For the disabled, Wrentham center builds true community

THANK YOU to Kevin Cullen for the wonderful column about June Larner, who spent most of her life at the Wrentham Developmental Center (“The end of a ‘hidden life,’” Metro, July 12). Unfortunately for the residents at the center as well as many others who are living in less-than-ideal circumstances within the Department of Developmental Services system, new admissions are not allowed, unless residents are transferring from other facilities that are closing. Without these new admissions, Wrentham Developmental Center will eventually close.

The department will not discuss this reality. It is too busy with the “community first” initiative, which mandates that individuals with intellectual disabilities, no matter how severe, be housed in a community setting. Yet too often these community settings are dangerous, with underpaid staff, high turnover, and a severe lack of monitoring.

The Wrentham center is a wonderful community unto itself. Staff have longevity, but more than that, they have a dedication to residents and their family members that is touching, reassuring, and a great blessing when we cannot keep our family members at home with us.

It is my family’s greatest hope that my sister Jean can end her days at Wrentham, her true home away from home, and that others like her can move to Wrentham as it becomes necessary for them and their families.

COLLEEN LUTKEVICH
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The writer is president of the Wrentham Family Association.

As many did for ‘Glee’ star, can we open our hearts to addicts among us?

THE UNTIMELY death of young, talented “Glee” star Cory Monteith by drug overdose last week shocked people everywhere. Media outlets and fans mourned his passing, describing it as “tragic,” “sad,” and “devastating.” I’m curious why we don’t view others struggling with addiction with the same empathy we have for Monteith. Is it because he hid it so well? Because he was handsome? Because we felt we knew him?

In my work experience I have heard the story of addiction, recovery, and relapse often. I have come to know amazing men and women whose initial poor choices turned into a disease they struggle to survive. I now understand that addiction is a lifelong battle.

People work hard every day to stay sober and clean. Sometimes they succeed. Sometimes they don’t. Sometimes the results are tragic, sad, and devastating. We need to recognize the complexities of addiction, help our friends through the struggle, and remain empathetic to the fight.

The next time you see someone on the street, I ask you to remember how you felt when you saw the headlines about Cory Monteith and extend the same appreciation for their tragedy as you did for his.

LORI MANZELLI
Communications coordinator
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More credit was due in report on Down syndrome research

RE “SCIENTISTS hit at core of Down syndrome” (Page A1, July 18): A woman at University of Massachusetts Medical School is responsible for “daring, out-of-the-box” research with jaw-dropping results that no one “thought . . . possible or even within the current realm of scientific dreaming,” and you bury her name in the 11th paragraph?

I had to follow the front-page piece to the continuation on Page A12 to find the names of professor Jeanne Lawrence and her team, after quotes from a man who was not involved in the research and a parent with an affected child.

Please, for women in science and for all of us, try to do better.

MARCIA LIPSON
Waltham