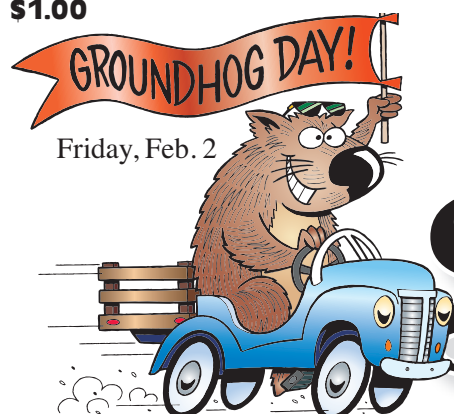


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Friday, Feb. 2

Cottage Grove Sentinel

SOUTH LANE AND DOUGLAS COUNTY'S MOST AWARD-WINNING NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1889



SPORTS

Lion named Athlete of the Week, N. Douglas and Yoncalla play ball. B1

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2018

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They know what you call them

"BAD KIDS"

But they're taking back the title because this is their school. And their story.

On an early September morning, the staff of Al Kennedy High School gathered in a room at the South Lane School District offices. The Sentinel had approached the district in the prior weeks about chronicling the teachers and students at Kennedy to tell the story of alternative education through the lens of those on the ground. District administrators thought it was a great idea. Kennedy staff had questions. Eight educators sat in a room with a newspaper editor and had a conversation. At the end, they'd come to an understanding: The truth is the truth and the kids come first. Over the course of the 2017-2018 school year, the Sentinel will tell the story of these educators and their students as they navigate a location change, funding gaps and the unfortunately true narrative that sometimes working hard isn't enough and an education doesn't fix everything. We'll tell stories of triumph, tragedy and truth as the tribe at Kennedy makes the most with what it has in its continued effort to slingshot students up and over the barriers to progress through understanding, commitment and engagement while acknowledging the reality that some kids won't make it.

PT.III



CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

By Caitlyn May and Zach Silva

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There's nothing special about the room. A quick assessment of it would find it to be nothing more than a closet with chairs, a couch and a giant modem that hums and heats. A space on a campus for an alternative high school that made the move to Delight Valley for just that. Space.

But that's the thing about Kennedy. Everything is more than what it looks like.

Room eight is smaller than the average Kennedy classroom. A six-foot tall man with a decent wingspan could stand in the center and come dangerously close to touching both walls. A meeting of a group of 10 would be uncomfortable; 12 would have the room threatening its seams. And yet, every Monday, Girin Guhu hosts a pack of teenagers in the space and makes more than enough room for their secrets, anxieties, fears, excitements, successes and concerns. It's called group and is part of the larger service package offered by community partner South Lane Mental Health (SLMH), free of charge.

In 2015, U.S. Health and Human Services reported that 30 percent of high school students experienced some depression symptoms and that 18 percent had thought about, attempted or sustained injuries related to suicide.

Mental Health America—a non-profit founded in 1909, dedicated to researching, addressing and lobbying on behalf of mental health care in America—released a report that marked a jump of more than two percentage points in the rate of adolescents with “severe depression.” In 2012, the number was 5.9 percent. In 2015, it was 8.2 percent. Seventy-six percent of those kids, according to the report, did not receive sufficient treatment.

It's a luxury for South Lane School District to provide counselors on site and one that is continuously praised by administrators.

“South Lane School District is very fortunate to have South Lane Mental Health as our partner,” South Lane School Board Chair Alan Baas said. “The work and commitment they have made to be present in our schools has had a tremendous impact on our students. Addressing and supporting mental health is paramount to helping kids succeed not only in school but also in life. This partnership has proven itself vital.”

The evolution from supporting kids to being present in classrooms, roaming the campus and hosting group session was initiated largely by counselor Valeria Clarke who supervises Guhu and helps tailor the school-based program district-wide.

“Al Kennedy was my motivation to start the school-based therapy. I graduated from a school like this on the East coast and the need — my experience of getting services, having somebody available at the school is what stuck in my mind and actually propelled me to

be a social worker and when I had the opportunity to do this, to do it,” Clarke said. “So absolutely, personal experience knowing that it can be of value.”

There's currently a counselor in every South Lane school, a feat managed by spreading resources and adding new blood whenever possible. Guhu, who specializes in high needs youth, made the switch from Cottage Grove High School to Kennedy this year and says the differences between the schools is vast—the kids not so much.

“When I say that four of my students at Cottage Grove are now my students here, nothing changed within a week from when they moved,” he said.

Clarke and Guhu maintain that adolescence is the same rough sea we all have to navigate and that 11th graders face 11th grade problems which are natural markers of development. However, recent data suggests that there's something a little different about 11th graders at Kennedy.

The Oregon Healthy Teen Survey, produced annually, consists of dozens of questions covering physical, emotional and mental health in 8th and 11th graders using sample sizes at every school around the state. In total, 11,895 students were surveyed, 23 of those were Kennedy students.

Please see KENNEDY PG. A6

COMMUNITY

Soccer theft

South Valley Athletics needs help replacing stolen equipment. PAGE A3



GOVERNMENT

Measure 101

Health funding passes by wide margin around the state. PAGE A9

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COFFEE WITH THE EDITOR

Have a news tip? Want to talk about community events? Have a question? Stop by Backstage Bakery.

The LAST THURSDAY of every month from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.

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