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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. An estimated 2.5 million New Yorkers suffer from some form of substance abuse while, 23.5 million Americans suffer from substance abuse. The use of technology only makes selling and obtaining substances much easier than in the past, which is accelerating the rate of teenagers who form a substance abuse habit. This paper will be highlighting how important the awareness of this epidemic is. This paper will highlight three key areas pertaining to substance abuse and treatment facilities, these areas include; the industry and money involved, how the people and community 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 and treatment facilities. 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 seem to be increasing access into their programs and being able to help patients sustain their recovery. So why is there such a large gap between people who suffer from substance abuse compared to those who are actually able to get help. It is estimated that 90% of people who suffer from a substance abuse problem don’t get help, leaving only 10% of people who actually do get help. According to a personal conversation with a family member of mine, she believes that OASAS purposefully overcharge substance users and abusers who have Medicaid and other private health insurances because they are able to make more money through this process. This is also discussed in the article, “State Budget Impasse Hurting Substance Abuse Treatment Programs” 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, which leads to users to feel out casted, alone, and not worthy of treatment, leading to larger issue with the substances they are abusing from. In a 2010 Survey of treatment facilities and services in New York, done by the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*(SAMHSA) it was found that New York has a total of one thousand treatment services, of the one thousand only 702 are non-profit facilities and 152 are for-profit facilities. 85% of these facilities focus on only treating substance abuse while, 10% of these facilities focus on both mental health and substance abuse issues and only 14% of these facilities treat opioid issues. Within these treatment facilities, a total of 84% of clients who are in treatment are under the age of eighteen, leaving less than 10% of the facilities’ population over the age of eighteen. These numbers are an astonishing factor of our society.

According to the National Council for Behavioral Health website, the federal budget for selected substance abuse facilities in 2014 was 483.744 million dollars, which was then reduced by 1.173 million dollars in 2015. According to the same article, the government only spends a mere 70% of that budget in substance abuse prevention programs and treatment facilities. How could it be that still so many people suffer form this crippling issue when the government and treatment facilities are sitting on 30% of a 482 million dollar budget that is supposed to serve the needs of our society? The survey by SAMHSA displays that more than 93% of New York’s treatment facilities only accept cash or self-payment while, 72% only accept private healthcare, and 43% accept Medicaid. The survey also displayed that less than 15% of treatment facilities accept patients regardless of whether they can pay or not so, the big question is how are 702 facilities non-profit? How are they serving the needs of a society when they are discriminating against those who cannot afford to pay for substance abuse treatment? Even if a substance abuser realizes that they need help, they cannot actually get help unless they have the correct amount of money. This not only affects the user, it also affects their family, their friends, their line of work, their education, and every other aspect of their life. Not being able to get the correct help puts stress on the substance abusers’ family especially if the user is under the age of 18. Substance abuse also affects the community that the user lives in. According to The Children’s Aid Society, 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.” This has been proven correct through all of the news stories in the media about drunk driving accidents and death from particular substances. However, David Brewster argues in his article “The Common Good of Drug Usage,” that using substances has a positive effect in the cultural and common 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 that will surely lead to a common goal of happiness which is greatly supported amongst teens. While others believe that it can cause danger such as impaired driving and especially poor judgement which leads to acts of sexual abuse and violence. The concept of drugs allowing a community to reach a common happiness 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 not put a stop to their stress or worries and most teens do not realize that until something tragic occurs. Allowing the use of particular substances and a lower drinking age would lead into less money for people who need treatment, less money for education, and ultimately more money for pharmaceutical companies, liquor stores, cannabis shops, and any place that substances can be sold. Our society would surely have a massive downfall in areas of positivity and prevention of particular substance programs.

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 is 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. People should be open to teens about the effects of substances, we should be stricter with controlled substances such as opioids, Percocet’s, Xanax because they are easier to get a hold of especially, with the us of technology. Doctors should be taking classes or courses 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. We should be creating a world where Substance abuse is taken more seriously and not swept under the rug because it does not seem like a fit priority. We should be creating a world where treatment facilities don’t have to charge for people to get help. We should be creating a world that is safer and contains much more communication between the issues of everyday people, the government, and substance prevention and treatment services.

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