alcohol and drug abusers.

Barbara Cimaglio is special assistant for child and adolescent health services in the Oregon Department of Human Services.

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