



April 17, 2013
HB 2392 – Work Session

Good afternoon Chairperson and members of the committee,

Thank you for taking the time to hear us today. My name is Abigail Wells and I am a PreventNet Site Coordinator for Northwest Family Services at Rex Putnam High School. I am here today representing the PreventNet Program through Clackamas County Children, Youth & Families Division.

My role is one of numerous prevention specialists' that work around Clackamas County in surrounding elementary, middle, and high schools. One of my responsibilities is to work with high-risk, or what we call "core" youth. These are students that qualify through the JCP tool for our services. We work with youth that surround themselves with poor peer groups, have D&A issues, have chaotic home lives, and are in danger of dropping out, getting pregnant at a young age, getting involved in gangs or drug activity, and things of this sort. The idea, is that we work with them before they are in the juvenile system, and therefore at a pivotal time where creating a positive connection with a mentor and adult figure may be essential to their being successful. The field of prevention is science based and an area of work that is proven to be effective.

I am convinced that prevention is the way to go when working with youth, and therefore believe that the sooner we can reach these students and get them the help they need, rather it be mental health resources, parenting classes for their families, leadership and/or volunteer opportunities, DHS involvement, basic food & clothing needs, after-school and/or summer programming to keep them engaged during the vital times when they are out of school and therefore more likely to make negative choices, and any other needed resources.

I have worked at Rex Putnam with 25-28 "core" youth for the past 3 years. I have had the opportunity to work with about 15 of these youth for the entire 3 years, and have seen a drastic difference in many of them. In fact, last year we had a 98% graduation rate for the students we had on our case load.

One story I would like to tell you today is about a high-risk Latino student who I began working with his sophomore year when he was failing out of ALL of his classes. After many meetings, we had a breakthrough and he admitted that he regularly smoked marijuana and told me his father was an alcoholic and he often used the drug to not have to deal with his home life. We set a goal to slow down his marijuana use to only a few times a week, because he was convinced it didn't affect him, and I wanted him to see if on the days he didn't smoke, he was more motivated. He ended up starting to see the difference on the days he didn't smoke. He actually made it to school on time (which he never used

to do) and did work in class on these days. This student started checking in with me almost every other day and after about a month, came to me and told me he decided he was going to try to just stop over the summer. He ended up quitting, and his grades started to improve. Over the summer, I set him up with NWFS's CareerFit program where he was able to secure a job. His confidence began to go up, as well as his motivation. It also kept him busy and away from home where it wasn't always the healthiest environment for him. By his senior year, this student was on track to graduate, still working after-school and on weekends, and drug free. His teachers saw a completely different student, he was more talkative and friendly, and definitely worked harder in his classes.

This year, we continue to meet, and I will be there as he walks with his class and accepts his diploma in June! We have also been working on getting him enrolled at CCC, a goal that he set, and is excited about since he didn't think he was ever going to go to college, it was not something his family or even he had ever figured would be an option.

If the state decided to cut funding for programs such as PreventNet, students all over the county, just like him will be given a disservice. They depend on us. Classrooms are overflowing, counselors don't have time to do anything except scheduling, parents are often too busy with work, or preoccupied with their own problems to help their children. We are often the lifeline that allows these students to grow to their potential. I really hope you take this into consideration when making plans for our youth's future.

Thank you.

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