

EDITORIAL

**Homeless by
bureaucracy**

Take a good look at the faces on page 8. They reflect the faces of today's homeless population – right before they become homeless.

They are not the faces of people who are lazy, addicted or chose the streets. They are among the tens of thousands of the people who are working hard, right now, to get a solid footing during the most difficult economic conditions of our lifetimes.

They are not about to become homeless because they failed, but because the system they relied upon, the one they were directed to, failed them.

By July 1, the funding need to keep the family on page 8 in housing, to offset their disabilities while they recover, to keep their children in good schools and a stable environment, will disappear, as it will for 284 other recipients of Section 8 housing assistance in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties. The blame

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ricochets between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD and the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, which distributes the Section 8 assistance to the poor, disabled and elderly in the three-county region. But lost in the numbers game both agencies play, are the families that will pay with their lives.

For the past four years, HUD, and by proxy Congress, has directed its attentions, money and public relations around a campaign to end chronic homelessness – a strict category of people who have been homeless at length or repeatedly over the course of several years. It promoted solutions through a nationwide canopy of 10-year plans to end homelessness, channeling funds for the homeless and addiction, and on its virtue touted numbers and platitudes to extol the Bush administration's commitment to ending the plight of the down-and-out. None of which did a thing for the 285 people and their families who received letters in Northwest Oregon informing them that they won't get the assistance they have qualified for, waited years for, and deserve. Despite the demonstrated need, and unprecedented economic calamities, the federal system will not continue to pay for the service it exists to render. That is the machinery of poverty that is still grinding away behind the Obama administration.

Immediate action by HUD is required. Regardless of who is to blame for the mishaps bureaucratically, HUD has the ability to right the wrongs in this specific instance. Moreso, HUD and the administration need to find a way to correct the broken system.

For three decades we have been treating poor people and homelessness as if they were the problem – this kind of thinking institutionally has to end.

Locally, City Commissioner Nick Fish and other politicians that champion these issues need to move on promises to reform the Section 8 program in Oregon, where landlords can discriminate against renting to recipients of such assistance.

For the many families throughout Oregon that will be kicked to the curb as of July 1, it's death by a thousand cuts. The short-sighted approach taken to date leaves too much room for scapegoating the people caught in the cracks; people like the ones on page 8, who deserve to be more than a statistic.

STREET ROOTS' EDITORIAL BOARD

The views expressed in the editorials in Street Roots are the consensus of members of the editorial board and contributing volunteers.

**Street Roots takes the next step:
Joining the Portland Business Alliance**

For more than 10 years, Street Roots has battled with the Portland Business Alliance in a public arena and behind the scenes about such issues as the oversight of private security downtown and the sit-lie law – both of which we haven't moved an inch on.



**DIRECTOR'S
DESK**

By Israel Bayer

We still believe there should be oversight of the private police downtown, especially considering thousands of park exclusions are handed

out annually. And we still believe the sit-lie law is inhumane and a gross violation of individual's civil rights.

Still, the work Street Roots represents through the vendor program and Rose City Resource guide spans out beyond these issues alone. More than 80 vendors sell the newspaper in front of businesses throughout the Portland region – many of which are downtown. Vendors and Street Roots have built relationships with business owners and their cliental. It makes absolutely no sense that we work with many of the businesses the Alliance represents that we are not members and to take the steps to create more formal relationships. By joining the Alliance we will be in a better position to work with and engage businesses downtown.

Street Roots will in no way, shape or form be beholden to the Alliance or will it change our editorial and social justice presence on important issues effecting people experiencing homelessness and poverty citywide.

Street Roots has never been an organization that followed trends. Why start now?

Street Roots has been working on the front lines of homelessness for 10 years and have been mentored by some amazing

organizers who have been in the game a lot longer than we have. In all of our accomplishments over the past we've yet to create a formula that works in the context of how exactly to end the injustices pointed at people sleeping in a doorway.

Street Roots supports tent cities, we have helped organize rallies and direct actions, we mobilize people to write letters, and help attorney's working on these issues be in a better position to challenge many of the laws targeting homeless folks.

We also have put together an extensive package (www.rosecityresource.org) of laws targeting the poor and how to combat those laws together in one place for community organizers, homeless folks and other activists. And still to this day, offer office space and resources (computers, printers, coffee) to groups organizing around these issues on the ground.

Saying all that, we feel like its time to engage the community in a new way. Will it lead to all of the answers we have on the issues of homelessness and poverty? No. But it will allow for us to break out of a stalemate that has led to a breakdown of trust and communication on the homeless front and with the broader community.

Homeless groups can't flinch or even think about working with the Portland Business Alliance in open for fear of being called sell outs or talked about in the press as being lap dogs for big interest. This environment has led to a smoke and mirrors game of veiled secrecy and mistrust behind the scenes among many of the homelessness groups. This has to change.

We're taking the first steps publicly to say it's OK to be a grassroots homeless organization working with the PBA and to move beyond the tired rhetoric.

Without an open relationship with everyone touching these issues people experiencing homelessness lose, period. And that's not what Street Roots is about. It's time to turn over a new leaf.

'Shock waves' article resonates with reader

May I say that the reportage quality and content of Street Roots has risen to an extraordinary level? I thank you all for the insight and effort present in each edition.

I am moved to respond to the May 28 piece "Shock waves," describing the state of homelessness evidenced by veterans. I too am a Viet Nam era veteran. I served with the 1st Aviation Brigade supporting Fire Base Bronco near Duc Pho, south of Quang Ngai and My Lai.

What affected me most in the piece by Mara Grunbaum is the portrait of what is missing. The words of each veteran interviewed or quoted seemed to carry the pain of self worth laid low by betrayal. Some may have suffered the wound of deceit early in life, some during their tour of duty or others after separation from the service. The fact of the matter is that we, as a community, tend not to value or respect those who stumble and fall. Each person who carries the burden of such a wound does not need pity – empathy and respect are required – to enable them to get back up. Most of all each veteran needs time, space and support to discover their value as a member of our community. The prize of that effort is self respect – not an easy gift to open or embrace. And it may be impossible to realize it when it is hidden by homelessness, denial or addiction.

For my part I am fortunate. I have had good teachers. I am in the company of solid friends. I am graced by a fine family. My

work has brought me into the company of ethical people. To be sure I labored long and hard on the road to self respect. I worked to overcome but not forget the pain, worked to heal the wound but remember the scar, worked to recognize the anger but reject violence to myself or my community.

Know this too. The awareness of what war does to us is borne by all. In speaking with civilians and soldiers here in the US, in Vietnam and Israel I know we feel it. The aware acknowledge that feeling, the wounded suffer it and the wise heal in the learning from it. I wish peace and healing to all of the brothers and sisters who suffer it. Respect them – they are our teachers.

JOHN MILLIKEN
Portland

**Baseball fans love the game,
but hate the deal**

As a baseball fan all my life I have to agree with your position on the Beavers and Lents (Street Roots, May 29, editorial). It is sad that it has turned out that way. We occasionally get ticked for the guys in our shelter and some of them are avid fans too and really enjoy the games.

(By the way, Willie McGee was the better center fielder.)

RICK STOLLER
Director, Salvation Army
Portland

**WHAT DO
YOU THINK?**

Street Roots encourages readers to submit letters and columns for publication. Letters to the editor may be submitted to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, faxed to 503-227-3117 or e-mailed to streetroots@email.com. Please address your submissions as letters to the editor.