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'Our Families'

Basic rights campaign embraces diversity

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Suicides on the Rise

Emergency providers deliver a message of hope and prevention

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'City of Roses'



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Established in 1970

Committed to Cultural Diversity

years of community service

Hijacked by Opioids

Drug causes more deaths than heroin and cocaine combined

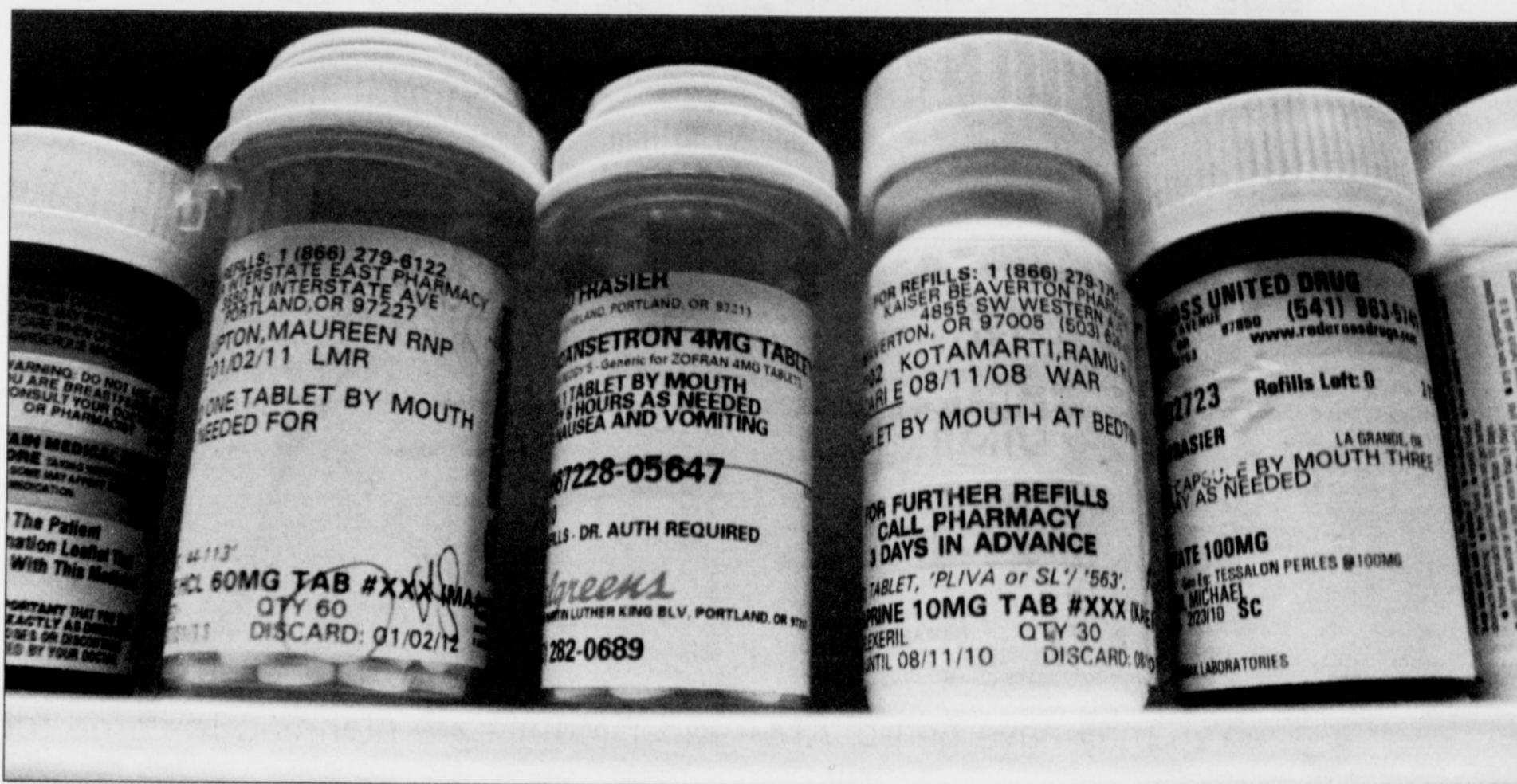
BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Four years ago, a middle-class Portland resident Tarek Ashurex, then 22, saw his physician for pain in his left shoulder due to several prior shoulder separations. With surgery not an option, he began taking pain killers such as Vicodin, Oxycodone, and Percocet prescribed to him by his doctor.

A year later, after his prescription ran out and his pain remained, Ashurex was sent to a pain clinic in Vancouver, where he received sharp increases in his narcotic doses. Trusting he was in the hands of medical professionals, the risk of addiction never occurred to him, and he continued taking the pills.

When the clinic shut down, and his doctor went to jail for overprescribing patients in return for thousands of dollars in kick backs he was receiving from pharmaceutical companies, Ashurex was taking about 540 milligrams of OxyContin a day —enough to tranquilize a horse.

After his 90-day supply ran out, Ashurex didn't think anything of it. Then, unexpected symptoms of drug withdrawals sank in. Sickness overcame him with flu-like symptoms of frequent vomiting and abdominal cramps. It hurt to do anything. He went to the doctor



The misuse of prescriptions is a growing problem for substance abuse.

PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

'You can always find a doctor that is shady enough to prescribe to you'

-- Tarek Ashurex, 26, a Portland resident seeking treatment for opioid addiction that began 4 years ago when a doctor prescribed him pain killers for severe shoulder pain.

again. They prescribed him Vicodon.

"Instantly I felt like a million bucks," said Ashurex, then 24 years old, "All my problems went away," he said. It was then he realized

that he was hopelessly addicted to opioids.

Now, at 26, Ashurex is searching for another doctor, one that will help him off pain killers, an addiction he fears may be life long.

"This is an addiction that I would never wish on anyone," he said, "Even my worst enemy."

Ashurex is one of two million Americans dependent on prescription pills or opioids, which the World Health Organization recognizes as a brain disease. According to the Institute of Addiction Medicine, from 1998 to 2003, the misuse of opioid prescription painkillers increased by 140 percent.

Today, Americans are the largest group of

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Money Runs Out for Gang Prevention

House of Umoja closes after two decades of helping youth

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

After 23-years of helping African-American youth stay away from gangs, the House of Umoja was forced to close its doors after fund-

ing for the program was cut entirely.

The House of Umoja ceased operations on Sept. 30, an abrupt end for a gang prevention program that reached over 200 youth, ages 11 to 18, each year through academic

support, mental health services, mentor services and basic needs support.

Although the center has operated under the umbrella of Lifeworks NW since 2009, Walter Butler, the director of the program, said they still couldn't find the resources to help the program remain afloat.

"We've been struggling for a

long time," said Butler.

He explained that once Umoja's board merged with Lifeworks, all private donors seemed to have disappeared. "Everything we do is free, and what we give the kids comes from us," he said. "We had the biggest life skills network in Portland Public schools, but now, they want us to defer the youth to other pro-

grams."

Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention selected Portland to be one of just four communities to share a federal grant to find ways to prevent gang and gun violence, which has claimed the lives of nine youth

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