



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

From left, Carolina Delgado, Amy Ashton-Williams, Luis Ibarra and Kathleen Pollard of the Oregon Washington Health Network pose for a photo Oct. 6, 2021, in the network's new drop-in peer center in Hermiston.

Openings:

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with OWhN, as she is trying to reduce emergency department visits by redirecting people to the peer centers, where they are more properly served.

Shannon Carslay, recovery mentor, works out of the Pendleton center. In the past month, working in Pendleton, he has been able to help people by relating to addicted individuals. By sharing his own story, he gets them to open up about their situations. Then, he finds help for them.

"I've been through a lot of what our clients have been through," he said. And he offers emotional support, while also directing clients to medical, psychological and even financial aid.

Valentin Palomares, recovery mentor, is working out of the Milton-Freewater center. He has spent the past month in training, studying to become certified and then shadowing other mentors.

"I'm really excited about this," Palomares said. "I, myself, have not only dealt with drug and alcohol, but with other issues."

He said he thinks people like him have been

LOCATIONS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

The Hermiston Center is at 165 S.W. Third St., Hermiston. The Pendleton Center is at 200 S.E. Hailey Ave., Suite 105/106, Pendleton.

The Milton Center is at 410 N. Main St., Milton-Freewater. Hours of operation for Hermiston and Milton-Freewater centers are Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Pendleton center is open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

People may walk in and receive help during these hours, without paying a fee and without notice. Once the centers become more established in the community, hours will be extended, managers said.

neglected, "not by the city, but by the culture." He said Hispanic people find it difficult to ask for help and he hopes, as a Hispanic man, he can bring services to others without compromising their place in their culture.

Another peer mentor, Mariah Wright, also shares her experiences to help other struggling addicts. She said she is a recovering addict and has been "in and out of addiction for 10 years." She was homeless for five years. For three of those years, she was homeless with her daughter.

"It was really hard," she said. "For the longest time, I couldn't put anything before the drugs. I always put the drugs first. So I understand the trouble; I understand how hard the drugs can be."

Wright went to prison, and that is where she changed her life. Released from prison, she is now dedicated to helping others in Umatilla County.

"This is a passion for me," she said. "I want people to get the experience with recovery that I have."

She is the niece of East Oregonian news editor Phil Wright.

Kori Hibbard, a home visiting nurse with the Umatilla County Nurse-Family Partnership program, also attended the event.

"I feel this is going to be a great resource for the clients I serve," she said. "I serve first-time moms and their babies, and I'm with them until their baby turns two. Some of my moms struggle with addiction and have a history of addiction."

Teens:

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enjoys the connection she feels to her friends and family, but said she feels worse about herself while watching attractive people on TikTok and other platforms.

Montez lamented that staying on social media is "just a thing that kids do nowadays." Other students don't typically talk about how the apps are affecting their mental health. She said she thinks she could quit if she wanted to, but it would be difficult. That's where all her friends are.

"I would really love and enjoy life without social media," she said.

Maddie Stuvland, a counselor at Pendleton High School who meets with the school's junior and freshman class, said social media has increasingly become a regular part of daily discussions with the students she sees. She said her students often are surprised when she points out social media might be having a negative effect on their mental well-being.

"I think they're a bit shocked," she said. "They're not aware that it's affecting their mental health. There really isn't anything out there that informs young girls or young boys about the impact it has."

They express feelings of inferiority when viewing platforms such as Instagram, where they compare themselves through what she calls "a highlight reel." She said high usage of social media platforms are driving some students to stay up later which, in turn, impacts their mental health and education.

"You're always posting things that you're either accomplishing or things that you're proud of and there are filters and you always have a smile on your face," she said. "And it's not realistic. They don't see any of the hardship or difficulty."

Stuvland said she sees more teens acknowledging

the negative effects of social media today. But the platforms remain too good to be true, explaining that among many influencers and bloggers, "there's not an image or post that's not perfect."

"The negative effects are outweighing the positive effects, at least in teens," said Dee Lorence, a counselor at Umatilla High School, who said the apps are causing her students to experience depression, anxiety and isolation. "Keeping it inside, or keeping it to ourselves, is not helping in any situation. If we're concerned about something, we must find someone we know and trust and will give good advice."

Nick Allen is a professor of clinical psychology and the director of the Center for Digital Health at the University of Oregon. For years, he studied the mental health of young people.

"When you look at mental health across the lifespan, you see that this period from 12 to 24, that's the period where the vast majority of people are going to have mental health difficulties," he said. "That's when it emerges. It's the most critical time in life for understanding prevention and early intervention for mental health problems."

Recently, the way social media impacts teenage mental health has entered the forefront of Allen's research.

The arrival of social media enabled kids to enter entire worlds of largely uncensored information without parental oversight, he said. For some, those platforms promoted growth and gratification. They helped well-off teens gain friends and notoriety. They provided marginalized young people a way to connect with communities they never could before.

But for some vulnerable students, cyberbullying, anxiety, depression, fear of missing out — or FOMO — and an endless flood of information left them feeling overwhelmed, he said.

"It's a real mix," Allen said.

There are multiple factors that influence the impact social media has on mental health, none of which are new, Allen said. Using the apps during the day is typically less harmful overall than at night, he said. Active usage like posting things is better than passive usage, or scrolling.

But what is lacking, he said, is any sort of disclaimer warning users about the risk. Much like the automobile industry, he said social media companies need to do a better job of making people aware of the possible harm that could come from extended use of the platforms.

"Over time, there's been regulation, there's been safety measures, and cars are much safer than they used to be," he said. "I think social media is going to be a very similar story ... Initially, the companies don't want to admit it. But when they do admit it and the government starts putting proper regulations and safety features, then we'll be in a better place and we'll be able to enjoy the benefits of social media and minimize the risk."

Lucas, the 16-year-old student from Hermiston, said she wants to encourage more people to talk about their mental health and the effects social media have on it. A self-described mental health advocate, she said she believes little can be done to change the platforms themselves. But what she can help change, she said, is the relationships her peers have to social media.

"This is equally good and equally horrible," Lucas said of social media. "The only way to solve the issues would be to get rid of the mean people, get rid of people who are bad, get rid of insecurity. But that's impossible. I don't think there are changes that can be made. This will be the way this is until there's another cultural shift."



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