

NONPROFITS: PAWS thrift store donations pile up at front door

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financial donations and she hasn't seen any indication of embezzlement, but she does have concerns that in-kind donations are handled less carefully. She wants to see the Warming Station keep a detailed ledger of all in-kind donations and put better procedures in place that avoid any impropriety.

"I know they were small things, but theft of small things leads to theft of bigger things," she said.

In addition to the concerns about in-kind donations Shelton brought up a few other concerns during Sunday's Warming Station board meeting, including what she saw as one board member's aggressive treatment of guests. When she felt her concerns weren't being taken seriously enough, she resigned. She also made an official theft report to the Hermiston Police Department, which is investigating with the cooperation of the Warming Station board.

Trish Rossell, president of the board, said she didn't want to comment on an ongoing police investigation. She did say



PAWS Thrift Store manager Sara McCormack helps a customer on Thursday in Pendleton.

the Warming Station has a rigorous accounting process for financial donations, which are documented and presented to the board in an open meeting each month. As for in-kind donations, Rossell said the Warming Station throws away expired hygiene and food items and

keeps water and toilet paper. Anything else is donated to Desert Rose Ministries or another nonprofit that can use the items to serve the homeless, and guests of the Warming Station are referred there.

"We don't want to be in the business of duplication

of efforts," she said.

Local nonprofits — often run by volunteers — set their own policies and procedures for handling donations.

Sara McCormack in mid-January took over managing the thrift store for the Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter. The store

sells donated goods and has a small shed near the front door for donations at all hours. When that fills up, people leave items outside. McCormack said some Mondays she has to be part mountain goat just to get to the door.

While a cash register at the front tracks every sale and print receipts, she said, there is no way to track all the items people donate. And too often those donations are only fit for the garbage bin, she said, from soiled clothes to broken goods. The store also has limited storage. Coats, for example, end up covered in mildew if the store keeps them too long.

She said she even brought in a dumpster to get rid of moldy items.

Since taking over, McCormack said she is under more oversight than previous managers because the store was in such disarray, but there is no doubt small nonprofits are vulnerable to theft.

"I am here alone every day," she said. "If I was not an ethical person, I could do whatever I wanted to."

At Made to Thrive, a

Hermiston nonprofit that helps outfit and support at-risk kids for participation in extra-curricular activities, director Kris Dammeyer said being good stewards of donations is a top priority.

She emailed statements from board president Tim Handforth and board treasurer Mitch Boylan explaining how every donation goes back to youth in the community. Boylan, a CPA at Barnett and Moro PC in Hermiston, said monthly financial updates are presented to the board and every financial transaction made is scrutinized by at least two people.

"Every dollar we receive is carefully planned for use in accomplishing our mission," Handforth wrote. "Whether it is for participation fees, equipment, clothing or operating expenses it is tracked and recorded. An easy path to failure for an organization is to lose its integrity in the way it operates and laziness in its execution of policies and procedures."

East Oregonian reporter Phil Wright contributed to this story.

SEX ABUSE: Nearly 7 percent of students report having sexual contact in school

Continued from 1A

The cases have ranged from teachers exchanging love notes and holding hands with students to repeated instances of sexual contact where a teacher was charged with and convicted of a sexual crime.

While concerning, local education officials say that a combination of state policies and local efforts are changing the way districts are handling sexual misconduct.

Defining the problem

Nearly 7 percent of students nationwide, or 3.5 million youth, report having physical sexual contact in a school, usually from a teacher or coach.

Add in other acts that don't include sexual contact, like sharing pornography, sexual talk or masturbation, and that figure is raised to 10 percent — or nearly 4.5 million students — according to Charol Shakeshaft, a leading researcher on sexual misconduct between educators and students.

In all likelihood, the actual number of victims is much higher, she said. Several studies on juvenile sex abuse victims in general show that only 6 percent of children report their abuse to someone who can do something about it.

Even once the abuse ends, the effects of sexual misconduct can last a child's lifetime.

A study found that sexual abuse victims are more likely than non-victims to have trouble with adult relationships, drug or alcohol abuse, the risk of suicide or other harm, and health problems like diabetes and heart disease.

Shakeshaft delivered a report on sexual misconduct research to the U.S. Department of Education in

2004, where she provided a definition for "sexual misconduct."

Sexual misconduct includes any conduct that qualifies as sexual abuse of minor under the state criminal code, sexual harassment or having any kind of sexual relationship with a student at any age or any child under the age 18.

Also included is a set of behaviors known as grooming, where an adult engages in actions meant to set up sexual contact, such as sending intimate messages, holding sexual conversations, making suggestive comments or dating a student.

While the *East Oregonian* included only cases where explicit sexual abuse or grooming occurred, there were a few others where the commission punished a teacher for moving a student into his house without permission and another where a teacher was holding personal conversations with students on social media.

