

COMMENT

When did silver become the medal of shame?

Every life saved is an opportunity for change

Drug-overdose prevention site is making a difference in first weeks of operation

DON EVANS

I attended a memorial service at Our Place recently for a man I had come to know for far too brief a time.

The outpouring of love, affection and sadness over his passing would come as a surprise only to those who didn't know him. Because, while he was part of the family at Our Place, to the outside world, he was labelled something far different.

Having lived on the streets, this imposing but gentle man wore his share of demons, the deadliest of which is addiction.

He died too young, and sadly, he's not alone.

There is a drug-overdose crisis in our community that is claiming

far too many lives, and its impact rains down like hammer blows.

Death is contagious, for it follows sorrow and pain as loyally as a dog follows its master. Most of the people who suffer from addiction use drugs to mask a litany of trauma and abuse in their lives. When that trauma is compounded by the loss of a friend or loved one, it becomes easier to be more reckless with their own lives.

With training, skill and compassion, our staff is saving lives every day. This isn't the job they originally envisioned for themselves, but this is the reality we face due to the arrival of fentanyl, a drug that is 100 times stronger than morphine. Not only have our staff members become first responders, but they are respond-

ing to people in distress with whom they often have a close relationship.

It is heartbreaking to lose a member of your family, and at Our Place, everyone is family.

This year, we pledge to fight back. We can't stand by and watch people die — that's simply not who we are. Working in co-operation with Island Health, our first step was to open an overdose-prevention site in the courtyard of our facility at 919 Pandora Ave.

In its first few weeks of operation, the converted cargo container is already making a difference. With a full-time paramedic on site, we can respond to an opioid overdose immediately and save that person's life. But beyond this essential medical service, we are also experiencing more open dialogue with a population that tends to shut itself away from our community's angry glare, from the people who look at addiction as

criminal, rather than a health issue.

Our Place isn't blameless in this either. In order to maintain a sanctuary for all people experiencing homelessness, we don't allow drug use inside our facility. This means that people caught injecting drugs in our washrooms are asked to leave the premises. Repeat offences can also lead to a ban.

Unfortunately, this policy shifts the problem to the streets and the parks, to the doorways and parking lots.

It also means that when people need help with their addiction, Our Place isn't always seen as a place they can turn to.

But our temporary overdose prevention site is changing that. We still don't allow drug use inside our building, but by opening a place of dignity in response to this overdose crisis, our outreach workers are having meaningful dialogue with this incredibly vulnerable and

stigmatized population.

I wish I could tell you that the work we are doing is a perfect answer to addiction, but it's not. It's an emergency response to a health crisis. The burden of real and substantive change needs to rest on broader shoulders than a local charity.

However, every discussion and every life saved from overdose is another opportunity for change, another chance to offer a helping hand and transform a life.

If we simply turned our backs, what would that say about us?

I want to thank every one of you for your prayers and support as Our Place continues its task of keeping people safe and offering a sanctuary free of judgment and scorn.

We couldn't be the welcoming place we strive to be without you.

Don Evans is executive director of Our Place Society.

LETTERS

Second interview would aid in hiring of teachers

Re: "Schools face big challenge in hiring teachers," column, Jan. 10.

Geoff Johnson highlights some of the shortcomings of the hiring process in the Greater Victoria School District.

A teacher wishing to be hired in Victoria applies and, based on their resumé and qualifications, might or might not be selected for an interview. The interview is conducted by a couple of Victoria principals, who rate the interviewee, turn in their findings and results of background checks to the district's human-resources department, which either hires the candidate or not. If a candidate is hired, they immediately begin accumulating seniority as a teacher on call and eventually will have enough seniority to bid for a permanent position.

The difficulty is this: The interview process to get on the teacher-on-call list is the only time a teacher can easily be deemed unsuitable by the district. As Johnson points out, many candidates have little experience on which to base such an important decision. What would make more sense would be to have a second interview before a teacher gets permanently hired and the right for the district to reject a candidate as a permanent employee at this point. The interview could take place when a teacher has enough accumulated time as a teacher-on-call to be the senior candidate for a continuing position. This experience would give the interview team a solid basis for making their decision.

It would benefit the district, but it would also help teacher-on-call applicants, as the interview team could afford to be less draconian in rejecting candidates who did not have a stellar initial interview.

*Tom Thorson
Recently retired principal
Victoria*

Adding up legal costs is not that difficult

Re: "Schools face big challenge in hiring teachers," column, Jan. 10.

Geoff Johnson asks: "What was the cost of 15 years of legal proceedings to the public purse? Finance Minister Mike De Jong is on record saying he does not know how much the court cases have cost taxpayers. However, he added, he wouldn't dispute the Supreme Court case alone is 'maybe in excess of \$1 million.'"

Here is some sage advice to the finance minister. First, you take a piece of foolscap and starting somewhere back in 2002, you write all the amounts that were paid in legal costs, in a list format, that were debited from public accounts for this cause, to the present date. Then with the help of a calculator or adding machine, enter each of these items with a plus sign, and lo and behold, a total should appear.

That sir, is the amount that was stolen from the taxpayers. I also recommend doing this in red ink, because it is what we bleed.

Is there anything else you need a hand with? I'm pretty good at math.

*Tom Romanuk
Courtenay*

Effective education goes beyond multiple-choice

Re: "Schools must understand new world," column, Jan. 5.

