

Community Counseling offers COVID stress help

Puts out list of symptoms and stress management

By David Sykes

Community Counseling Solutions, CCS, a four-county mental health organization based in Heppner is offering help with COVID-related mental health and stress issues, director Kimberly Lindsay and Crisis Outreach Team Leader Sarah Brown told the Morrow County commissioners last week. At that meeting Commissioner Don Russell became the 2021 chairman, taking over from Melissa Lindsay who held the position for 2020.

In her report to the commission Lindsay and Brown said CCS wanted to make more people more aware of what Brown called disaster related stress. COVID is a disaster putting stress into their lives, Brown said, and people need to be aware of what that stress could be doing to their mental health. And most of all Brown said she wants the public to know that CCS is there to help through education and connections to counseling professionals.

Brown says pandemics do not have a clear ending or beginning and as a result the impact on a person's life can be hard to recognize. She says some of those symptoms may be starting to show up in people's lives. Symptoms could include:

- Higher or lower energy levels
- Trouble communicating
- Blaming others for everything
- Wanting to be alone
- Excessive worry
- Being easily startled
- Headaches and stomachaches
- Hopelessness
- Sweating or having chills
- Angry outbursts
- Difficulty making decisions
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble sleeping

If people are feeling these symptoms CCS says



The local counseling service is reaching out to people feeling the effects of life under COVID.

there are things a person can do on their own to manage the stress such as:

- Connect with friends safely
- Have a flexible routine
- Eat healthy food and drink water
- Get plenty of rest
- Exercise and spend time outdoors
- Laugh
- Write in a stress journal
- Ask for help when you need it
- Meditate
- Spend quality time with family

For those who want to know more or want assistance the local phone number for the Heppner office of CCS is 541-676-9161. They also want people to help others who may be struggling by encouraging them to get help and understand that children are also struggling and may need extra love and attention.

"We hope people will be made more aware of symptoms of disaster related stress," Brown told the commissioners. "We want them to understand what is happening and be more proactive with a rising mental health issue." She said CCS is also trying to help people make the most of their time if they are at home during COVID. "Since a lot of people are at home and not employed, we want to connect them with programs that focus on self-improvement and make these resources known to a population that hasn't needed them in the past," she said.

Brown said her orga-

nization is doing more outreach to the communities in their four-county area through networking, an art project in the elementary school, brochures, radio interviews and adds, Facebook and in person contact when possible. She said her program is funded through August but if COVID keeps going she hopes for more funding for the program to come. She said they plan on doing more on the long-term effects of COVID stress and pointed out that some communities are hit harder than others.

Vaccination rates 'low' with first responders

In other COVID related news at the Jan. 6 meeting, Commissioner Don Russell said he heard that out of the eligible people in the county who get the vaccine, the number actually taking it was "low." "The governor came out with a list of people who are going to get the vaccine first. The first responder's participation level is low," Russell said. Lindsay said she didn't know about Morrow County but in Grant County where her agency is involved with the vaccines there is "not a high participation rate. We are vaccinating people, but it is less than 50 percent for Grant County," she told the commissioners. "Our participation rate is 43 percent," she said. "Your results are what we are seeing in Morrow County," Russell said. "Some agencies are higher; some are quite a bit lower. Surprisingly low," he added. Russell did not name which of the county agencies has a high participation or which are not getting the vaccine. On why people who are eligible are not getting vaccinated Russell said, "I have my opinion and I'm sure it doesn't agree with other people's. Otherwise, we would all be vaccinated." Lindsay concluded the conversation

saying, "It's an interesting subject to follow."

In other business Lindsay told the commission about a new mental health service CCS is offering for young people six to 11 years old. Her organization is in the process of purchasing a piece of property in Boardman for a 14-bed sub-acute short term residential program for the kids with severe mental health conditions that require residential treatment. It's a program Lindsay has been working on for five years she says because there is nothing for those children on the east side of the state. "If they do need that care they go over to the west side or are shipped out of state for long periods of time. It's really not okay," she emphasized.

commissioners heard from Fair Secretary Ann Jones who said the fairgrounds was able to open for a couple of events in October and November including a series of barrel races that she thought would continue. There was also a wedding reception inside.

With money from the Oregon Cultural Trust Grant the fair was able to do upgrades including new LED lights in the Wilkinson Arena, sheep barn and annex. Two outdated water heaters were replaced, and electrical upgrades were done to both kitchens. Some plumbing work in the outside bathrooms including adding three new toilets and four sinks in the women's and two sinks and two toilets in the men's rooms.

they say. Roach takes the position formerly held by previous Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Sheryll Bates.

In other discussion the commission heard from Katie Imes, Transportation Coordinator of The Loop, the county's transportation department. Imes said The Loop is working with Umatilla County and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) on establishing two new public transportation routes that would transport workers from Hermiston and Umatilla through Irrigon and then to Boardman and the Port of Morrow to go to work at jobs there. The fixed routes would be called the "Port of Morrow-Boardman Circu-



The Confederated Tribes currently operate bus systems and are looking to expand more into Morrow County, Boardman and the Port of Morrow.

Lindsay says CCS received \$900,000 from the state to fund the program and with a verbal agreement on the Boardman property she hopes to break ground on the new youth facility this summer. "We are happy to have it in Morrow County and it will be a great resource," she said. The property is located across from the Umatilla Electric building in Boardman.

