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Social Justice Issue Paper

Imagine a society where people did not have to suffer with the struggle of substance abuse; imagine a world where people were able to get help for their problems without having to worry about the bills and debt they would have to pay afterwards. Less than one in every five people who suffer from substance abuse, never get the treatment they need due to the high cost of treatment facilities and other personal reasons. The issue of substance abuse and use is a major public health issue worldwide. This paper will be highlighting how important the awareness of this epidemic is. This paper will also highlight three different areas pertaining to substance abuse and treatment facilities, these areas include; the industry and money involved, the people and economy that suffer from the effects of substance abuse, and how the issue of substance abuse and use can be solved within our society.

The industry of substance abuse and use is mostly powered by the treatment facilities and the federal/state budget put forward. Many people within this industry make money off the substances sold and treated; this includes pharmaceutical companies, drug smugglers, and sometimes even the patients themselves. One of the biggest foundations within the five boroughs of New York City is OASAS. OASAS is known as the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. OASAS helps fund up to 1500 treatment services and facilities around the country. According to an interview with the commissioner of OASAS in 2010, published in the Journal of Addictions Nursing, OASAS planned to “improve the lives of all New Yorkers by leading a primer system of addiction services through prevention, treatment, recovery.” OASAS planned to hire nurses who had a significant amount of expertise in order to help within their inpatient facilities. With this five-year plan, OASAS’ main goal was to increase access into their programs and be able to help patients sustain their recovery. However, according to a personal conversation with a family member of mine, OASAS purposefully charges substance users/abusers who have Medicaid and other private health insurances because they are able to make more money through this process. This specific method of purposefully overcharging patients is also discussed in an article published last year in the *Reading Eagle,* Ford Turner states*,* “Those people-specifically, those who need “live in” treatment but are without private insurance, Medicaid coverage or sufficient money of their own—are now being steered into a lesser level of treatment called “intensive outpatient.” People who are suffering from a substance abuse problem are expected to fund their own treatment or have a specific form of health insurance that must pay for their inpatient treatment. In a 2010 Survey of treatment facilities and services in New York, done by the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*. It was found that New York has a total of one thousand treatment services, of the one thousand only seven hundred and two are non-profit facilities and one hundred fifty two are for-profit facilities. Eighty five percent of these facilities focus on only treating substance abuse while, ten percent of these facilities focus on both mental health and substance abuse issues and only fourteen percent of these facilities treat opioid issues. A total of eighty four percent of clients who are in treatment are under the age of eighteen, leaving a mere two percent of the facilities’ population over the age of eighteen. Now, imagine more than half of those clients being cut from their treatment program because the government does not pass a budget increase and cuts those whose health insurance cannot fund their treatment services. People are going to suffer, they are going relapse and only add to their mental health and substance abuse issues. According to the National Council for Behavioral Health website, the federal budget for selected substance abuse facilities in 2014 was four hundred-eighty three point seven hundred forty four million which was reduced by one point one hundred-seventy three million dollars in 2015.

In the same survey mentioned in the previous paragraph it was found that more than ninety three percent of New York’s treatment facilities only accept cash or self-payment while, seventy two percent only accept private healthcare, and forty three percent accept Medicaid. According to the National Council for Behavioral Health website, the federal budget for selected substance abuse facilities in 2014 was four hundred-eighty three point seven hundred forty four million which was reduced by one point one hundred-seventy three million dollars in 2015. Even if the budget is reduced by a small fraction it still hurts thousands of people who are suffering from a substance abuse problem. Suffering from a substance abuse problem does not only affect the user, it affects their family, their friends, their line of work, and every other aspect of their life. According to an article by Karen S. Peterson, teens are affected by three particular factors which lead them to substance use, “High stress levels, frequent boredom, and too much money.” Parents are urged to talk to their teens about substances and alcohol because the parents could be blindly enabling their teens’ addictions. However, Substance abuse also affects the view of a particular community especially, if a majority of users are under aged. In an article by the children’s aid society, it is brought to attention that under aged substance users typically “become more hostile and their decision making becomes greatly impaired…teens usually start fights, mix alcohol and substances risking death, set poor examples for other youth, and cause accidents from poor judgment while under the influence.” However, David Brewster argues in his article “The Common Good of Drug Usage,” that using substances has a positive effect in the cultural good. Brewster states that “The taking of drugs will deterministically lead to passivity…” He also suggest that drugs will lead to a much “broader goal of common happiness.” Brewster suggests that cannabis is one of the drugs will surely lead to a common goal of happiness while others believe that it can cause danger such as impaired driving and working skills. This concept leads back to the money issues with substance abusers. If cannabis were to actually be legalized and the alcohol drinking age lowered, there would be no doubt that more teenagers would be open about their addictions. However this would also lead into less money for people who need treatment, less money for education, and ultimately more money for pharmaceutical companies, liquor stores, and cannabis shops. Our society would surely have a massive downfall in areas of positivity and prevention of particular substance programs. There seems to be no possible way to control substance abuse or use among teens.

There have been many solutions proposed in order to help stop substance abuse and use such as raising awareness at early ages, prescriptions being sent directly to a patient’s pharmacy, hopeful and positive thinking, and a multitude of many other alternatives. I believe that instead of the solutions already proposed family members and friends should be open to someone who using or abusing a particular substance. They should ask the user what their reasons are, how would they like to get help, what would be the best way for them. I believe that schools should have more programs that encourage staying away from substances, there should be a higher budget for these prevention programs and services. We should be open to teens about the effects of substances, we should be stricter with controlled substances such as opioids, Percocet’s, Xanax. Doctors should be taking classes to know when a patient is just lying to get a drug prescribed because many people lie about having anxiety or depression just to get pills that they can sell. There should be more treatment facilities in rural and urban areas. Substance abuse should be taken more seriously and not swept under the rug because it does not seem like a fit priority.

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