

Fast Facts

A new study commissioned by health care foundation The Commonwealth Fund shows that as health care costs have risen and insurance benefits have disappeared, women have been hit particularly hard.

In 2007, even before the economic recession, a majority of women had problems related to health care costs. Women overall have lower average incomes than men and higher out-of-pocket medical costs, but a greater need for health care between the ages of 18 and 45.

- 71 percent of women ages 19-64 were uninsured, underinsured, had problematic medical debts or didn't access health care they needed because of costs in 2007. For men, it was 59 percent.

- 45 percent of women and 36 percent of men did not receive preventive cancer screenings or dental exams in 2007 because of the cost. Women were much more likely than men to delay or avoid necessary health care.

- In 2003, an estimated 16 million people in the U.S. were underinsured — they had some health coverage, but it was inadequate for their needs. In 2007, that number reached 25 million.

- In 2001, 29 percent of low-income women with spent at least a tenth of their income on health care premiums and out-of-pocket costs. By 2007, that rose to 55 percent.

- One-third of women and one-quarter of men in 2007 were unable to afford food, heat or rent, had used up all their savings, had taken out a mortgage on their home or had taken on credit card debt because of medical bills.



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Leo's loss fuels his advocacy for homeless

BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Homeless advocate Leo Rhodes moved from Seattle to Portland a couple of months ago to get some rest. He had become so preoccupied with educating people — politicians, journalists and school children — about homelessness that he wasn't taking time to eat and sleep properly.

Although some see him as a pillar of strength, Leo complained to me that he is "not Superman." He told me, without sounding bitter, that others have tried to help, but no one else was "stepping up" because he needed a break. Many people expressed an interest in helping but find that they burn out after only a month or two, Leo said. But they do not have the same passion for the cause that drives Leo.

After talking to Leo for an hour, I came to

VENDOR PROFILE Leo Rhodes

realize that the ghosts of homeless friends drive him to continue his advocacy work.

I found Leo Rhodes at the Street Roots office early one cloudy May morning. He had just located an online article about himself and the tent city he had helped establish in Seattle. (See www.vanmag.com/News&Features/Tent_City) He wanted to give me an interview, but Leo had a hard time tearing himself away from the computer screen. He is currently homeless as he has been off and on for 20 years. He has no computer, no phone, no roof over his

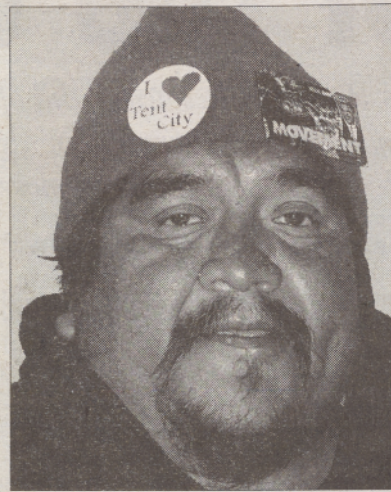


PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ

head. Not even a change of clothing.

The Pima Indian has a small backpack. It mostly contains paper and pens for the book he is writing about the Seattle tent city. When it rains hard and the papers get wet, he has to throw them away and start over.

Leo sells Street Roots outside Panera Bread in the Hollywood District. The money goes for food and writing paper. He receives no public assistance. He appreciates it when individuals give him a sandwich or piece of fruit. It helps, he says.

I found it difficult to get Leo to talk about himself. I wanted to know how he is taking care of himself so he can regain enough health to continue his work. This articulate man would begin to tell me about his reduced lung capacity, his arthritis or untreated sleep apnea, but then he would

fall silent. "My head is so full," he said, apologizing. "I can't stop thinking about them."

"Them" are all the friends who have been murdered while homeless or who have committed suicide because they cannot tolerate being treated like "mangy dogs" by those with secure shelter, he says. Then there are the friends who have died because they could not access appropriate medical care.

Leo gave me several graphic examples of tragic deaths that came as a result of the stereotypes "housed" individuals hold about the homeless. One of Leo's "ghosts" was an educated man, a lawyer, who was told by the group of boys who beat him to death with a baseball bat, "You should be thankful that we're doing this to you because you're useless, dumb, lazy, and stupid." Three days later, the murdered man's friend, who witnessed his death, committed suicide because he could not deal with the memory of what had happened.

