

**In My View** (appeared in the *Bend Bulletin*, April 2007)  
by Barbara Stoefer – mother of a drug addict

I've read with interest The Bulletin's recent front page articles regarding the matrixing problem at the jail. My heart breaks for the families of these young people whose lives have spun so out of control, and shudder at the realization my own daughter could have been featured on such a cover story.

Anna, now 23, was a meth addict living on the street for over a year. Those 12 months were an awful time for our family, but I'm happy to report that Anna went to treatment 10 months ago and she is doing well in her recovery. I am convinced that what helped to get her there were consequences – legal consequences. She decided that her fourth stay in jail would be the last and she finally asked for our help. We were ready! After a morning meeting with Judge Forte last May, we picked Anna up at the jail and drove directly to the airport. She spent the next 6 months in treatment in Southern California. Now back in Bend, Anna is working full-time and is a regular at four NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings per week. It's been a miracle to get our daughter back, and in some ways she's better than ever. An addict in recovery is a beautiful thing. While it is still one-day-at-a-time, we are most hopeful.

I know, as do others with addicted loved ones, that the consequence of incarceration is important. Most of us in the Meth Friends and Family Support Group (part of the Meth Action Coalition) can point to jail time as a key ingredient in getting our kids to treatment. Not only is the punitive part of jail important, but “clean” time is essential for them to regain enough cognition to consider their dire circumstances. The matrixing system interferes with this. Of her four incarcerations, Anna was matrixed the first three times. When we could plan for her last release, a seamless transition to treatment became possible.

Not only is jail expansion needed so offenders can serve a full sentence, but we also need treatment in the jail as a first line of defense. Our county is ill-equipped to handle this massive addiction problem and our treatment capabilities are insufficient for the numbers involved. My husband and I were fortunate to have the financial resources for extended inpatient treatment for Anna, as well as a single-minded determination to do whatever it took to intervene for her. Unfortunately, most addicts can't afford *any* kind of treatment and many have lost their family support system along the way.

I see jail as the place to start treatment. As a captive audience with a period of forced sobriety, it is my opinion that every inmate with addiction issues (which I understand to be about 85%) should be exposed to treatment ideology and *daily* 12-step meetings. We need more people like Nancy Wolf providing mental health care, as well as the services of addiction treatment specialists and social workers. For those who qualify, transition to an intensive residential inpatient treatment program, possibly housed within the jail, will help maximize the chances of recovery for many.

I realize many addicts will begin “using” again upon release. All can't be saved. However, over time and with repeated incarcerations, and repeated exposure to a program, I believe many will eventually embrace the help. These are sick, suffering human beings who need to be shown the way out. If left to hit the proverbial “bottom” on their own, many will not bounce.

This of course costs money and, understandably, most citizens don't have a heart for meth addicts. But when we connect the dots, the realization comes that the *disease of addiction* is the genesis of most of the crime here. Meth addiction breeds criminal behavior – it's the very nature of the beast. In

order to effectively fight the crime, we need to also fight the addiction. Otherwise, our jail is simply a bulging human warehouse with a revolving door.

It's a funny thing: I used to judge addicts as being the dregs of society. Now that the problem has been under my own roof, I've seen it with new eyes. Our family is pretty much the all-American "Cleaver's" and Anna, with brains, talent and beauty, most would have described her as "the full package." If meth addiction can happen to us, it can happen to anyone.

I'd like to close with mention that I have Anna's permission, and that of our son, to speak of her and our family so publicly. As Anna says, "my name and mug shot have already been in the news, so what have we got to lose?! Maybe we can help somebody."

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