

THE Skanner®

Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now

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Opinion

Decreasing Harm to Communities Impacted by the Criminal Justice System

At a time when our country faces deep political and social divisions, we see a bright spot that shows how people from different perspectives can come together in the name of hope: the bipartisan efforts underway to reform the criminal justice system.

After decades of tough-on-crime policies that have led to burgeoning prison and jail systems, members of Congress from across the political spectrum passed a federal criminal justice bill in December that acknowledges the harm caused by over-punishment and mass incarceration.

That national shift comes as Multnomah County and other jurisdictions across the country are working hard to address pervasive issues in their local criminal justice systems. Taken together, those steps toward reform make clear that many facets of the justice system have taken heavy financial and social tolls on individuals struggling with addiction and/or mental illness, as well as on their families and the community at large.

This is particularly true for people of color, and especially in Oregon, where our racist past is distinctly ugly. It's why local leaders have long been fighting to make the same



Abby Stamp and Ebony Clarke

Guest Columnists

kinds of changes we're now seeing nationally.

Oregon's founding Constitution excluded Blacks from the state. Well into the 20th century, racially restrictive covenants squeezed people of

“Even today, gentrification continues to force people of color from their historic communities

color into certain neighborhoods, then subjected those neighborhoods to further racist land-use policies. Even today, gentrification continues to force people of color from their historic communities.

Inequity has had a profound impact on our criminal justice system. People of color suffered not only from explicit racism, because of policies and practices stemming from the Jim Crow-era, but also from the lack of institutional support in a state that was literally designed by, and for, whites.

African Americans currently represent an estimated 20 percent of inmates in Mult-

nomah County's Jail, despite making up just 6 percent of the County's overall population.

Nationally, 15 percent to 17 percent of people booked into jail are estimated to have active symptoms of a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder. But that share doubles when race is factored in. A 2015 study found that Black detainees with symptoms of a mental illness were significantly over-

Multnomah County and our partners including judges, district attorneys, law enforcement, public defenders, victims advocates and more have worked to identify and address disparities in our system. We've participated with national efforts such as the Square One Project and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge.

Through our partnership with the Safety and Justice Challenge, we've acknowledged the need to directly address the harm caused by institutional racism and oppression and recently, developed the Diane Wade House, an Afrocentric transitional housing program for justice-involved women. At the conception of the program, we walked hand-and-hand with women of color who have lived experience with addiction and/or mental health challenges and justice involvement. We had hard conversations about gentrification, race, racism, oppression and more. We slowed down and took a purposeful approach to develop a tailored-program for Black women and led by Black women - even down to a first-of-its-kind, culturally-specific curriculum.

Read the rest of this commentary at TheSkanner.com

represented in Multnomah County's Jail. As longtime social workers and executives in public safety and mental health, we have seen these impacts play out across generations. For Black men and women, and their children, the repercussions from disproportionate incarcerations can echo for the rest of their lives. Even after those individuals reach milestones in their recovery from addiction or mental health challenges, persistent barriers to housing, jobs, credit or even something as simple as a driver's license can keep them from stability and success.

For the past several years,

Kindness Is in the Little and Big Things

“Three things in human life are important: The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind,” proclaimed Henry James.

Random Acts of Kindness Day is Feb. 17, 2019. Help your family, friends, and co-workers get excited about Random Acts of Kindness Day. There are scientifically proven benefits to being kind. It is contagious, teachable, and makes you feel all fuzzy inside. Check out a video featuring the science of kindness. Read a plethora of kindness stories. See the Kindness in the Classroom curriculum (no cost). Download Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn profile images. www.randomactsofkindness.org.



Melissa Martin, Ph.D.

Guest Columnist

org.

My grandma Hila showed kindness with food. She cooked homemade meals for family; gave garden vegetables to neighbors and strangers; and fed stray dogs. My grandma Lyde gave quarters to the children at church to put in the collection plate; gave away crocheted doilies, and voluntarily painted the former Hillcrest Children's Home. I am grateful for kind grandmothers.

consider kindness to be weakness and may try to take advantage. Showing kindness is not about being a doormat or allowing others to manipulate you.

“It's not our job to play judge and jury, to determine who is worthy of our kindness and who is not. We just need to be kind, unconditionally and without ulterior motive, even - or rather, especially - when we'd prefer not to be,” affirmed Josh Radnor.

Nonetheless, in today's world, people can be suspicious when we offer deeds of kindness, compliments, or praise. So we need to balance caring with caution. But a lack of showing kind deeds due to fear of other humans is an excuse.

Kindness Day in Your County and City

How will you show kindness to others on February 17? And the other 364 days of 2019?

Think about what deeds of kindness you can do in your area. Give blood. Read to an elderly person at a nursing home. Clean out your closet and donate gently used coats and gloves. Sign up as an organ donor on your driver's

license. Give eye contact and smile when you talk to children. Be kind to furry friends by donating pet food to the local food pantry. Send notes of gratitude to city and county leaders, nonprofit organizations, and school board members.

A few of my small kindness deeds this year includes: Sending an email to Gov. Mike DeWine and thanking him for creating a new position—Director of Children's Initiatives for Ohio and for his campaign promises of expanding early childhood education, increasing access to mental health services, and reforming the foster care system. I will daily turn off the water when brushing my teeth to show kindness to planet Earth. Honking and waving at the employees who dance and hold signs for businesses outside in the cold.

Kindness is in the little and the big things we do for others. And let's be especially kind to oldsters, children, and animals. Celebrate kindness day!

Melissa Martin, Ph.D., is an author, columnist, and educator. She lives in Ohio.