

Local weighs in on 'pesky' alcohol problem

Written by By Richard Kontz
Friday, 27 May 2016 02:36



Part 1 of 2

Ever feel like you are trapped in a weird “time warp”? After reading several recent articles in the local media regarding the “alcohol” problem in Gallup, I feel like I am re-living April through July 2013.

Back then, Genevieve Jackson, Commission Chairperson, had arranged for a round-table discussion at the County with my help [as County Manager] and several local elected officials. Pretty much the same principals in position and title as those that came to Ben Ray Lujan’s March 4, 2016 pow-wow. And, all the same things were said, more or less, in both roundtables.

Back then [2013] there was a lot of tension between the city and the county over the use of the Liquor Excise Tax. The authorized uses under the statute at that time were: “Prevention, Education and Treatment.” The City wanted 100 percent of the LET for Gallup Police’s community service program [an unauthorized use] and for [Na’ Nihzhoozhi Center, Inc.] operations. NCI wanted to use the funds for shelter [an unauthorized use], social detox [an unauthorized use] and counseling [an authorized use].

The County wanted to use half of the funds for dealing with prevention, education and treatment of youth and young adults [15 to 25] in order to stop the flow of younger people “into the chronic alcohol-street people pipeline.” The County had a study completed, which indicated this was the highest-risk group for drugs and alcohol problems within the city and the county.

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During the 2013 roundtable, the Navajo Nation explained that in the past they had concerns with "lack of data" from NCI on their treatment programs. They stated they could fund prevention, education and treatment programs, but could not fund shelter programs and social detox.

NCI representatives stressed the same things as they do now – people are dying – their treatment program was highly successful and the annual intake averages 22,000 to 25,000 per year, and kept pointing the finger at the NN for pulling the previously earmarked federal funding.

Udall representatives said the same thing then as they said in a March 25, 2016 article titled: "No more earmarks."

As the County Manager, I tried to get NCI to break out their budget into program categories of: Prevention, Education, Social Detox and Treatment, and break out their statistics by each program area. This was to help sort out what could be funded with LET and what had to be funded with other funds. No cooperation there.

Another thing that troubled people was the sheer volume NCI kept quoting [22,000 to 25,000 per year] and yet they kept stating how successful their program was with 30 years of experience. When pressed to give a success rate – 80 percent was quoted.

So, if they were so successful with 30 years of experience, it seemed by now we should have a minimal number of people on the streets. Their response was "Well, not all of these people will enter the counseling program." So, when asked how many they ran through their counseling program in the last year? Their response: 480 or so.

Just looking at the sheer number of intakes [22,000 to 25,000] vs. the number who enter treatment [480] they would never turn this thing around even if given all of the Liquor Excise Tax funds. The response: 22,000 to 25,000 includes a lot of "repeat" offenders. Ooookay, so how many? Well, they didn't have data. Someone mentioned they knew a person who checked in 10 times and doing the math that means 2,200 to 2,500 chronic alcoholic street people. So, could NCI give us a realistic budget to provide a program of full services for treatment of 2,200 to 2,500 a year? We never received one.

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To me it just seemed like a big game, and now I see the same thing happening all over again. That, in my opinion, is why the city finally just threw up its hands and said, “Enough, we are going to just let NCI leave and we will run the ‘detox’ only program,” which later was replaced by the NN Behavioral Health program taking over for a while.

Further, as a result of Senator Muñoz amending the law, the percentage for the LET funds was raised from 5 percent to 6 percent, “Social Detox” was added as an “authorized use” and LET-funded programs were required to report and submit data periodically.

In the March 4, 2016 meeting, Lujan promised to have another meeting on April 4 to continue the dialog until a permanent funding solution was reached – he requested NCI to provide data for review and instructed NCI to respond to the NN [Request For Proposal] for behavioral health funds.

So, on April 4, I went to the designated place and no one was there. So I stopped by the City and they said they hadn’t received any further notices on Lujan’s monthly meetings. Later, it would come out that there still wasn’t any data to discuss and scheduling problems arose.

On April 6, 2016 another local headline states: “Delegates demand detox data.” An NCI representative had gone to the Health, Education and Human Services Committee of the NN to plead their case “without data.”

If you have read this far you will see a “recurring theme” – No concrete data to support the case to fund NCI.

Continued next week

By Richard Kontz