GUEST COLUMN

Diversion Hub helps those seeking hope

For most, being arrested and jailed is a low point in life, but an Oklahoma City nonprofit established two years ago is changing that narrative for thousands.

"Now being locked up in the Oklahoma County Jail can open up a path to a better life," The Diversion Hub was set up as a free service to help people navigate their way through the complicated court system. However, in the past two years, the agency has become much more than that.

The agency is a clearing house of opportunities serving several Oklahoma community who are desperate to find a foothold. Nearly all the Diversion Hub's clients are low-income, and some are indigenous. Alcohol and drug addiction are common. Some are homeless and, for many, hunger is a way of life, so imagine how difficult it might be for them to pay a fine, find transportation to a court date or comply with probation requirements.

For those who are struggling, the world seems filled with traps. That is why the Oklahoma City Community Foundation has joined with the Arnel Family Foundation, the Kirkpatrick Family Fund and the city of Oklahoma City to help break the cycle of incarceration and open doors to recovery and stability.

Through the leadership of Executive Director Damon Britton, Diversion Hub has been expanding and growing since its early days as a pilot project supported by the Oklahoma County Public Defender's office.

Beyond helping people manage their affairs at the county courthouse, Britton's agency is collaborating with multiple public and private agencies to help people address issues that may have led to incarceration in the first place.

"Within Diversion Hub's offices in Oklahoma City's Midtown District, there are representatives from a nonprofit run by the Furnitureless Alliance, City Care, Criminal Behavioral Services and The Education and Employment Ministry. The Hub also is partnering with public agencies and services to provide easier access to healthcare, child care, nutritional assistance and other social services."

The nonprofit has never turned anyone away, despite growing demand and stretched resources. For those who need help, the agency is easy to find. A bus runs a regular route, offering free transportation from the jail's doorstep to the Hub's front door.

Part of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation's mission is to step in where there are opportunities to fulfill unmet needs in Central Oklahoma. The Diversion Hub was one of those opportunities. It has earned strong support from across the community, including judges, prosecutors, public defenders and even Oklahoma City voters, who approved its funding via a bond of $17 million Diversion Hub facility that was proposed under MAPS 4 in 2019.

"It is a problem in Oklahoma's criminal justice system. Perhaps the Diversion Hub is part of the answer," Nancy Anthony is president of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation. www.OCCF.org.

RIGHT THINKING

Right's corporate support eroding

It's easy these days for Republicans to feel beleaguered. Aside from losing the presidency and Congress, it feels like all of the power centers of society are arrayed against them. They already knew the press, Hollywood, most lawyers and Wall Street investment bankers, Silicon Valley and the universities are against them and have been for years. Their only salvation was that their party, with few exceptions was backed by the military and power of big corporations in legacy industries like energy, transportation, manufacturing and consumer goods.

But now, it appears the GOP has lost the support of even these corporate titans. After some Republicans in Congress hesitated to affirm President Joe Biden victory election victory, party leaders in the increasing number of states decided to revise the voting laws in order, in their minds, to address the abuses that threatened the integrity of the process. These corporate leaders turned on them and teamed to withdraw both campaign contributions from them personally and business from their state and local unions.

When once big business only wielded its political capital in defense of its particular interests and astoundingly kept clear of messy cultural conflicts, the managers of many of our largest corporations now think nothing of taking sides—always on the left—in our society’s most divisive conflicts, especially those involving race, sexuality and religious freedom. Some of these companies have gone so far as to threaten economic retaliation against these state governments that dare to offend the pies of “woke-ism.”

Many conservatives are shocked by these developments, but they shouldn’t be. Ever since the rise of political correctness hollowed out the humanities and social sciences departments of our most prominent universities, it was inevitable that the products of this intellectual sewer would bring their tendentious notions to their professions. You can never forget that most of the people who run these big corporate outfits are no longer entrepreneurs who made good, but university-educated managerial elites who were trained to implement the progressive dogmas the universities have been peddling for decades.

The good news is, while these people may be wealthy and culturally powerful, they don’t represent a lot of votes. Most middle and working-class Americans— as demonstrated in this Republic threatened its majority in Congress and major policy control in state legislatures—think America is great the way it is and our state and federal leaders, our police and our national and state militaries, have been predominantly a force for good and that, while we should purge those who abuse their authority, most police officers nobly serve and protect our community. I don’t know about you, but it’s hard for me to choose between joining a party dominated by patronizing progressive elites or one made up of small business people, blue-collar workers and religious families, I’m picking the former.

Door 92. And I’m not alone. Before this year, one poll showed 57% of Republicans were satisfied with big business. That number is now down to 31%.

Republican leaders worry about losing the corporate campaign cash they are used to relying upon, but it is evident that they can raise just as much or more money from individuals and businesses, for example, Republican U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy raised a record $2.37 million from 50,000 unique donors, as opposed to the previous year’s $22.6 million from 6,000 donors. It will take much time before the institutional shareholders who really own these companies inform their hired hands that their companies need the politicians more than they need them.

Andrew Sparopoulos is the Robert S. Kerr, Sr., Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Oklahoma and the Milton Friedman Distinguished Fellow at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. He can be reached at Andrew.Sparopoulos@ou.edu. His columns, this column are those of the author and should not be attributed to either institution.