Geoff Johnson is spot on. In the mid-1990s, the school board where I was employed as a principal required all schools to develop a vision statement for their use of new technologies. How prescient of my staff to



The state of public education has attracted our readers' attention. Two commented on the ramifications of the recent Supreme Court of Canada judgment, while another looked at education and modern technology. TIMES COLONIST

come up with the following statement:

"In a democratic and technologically driven society, learners are faced with ever-increasing amounts of information about which they must make moral and informed decisions. At our school, there will be an emphasis on developing autonomous, self-motivated learners who can independently utilize many forms of learning resources (including technologies) so that they have the skills and strategies to succeed in an ever-changing society. Learners need to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers, able to deal with multiple perspectives in a variety of situations."

That was 20 years ago. What has happened that instead we're getting fake news and post-truth?

Perhaps because schools are publicly rated and judged according to standardized test score results. Shame on us for buying into the notion that effective education is about the results of multiple-choice tests that measure memorization and rote learning, and reflect the socioeconomic standing of parents.

Engaging students in higher-order thinking is not easy work, but essential to a well-informed citizenry.

Let's start supporting our teachers by understanding they are capable of and should be accountable for so much more than standardized test scores.

*Janice Davis
Oak Bay*

Bills still coming in for royal visit

Re: "Happy to pay the costs of royal visit," letter, Jan. 7.

I disagree with the letter-writer's support for the royal-visit expenses. This is just the tip of the iceberg; we have yet to see the amount of federal, provincial and municipal tax dollars spent on the visit.

I have no doubt the royals are a lovely couple, but to pay for them to visit simply because of who their parents are is not my idea of a great way to spend tax dollars. The CEO he refers to might not be "worth \$100 million," however, he earned that job and has some credentials besides parents to garner that wage.

I do not think José Bautista, formerly of the Blue Jays, is worth his salary, either, but for different reasons. However, both he and the CEO have earned their salaries based on market forces, not lineage.

And here I thought feudalism was long gone, but it appears the peasants are still paying tribute to the royals.

*Glenn White
Shawnigan Lake*

Furlong episode at UBC has lessons for us all

Re: "Furlong returns as UBC speaker," Jan. 10.

The University of British Columbia, my alma mater (1975), has reconsidered and will allow John Furlong on campus Feb. 28 to make a fundraising presentation at its 18th annual ZLC Millennium Scholarship Breakfast for the benefit of aspiring student athletes.

It is also reported that the initial decision refusing him access was in reaction to a protest opposing his acceptability because, in recent years, it had been alleged that elsewhere, 40 years ago as a physical education teacher, he had used physically abusive teaching methods. The accusations have not been proved to be true.

UBC's decision-making record has been under question on some issues in recent times. The concern has been whether it has been overly influenced by the political attractiveness of popular, though necessary, causes.

Although the right to oppose should be well protected and popular attention to the necessary causes can well be deserved, protecting the innocent and the basic standards of democratic process by not supporting well-intentioned errors should be applied as well.

Furlong's record of exceptional public contribution is not blemished. Apparently, it is the misuse of unproven accusations that might have not withstood the test of public scrutiny.

*Pat Munroe
Cobble Hill*

It's not that easy to buy ammunition

Re: "Ban on ammunition would boost security," letter, Jan. 10.

As a Victoria resident and long-time firearms owner I take issue with the tone and substance of this letter.

I have flown out of numerous airports around the country, including Victoria International, often with both firearms and ammunition in my checked bags. The process as it stands is safe, efficient and fair.

One incident should not wreck it for everyone else. Better mental-health services would have done wonders to prevent this tragedy.

The idea that ammunition can be brought in "a grocery store" is simply not true. Ammunition in the kind, quantity and price that a user needs is often a long and

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painstaking search, as any firearms owner will attest.

Finally, the slur against Americans is uncalled for. As a Canadian member of the National Rifle Association, I interact with American gun owners on a regular basis. I find them to be polite, kind and knowledgeable individuals. More so than some people I have met in this city from time to time.

*Andrew Tyler
Victoria*

Final game was best of junior hockey

Re: "Oh no, Canada," Jan. 6.

I was so saddened by the image of the World Junior Hockey team that graced the front page of your newspaper.

Anyone who followed the tournament from start to finish would have been so proud of our Canadian team.

The final game was the best hockey played by the juniors ever, and the game was won by one shot in the shootout. What does this say to our youth?

Shame on you for promoting: "All that counts is the win and not the effort." A big step backward for your newspaper's sports reporting.

*Linda Danielson
Sooke*

Silver medal is worth celebrating

Re: "Oh no, Canada," Jan. 6.

I object to the headline on Friday's front page. Please, let's have no more of this negativity.

When did silver become the medal of shame? Hint: Salt Lake City Olympics, where the "Just do it" brand coined one of the most offensive ad campaigns in sport: "Second place is for losers." That earworm, the antithesis of sportsmanship, buried itself in the collective subconscious. Silver has been tainted ever since.

I say we "just undo it." Now. Yes, it always hurts not to make gold. Still, silver is nothing to sniff at. Silver in a close match with a tough rival is something to celebrate.

Let's stand behind our splendid team. In headlines everywhere, let them know. After their natural disappointment they need our collective encouragement to savour their amazing achievement.

O Yes! Canada.

*Lynda Grace Philippsen
Victoria*