

Juvie

continued from page 1

Almost every teen in the center stands accused of a Measure 11 felony. Voted into Oregon law in 1994, Measure 11 set mandatory minimum sentences for 24 crimes ranging from assault, robbery and weapons charges, through sexual abuse, rape, manslaughter and, at worst, murder. You could be forgiven for wondering if these are just ‘bad kids’.

‘I’m just really focused on what I’m going to do with my life – I am not going to go back into being around the bad influences that I was around before.’

Jose’

But Bachman’s philosophy is backed up by brain development research that shows teens are impulsive, reactive and less able to consider the consequences of their behaviors than adults. In fact, our brains may not fully mature until age 25 or so. Youth corrections staff—who monitor these girls and boys round the clock – understand that many teens who are taken into custody are driven by extreme emotions that stem from trauma, abuse, neglect or addiction.

The majority of these young inmates are taking prescription psychiatric medications for depression, anxiety and other problems, Bachman says. They’ve missed a lot of school and need intensive educational help. Some are completely abandoned by their families and get no visits.

‘That makes our job a lot harder,’ he admits.

Measure 11 makes no allowances for youthful immaturity or a history of victimization. Every 15, 16 or 17 year old accused of a Measure 11 crime— even a first offender — must be tried and sentenced as an adult.

‘Any youth who is 15 to 17 and charged with a Measure 11 crime will always be

held,’ Bachman says.

That means living in the center for an average of five months as lawyers prepare their cases – even though more than 62 percent of the teens charged with Measure 11 crimes are never convicted of one.

As for the curfew breakers, the runaways and the kids caught drinking, smoking or high on drugs: most are released within hours. The same goes for teens brought in for vandalism, shoplifting or other petty crimes. Some leave with a court date for the next morning, or — for the least serious offenses — many weeks away. And 89 percent of them show up in court and don’t commit new crimes.

‘At the end of the day almost every kid who comes in to juvenile detention is going to be back out in the community,’ Bachman said. ‘So it’s our job to help kids learn the skills they need to be successful so they don’t come back.’

What Multnomah County is doing seems to be working. The county’s youth recidivism rate has been dropping steadily from 38.5 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2007.

You’re Inside Now

For the first 24 hours, new inmates are isolated. Later they will be allowed pictures and some possessions, but at first it’s bare walls and plenty of thinking time — until detention staff finish explaining the rules they will now be expected to live by.

‘For the first week I was really upset,’ says Andre, a bright-eyed African American 17-year-old, in detention for 3 months— awaiting his court appearance. ‘It was really strict. I didn’t know about the 24-hour orientation period and I thought it would be like that all the time.’

The Skanner News was allowed to talk to Andre and one other boy, Jose, on condition we didn’t discuss the criminal charges they

On the Margins



PHOTO BY BRIAN STIMSON

The Unemployed/Underemployed Marginalized Workers Campaign gathered on Monday, Nov. 29 in Director’s Park in Downtown Portland to encourage members of Congress to extend unemployment benefits to millions of unemployed workers. Watch an interview with Francisco Holdman about his unemployment experience at www.theskanner.com. Eleya Fugmen, the self-help group’s organizer, helped rally a number of unemployed workers who are struggling to survive—even with unemployment assistance.

George Slanina said unemployment benefits are about the same as a low-income part-time job. ‘It doesn’t fulfill your needs,’ he said. ‘It doesn’t cover your full-time bills.’ The Rev. Lynn Smouse of Ainsworth United Church of Christ says she can see the effect of the economy on people in her role President of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. ‘The line-up of people needing help grows and grows and grows,’ she said.

The unemployment benefits extension bill – H.R. 6867 – remains stalled in Congress as of Dec. 1.

faced. To protect them we have changed their names.

Andre seems younger than his 17 years and shockingly vulnerable, in spite of his cheerful demeanor.

‘I never thought I would be here,’ he says. ‘But I’m doing great. It’s better than being in any other facility I’ve heard about. I expected it to be like: everyone locked down all the time — and bad food. But the food is actually good.’

How many teens do you know who would appreciate institutional food of any kind?

After the first 24-hours, each youth is assigned a room on one of the units. Each has a bed, a toilet and a writing surface —fixed so they can’t be moved. And, of course, they have locks on the outside.

Read the rest of this story online at www.theskanner.com



Health

continued from page 1

Central to the mission of the Vacuum Project was a desire to change people’s feelings about providing health care to people regardless of their ability to pay. To do that, they proposed a study on medical students across the country.

Dr. Paul Gorman, an advocate of universal healthcare, helped mentor and assist the students in their project and the study. What the students found, says Gorman, surprised him in ways he didn’t entirely expect.

‘I was struck by how high a proportion of students support health care (for all),’ he

said.

Nearly 86 percent of medical students supported some form of national health insurance. When medical students viewed the videos, it didn’t seem to make much of an impression into their previously held beliefs. Gorman and Bruno call this the ‘ceiling effect.’

Essentially, when such a high number of people already believe in something, it’s nearly insurmountable to get the remaining 10 percent to change their minds.

Gorman said he was also struck at how

many students would be willing to forgo higher incomes in order to provide health care to their patients. There was also a great deal of disagreement among medical students about just how a national health care system should operate.

Allen Andrews, one of the project’s founders, says the next goal of the project will be to outreach to doctors and nurses across the state of Oregon. They are already beginning outreach to doctors at OHSU. He hopes to also screen the videos for elected officials and publish their findings in med-

ical journals.

In January, many of the same students involved in the vacuum project are organizing the Single Payer Conference on Jan. 29, 2011. Speaking at the event will be U.S. Rep. John Conyers, along with a number of panel discussions and lectures and breakout sessions. For more information, visit www.singlepayeroregon.org.

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Detroit

continued from page 1

people of color in Multnomah County face huge challenges.

People of color are much more likely to live in poverty and to live in resource-poor neighborhoods with underfunded, struggling schools.

‘What we are seeing is the suburbanization of poverty,’ Bassett says.

‘Some localities are being asked to absorb large numbers of people, without the resources to do so. Schools in those neighborhoods have higher numbers of students whose first language is not English, for example, and they are struggling. So we have school systems with

very different educational outcomes.’

That’s why the Toulan School is creating a yearly event to discuss how Portland can bring fairness into planning decisions. The first annual Bonner Equity Planning Event will bring to Portland Professor Robin Boyle of Wayne State University and Ms.

BONNER EQUITY PLANNING EVENT

University Place Hotel, Columbia Falls Ballroom
310 SW Lincoln Street

Thursday, Dec. 9, 5:30 to 7:00 P.M.

To confirm you will attend email tiede@pdx.edu

Linda Smith, of Detroit’s community development corporation U-SNAP-BAC.

Professor Boyle has been working on a task force charged with revitalizing Detroit’s midtown. He will talk about: ‘Detroit: the 21st Century Challenge — a test of equity, vitality, and sustainability.’

Also on the panel will be Michelle Rudd, a partner in the Stoel Rives law office and a planning expert who is serving on the newly formed Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission; and Connie Ozawa, director of the Toulan School. Dr. Bassett will act as the moderator for the discussion. The event is free and

open to the public.

Bassett hopes the event, organized with Coalition for a Livable Future, will bring leadership to an issue that has been discussed in Portland, but has seen little real action.

‘We need to have a serious discussion about fairness, and about how the benefits and costs of planning and public investment are spread’ Bassett said. ‘Why don’t we think about sharing our tax base across the metro region to make sure resources are distributed fairly? We’re willing to invest a lot of money for projects like bike lanes, why can’t we do the same for affordable housing?’