In a 2013 article, Shakeshaft spelled out what practices schools could undertake to protect students from sexual misconduct.

She encouraged schools to have windows on all their doors so students and teachers were in sight at all times, even with the doors closed. To ensure teachers know what sexual misconduct in, Shakeshaft also suggested schools adopt policies that specifically outline what behavior is unacceptable.

But one of her biggest recommendations was training teachers to look for signs of sexual misconduct.

With the rate of student reporting so low, Shakeshaft said teachers are often in the best position to notice suspicious behavior in their colleagues.

Despite the prevalence of sexual misconduct in schools, Shakeshaft surveyed teachers and found only 11 percent would report instances of abuse involving their co-workers.

In an interview with the *East Oregonian*, Shakeshaft said these policies have proven to be effective, but many schools across the country have been slow to

through examples of sexual misconduct but also potential grooming situations that should be avoided. SafeSchools advised against teachers driving children home, being alone with a student in a closed room, or being friends with students on social media.

The training intoned against ignoring warning signs from teachers who

"Their primary camouflage is an unwillingness to see a molester in our midst."
— Mark Mulvihill, InterMountain Education Service District

take them up.

"It's not on top of the school district's radar until it happens to them," she said.

More awareness

Local administrators point to a change, around 2009, in the approach toward sexual misconduct.

That's when the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2062. It greatly expanded the reporting requirements for sexual misconduct.

Schools adopted policies that explicitly forbade certain actions between students and teachers, such as performing backrubs, sitting on laps, kissing and sharing sexual exploits and marital problems.

The law also mandated schools hold annual trainings on sexual misconduct, which local districts do through an online course provided by a service called SafeSchools.

InterMountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill demonstrated how SafeSchools worked at his Pendleton office.

As a voice actor narrated each slide, the course went

appear to be abusing a student.

"Their primary camouflage is an unwillingness to see a molester in our midst," the narrator said.

Mulvihill said it's a good training course that reminds him to constantly rethink his own organization's policies.

Besides being responsible for his own special education teachers and support staff, Mulvihill oversees the service district's misconduct investigation unit, a group of independent investigators local districts can use when sexual misconduct issues arise.

Heidi Sipe is the superintendent of the Umatilla School District and the chairwoman of the Teaching Standards and Practices Commission's executive committee. She said she thinks there has been an uptick in local sexual misconduct cases because of an increase in awareness and the advent of social media.

Timothy Walter Frey, a former substitute teacher at Pendleton High School and other area schools, communicated with his victim through

Snapchat, a messaging app that deletes video, picture or text messages after they are viewed.

In 2015, he pleaded guilty to three counts of second-degree sexual assault after an investigation revealed Frey had sex with a student multiple times.

Not immersed in social media himself, Pendleton Superintendent Chris Fritsch said it is becoming more of a problem as districts hire younger teachers that are more technologically adept.

"Students are not your friends," he said. "They're not your social circle."

Commission numbers do suggest an increase in sexual misconduct reporting. From 1997 to 2007, the commission records show the organization took action in just two sexual misconduct cases.

Sipe said she has dealt with some sort of professional misconduct case every year since she took the job full-time in 2008, although only a small number of them resulted in any action against the teacher.

Reporting procedures

If a Umatilla staff member has a credible allegation made against them, Sipe said she puts the employee on paid leave before contacting the IMESD or a private investigator to carry out an investigation.

In the Hermiston School District, human resources director David Marshall said the district takes a step back if police are looking into the matter. If authorities end their investigation without charges, Marshall said the district will continue its investigation to make sure no internal policy has been violated.

Sipe said she wants to encourage teachers to report misconduct, but also wants to avoid tarnishing teachers'

reputation if the accusations prove false.

She said she's dealt with investigations where there was proven to be "grossly false allegations." If those false allegations become public, Sipe said it can be harmful to both the staff member and other students who are considering truthful confessions.

Mulvihill echoed Sipe's comments, but added that sometimes there's "smoke" surrounding an investigation but both the teacher and the student deny any misconduct.

And when children do come forward, studies show that fake accusations are rare.

"Statistically, kids don't lie," Mulvihill said.

As an administrator in Longview, Washington, Fritsch said every sexual misconduct case he was involved with came from a student making the report.

Mulvihill said teachers need to get more comfortable with reporting other teachers.

In the meantime, districts continue to try improve. Marshall said new sexual misconduct trainings are often incorporated into human resources meetings and Fritsch said he's considering the implementation of an in-person training for staff on grooming.

Mulvihill said the main message to get across is that districts are trying their best to prevent sexual abuse and harassment.

But each time a teacher is caught in a sexual misconduct situation, Mulvihill said it was a hit to morale. And in a profession that's finding it harder to recruit new people to the field, that can be a big hit to take.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

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