

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services, 2013 Oregon Legislative Session

Attention Sen. Alan Bates, Co-Chair and Rep. Nancy Nathanson, Co-Chair



I am grateful for the opportunity to share my story with you today. I am grateful that my story did not end reading like a tragic newspaper headline: "The body of a woman was found in the park Monday morning, half-dressed and face down in the mud"... My illness took me to some dark and dangerous places! But today I have a debt of gratitude for the people, programs, and agencies responsible for ensuring that that was not the end of my story.

Just eight years ago I could have been the poster-child for addiction and mental illness. In fact, I recall taking a Sharpie & writing: "Mental Health Services" above the inside of my front door, as a reminder every time I left the apartment that I needed to get help. I was severely depressed, and I could not stop drinking. I was unemployed and unemployable: I was a drunken welfare mother. It was a chaotic, hellish time for my whole family.

It took many attempts for me to find help. Near the end of 2004, I had been to the ER twice, to a hospital psych ward at least once, and to a 2-week inpatient drug & alcohol treatment program. Each time, I would leave with a plan for some kind of aftercare, but each time I would relapse. It wasn't until after a DUII that I really began to receive and benefit from the services I needed. The stakes were high: I lost custody of my children, who were placed with my parents. I could no longer deny my illness.

I had to assume responsibility. I participated in DHS family team meetings where I was encouraged to get the help I needed. I participated in drug & alcohol treatment, found ongoing support for my recovery, received medical care for the chronic depression. I slowly began to get well. But it has taken every bit of that- every false start, and every failure- for me to get where I am today. Today I am well!

I am here today to say that I do believe "it takes what it takes". I am the happy after-picture of what state funded addiction and mental health services can do. Today I am able to be the mother that my kids deserve. I was able to return to college and graduate with honors. Today I am employed in the mental health field and work to support families who also face addiction and mental health issues. I no longer financially qualify for OHP!

For too many individuals struggling with addiction and mental illness, the story does not end happily. Today, I urge you to fund Addictions and Mental Health budgets as they have been presented, for the sake of children, youth, families and every Oregonian. Thank you!!

Sara Newberry, 3012 NE 66th Ave, Portland, OR 97213