In other reports the

Also upgraded with money was the main kitchen which now has a commercial grade kitchen installed.

In other business the commissioners voted to appoint Lori Roach the Heppner Chamber of Commerce Executive Director to the Eastern Oregon Workforce Board (EOWB). In a letter to the commission Roach said she comes from a "long line of entrepreneurs. My grandfather, father, brother and I are all passionate entrepreneurs that really enjoy helping people solve problems," she wrote. She has a history of publishing several business news publications in Oregon. "My passion for small businesses makes me a great candidate for the board position," she said.

According to the workforce website, the role of EOWB "is to develop a strategic plan and set funding priorities for the eight-county eastern Oregon area of Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties. We are your link to the public workforce system. As one of its many functions, the EOWB facilitates partnerships between local businesses with similar workforce needs,"

lar" route and the "Hermiston-Boardman Connector".

The three partners in the project plan on establishing the public bus lines for the workers in these communities but needed a company to develop plans on how to set up and implement the new bus system. Imes reported they have signed an agreement with Kittleson and Associates to begin "analyzing the two potential fixed routes." Also, under the plan, CTUIR would do four things including buy two buses, handle operations, provide bus drivers and provide a backup bus. "Umatilla County and CTUIR have proposed that Morrow County contribute to this project by paying half of the total cost. Morrow County's cost would total \$317,000," Imes told the commissioners.

Commissioner Russell said he liked that Kittleson was involved in planning the new fixed bus routes as he has seen them work before. "They have done quite a bit of transportation planning in the region," he said. The transportation planning company has 26 offices across the United States including Bend and Portland in Oregon.

Spiritually Speaking

Encountering Christ every day in our lives

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

After Christmas, the Church is gradually moving on to the Ordinary Sunday celebrations. In the second Sunday of the liturgical year, the theme can be the encounter with the Lord and its consequences. The readings bring this idea forward: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening," and the Lord tells the disciples who asked him, "Where are you staying?" to "Come, and you will see." These phrases remind us that we are here to listen to God. And the disciples accepted His invitation and had a wonderful encounter with Him after which their lives were never the same again. So much of our daily lives entail doing ordinary things that need to get done, living can easily become a series of just doing same things unless we see it differently. Can a daily task open the way to encounter God? The Lord is inviting all of us.

The book of First Samuel (3: 3-10) describes the call of boy Samuel by the Lord. I was really struck by the starting verses of that chapter: "In those days it was rare for Yahweh to speak; and visions were uncommon" (3:1). The time is very apt for us, to witness the situation of the time of the call to Samuel - unfamiliarity with God and God's Word. Let it not happen to our generation. The encounter of God with Samuel is a reflection of a god-with-man-relationship at its best. God calls boy Samuel when he sleeps in the temple. God prepares with care the future judge and prophet. He is remembered for being Israel's kingmaker and king breaker; he came as a result of God's answer to Hannah's fervent prayer for a child. Samuel showed that those whom God finds faithful in small things will be trusted with greater things. He grew up assisting the high priest (Eli) in the tabernacle until God directed him to other responsibilities. God was able to use Samuel because he was genuinely dedicated to God. Samuel moved ahead because he was listening to God's directions.

We are going through a difficult time at the moment with this pandemic and its menace, a time closing down of our places of worship. Even in some places the churches are still closed. That reminded me to question: Did this pandemic situation bring us little closer to God, as the baby Samuel was always at the service of God? I was reminded of another scripture: "If I send pestilences and epidemics among my people, if my people who bear my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my presence and turn from their wicked ways, then I will listen from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their country" (2 Chron. 7:14). The pandemic and its lockdowns should

have been time for us to come closer to God. Every home should have become an altar for Christ.

The Gospel of John (1:35-42) describes an encounter of Christ by disciples of John and their response to the encounter. In every encounter the Lord expects something from us, "Come and you will see." As He invited the disciples of John, He invites every one of us every day. How do we respond to his invitation? John the Baptist revealed the Messiah to the world, "Behold, the lamb of God." The two disciples follow Christ as the fruit of John's witnessing.

Following can be understood in two ways: a) go behind a person, just following wherever he or she goes, or b) imitate the person's life. Jesus invited the first two disciples for this second way. Here we see that the Lord is inviting them to be with Him. In the Gospel of Mark, we see it very well when He called His disciples to be with Him and to learn from Him, to assimilate the spirit of the Master and to be sent out as healers and exorcists.

The discipleship has its fullness when the trained disciples bring somebody else to the Master; then we can say he/she is a fully trained disciple. We see that Andrew goes to his brother Simon Peter and describes to him the Messiah and convinces him about Christ and brings him to Christ. Discipleship urges everyone to talk to someone else and convince them about the Messiah and lead them to Christ, as Andrew has done with this brother Simon. In Christ, everyone gets a new name, nature and individuality. Are you ready for it? To be called to Christ and be reformed by Him?

Pope Francis says, "The encounter with Jesus Christ takes place in our daily lives, in the direct contact of prayer, in the wise discernment of the signs of the times and in our brothers and sisters." Let us examine how often we listen to the Messiah in our life. Are we in any way attracted by Him as the first disciples were attracted? The Lord who called the first disciples still continues to call all of us every day. It is amazing what happens when we seek God and encounter Him in the everyday tasks of life. It changes our attitude... it changes us. We do things differently.



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

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