

OPINION

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Mental health services need a leg up

Even in the boom times mental health issues took a back seat, but in this precarious economic climate they stand to fall even further behind. Sure there was always the easy hand-out of symptom reducing prescription drugs - but no real gains in delivering alternative service to the sufferers and families.

Ironically it's during recessions and depressions that people services are most in demand. Yet the reality is such that funding dries up and lay-offs and cut-backs will be felt keenly in the area of mental health and other social services.



Viewpoint

Jo Ann Stevenson

Where churches and neighborhoods once played this role, public agencies for the most part are responsible for those who need a leg up. Services have jumped from the personal to the public, paid for by the taxpayer.

The good news is that taxpayers are also good citizens, and many of them are stretching their own

resources to look out for the other guy. As well, events such as the springtime festivals that abound in our local communities cost very little and go a long way toward drawing people into involvement with the people they live among.

And at the agency level, some movement is taking place. A special committee has been struck by the province to advise the ministry on the reform of Ontario's mental health services.

And rather than listen to professionals only, the committee includes consumers (someone who has experi-

enced service first hand) and family members as well as representatives working in hospitals and community service organizations.

To become more involved in local service, consider joining the Canadian Mental Health Association. The York Region branch holds its annual general meeting June 21 at 7 p.m. and will feature a special performance by the Kent County Mental Health Players focusing on stigma.

Fish tank display popular as TV fare

Imagine what it would be like if TV were actually good. It would be the end of everything we know.

Marvin Minsky

An American media executive with the unfortunate handle of Newton Minow Esquire once defined North American television as "a vast wasteland."

Mister Minow may have been moker-challenged but philosophically he was bang on the money.

If you doubt it, go to the only one-eyed piece of furniture in the corner of your living room on any weekday afternoon and turn it on.

You will be rewarded with badly acted soap operas, huffing and puffing airheads in spandex workout suits and a plethora of talk shows hosted by mike-toting hosts examining the problems of Transvestite Bank Tellers from Broken Homes and Their Pets.

Or you could flip up the dial until you hit The Weather Channel.

The Weather Channel. Think about it for a moment. Do you think Newton Minow would ever have believed that some day television would feature a channel devoted to nothing but weather reports 24 hours a day?

What's really scary is that the Weather Channel is often the best thing on the box.

Not counting the Shopping Channel, of course. Now there's a magnificent milestone in broadcasting history - a channel that features still photographs of Elvis paintings, chia pets, and phony-looking necklaces made of cubic zirconium.

And they're all for sale.

That's not all: The National Cable Association down in the U.S. is offering a whole raft of new video services next year, including a channel called ATV. That stands for Advertising Television. It features an endless reel of five to ten-minute commercials, one after another. Twenty-four hours a day.

Who watches this crap?

Well, it's hard to say exactly



Basic Black

Arthur Black

who the hard core TV addicts are out there, being mesmerized by the tube, but we know a few things about the gaping maw called the Television Audience.

We know for instance, that you don't want to get them riled. Last summer a cable-TV company in Columbia, South Carolina stationed a TV camera on a tropical fish tank and broadcast the resulting 'drama' on an otherwise empty channel. When they finally replaced the static aquarium shot with some actual network programming, outraged viewers lit up the cable-TV telephone switchboard, angrily demanding the return of the fish tank.

They won. The company now broadcasts the aquarium on another channel non-stop from nine in the morning to midnight.

And it looks like television is poised to take an even bigger bite out of our time. What's the title of that old Springsteen song - "Fifty-seven Channels and Nothing's On"?

Make it 160 channels.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to Deathstar. It's the slang name for a Los Angeles-based news service and entertainment package that will soon be targeting all North American televisions with a hundred and sixty channels.

You know that humongous satellite dish your uncle shelled out a couple of grand for last year? Tell him he now owns one of the world's biggest bird-baths. Deathstar offers its clients a rooftop dish no bigger than a large pizza.

Ann Landers said it best: "Television has proved that people will look at anything rather than each other."



ADAM

by Brian Basset

