

My name is Melissa Jones and I am a Jackson County resident, specifically Medford. I'm a 43 year old single mom and a small business owner. I also identify as an alcoholic. I struggled with problematic drinking which turned into full blown alcoholism after my son was born 16 years ago to manage postpartum depression and an anxiety/panic disorder. Many times I tried to give up alcohol and many times I failed. Not because I didn't want to quit, but because I couldn't quit. I asked for help many times and many times help was not available due to lack of money, insurance, mental health services and or family/financial support. I've had a DUII, I've been arrested, I've been to jail. None of those things deterred my disease. In fact those things drove me deeper into shame, despair, and the only coping mechanism I'd ever known: alcohol. One summer during a horrible fire season, a few years ago, I once again asked for help from a family member who offered to take me into the ER to get emergency medical assistance around my alcoholism. My body was at that point, physically addicted to alcohol and my blood pressure was dangerously high. I tried to wean myself several times but couldn't. The anxiety and detox was far too severe and I feared that stopping cold Turkey would lead to a lethal stroke and/or heart attack. I went to providence hospital in Medford OR and the ER doctor refused to help me at all. She refused to medically detox me. She treated me as if I was garbage and acted like she didn't care weather I lived or died. It was an incredibly humiliating, degrading, and very scary. She discharged me without so much as IV fluids and sent me back out into the smoke. I could barely walk or talk. I laid in the grass until a stranger called me a cab and I went home and did the only thing I knew how to do: continued to drink. I contemplated suicide and felt so hopeless. I continued drinking, inching closer to death with every sip. I could not stop on my own. I wish I could say this was this was an isolated incident, but it wasn't. There is a precious window when someone seeks treatment and if there isn't help readily available and/or easily accessible, that window closes. I Experienced this countless times.

A few months ago, my young, beautiful cousin died as a result inaccessible treatment options. She died from untreated alcoholism at the age of 36, leaving behind an elementary school age child. Her death was preventable. Her death was a result of not being able to get her treatment when she was ready. She flew to Portland and was too sick to enter treatment, she was hospitalized and by the time she got out of the hospital, covid hit and they wouldn't take anyone. From that point on it was long waitlists and a series of unreasonable hoops to jump thru in order to get her help. She never got it. The precious window closed and she died. I think about her everyday.

I currently run a mobile harm reduction unit which includes syringe exchange services where I see the same pain, shame, and barriers I faced, the same barriers my dead cousin faced. Covid and the wildfires have proven to create a near impossible system for many people to get the help they need. The majority of the folks I work with are unhoused, have no phone, no resources, no support. Yet they are expected to call everyday for weeks hoping to get one of seven detox beds, attend mandatory zoom calls while waiting weeks if not months for an inpatient spot to open up. This makes no sense. We want to arrest, criminalize, and demonize this population but offer them zero options. I'm here to ask you, or rather quite literally beg you to make it so folks can easily receive treatment, with no or low barriers, no matter where they are at in their life. No matter how what their situation is. People deserve dignity, access, and a chance to live. We cannot wait, this must be a funding a priority!