While that might be an extreme example, the stereotype — that everyone who is homeless is drug addicted or mentally ill — is very real. So pervasive, according to Rhodes, that government programs are aimed at these populations, with little money left over to help others by providing affordable housing.

When Katrina hit, Leo told me, "200,000 people became homeless overnight. Those homeless aren't mentally ill or addicts."

Many things can lead to homelessness: housing foreclosures, divorce, injuries, and illness. Leo's advice to the housed: Make a financial cushion for yourself, and fight for affordable housing for all people in need.

Street paper network celebrates milestone

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

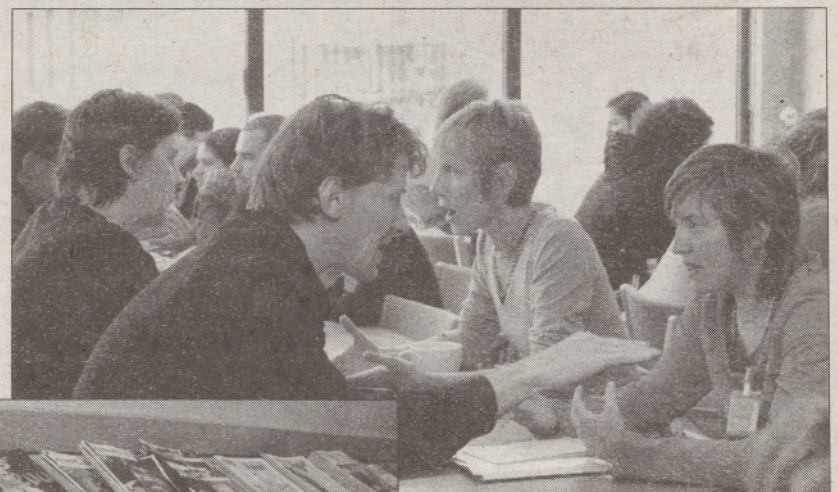
We are not alone. Yes, Street Roots is a unique publication in Portland, but we are part of a global movement of alternative and advocacy journalism called street papers.

Earlier this month, street papers from around the globe conferenced in Bergen, Norway, celebrating the 15 anniversary of the International Network of Street Papers. On every continent on earth, street papers are providing local poverty solutions just like Street Roots, with vendors earning a dignified, flexible income through sales, writing and participation. But equally important is the work each paper is doing to inform readers about economic and social inequality, and bringing people together to create a more just environment for everyone.

From May 13 to 17, Bergen's street paper Megafon hosted about 90 delegates from street papers around the world, engaging all of us in training sessions, roundtable discussions on ethics in journalism and workforce development, and simply networking with fellow papers doing remarkable work and making change in their own communities. From the International Street Film Festival to progressive approaches to journalism to products and benefits we can offer to vendors, the conference provided many great ideas for Street Roots.

The week of workshops and discussions were highlighted by the INSP Awards for outstanding journalism.

It was an evening to celebrate the best of



PHOTOS BY MAGOFON, BERGEN, NORWAY
Delegates and newspapers at the 2009 conference of the International Network of Street Papers.



street journalism with many supporters of our work, including representatives from Thomson Reuters and Inter Press News, as well as local dignitaries.

The competition is judged by an international panel composed of award-winning journalists. Two papers in North America were honored at the evening. Sean Condon with Megaphone in Vancouver, B.C. received the external press award for his piece in The Tyee newspaper advocating for the rights of the homeless and poor. Ahmad Kavousian, also with Megaphone, took top honors for best photograph, and Gregory Flannery with Street Vibes in Cincinnati received the award for best feature writing.

Look for these pieces and photographs in the upcoming edition of Street Roots.

For my part, I participated in a panel of journalists discussing the future of street papers for the next 15 years. While the challenges facing journalism and major media houses was well represented in our discussion, the emphasis for me was the quality of the journalism street papers are producing, working to create more progressive reporting that seizes on the sense of urgency within our readers.

We are the rising news source for more and more readers with each edition, at a time when the news story of the decade is poverty and homelessness. This is our expertise and we have to get better and smarter at how we fill the void left by years of bankrupt news coverage from the major houses and gutted newsrooms from the fallout on Wall Street. If we can do that, we have another powerful 15 years ahead.