

**NEWSBRIEFS****California city sets up designated campsite for homeless**

Laguna Beach —

The Laguna Beach City Council voted this week to create a temporary sleeping area for the homeless in a parking lot to prevent illegal camping on public parks and beaches. The sleeping area is expected to open Nov. 1.

The move comes as the city passed an ordinance prohibiting loitering around other areas and sleeping in other public spaces.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the city last year saying that people experiencing homelessness had no choice but to sleep in public spaces because there was not enough shelter space provided by the city.

The Orange County Register reports that the new sleeping area will accommodate 50 people in modular units until mid-June. The site will provide places for people to keep their belongings, and a bus to transport people from downtown to the parking lot.

The City Council's decision was met with opposition by the city's Chamber of Commerce, who said the site would make Laguna Beach more attractive to people on the streets.

Meanwhile, in Seattle's contest for mayor, candidate Mike McGinn has said he supports having longer term encampments, like the famed Nicklesville, named after the city's current mayor.

**CORRECTIONS**

Street Roots strives for accuracy, but we're human. So we also strive to correct errors in our paper whenever possible. Please report any errors to our managing editor, Joanne Zuhl, at 503-228-5657, or write to joanne@streetroots.org.

**Learning the power of a few kind words**BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**A**nthony and I chatted outside the Street Roots office on a sunny morning.

He is 31 years old and trying to get his life together again, but childhood memories make it tough. We discussed whether or not he really wants to break his anonymity as a former addict. I gave him time to change his mind. He has remained steadfast in his decision to go public with his story. And he seems to have resisted the temptation to become "comfortably numb" ever again.

Perez told me his father had been a heroin addict and his mother had been addicted to pills. One of his first childhood memories was of waking up from a nightmare and trying to wake his parents. When unsuccessful, the then 5- or 6-year-old Anthony had gone into the kitchen, grabbed a sharp kitchen knife, and then sat there ready to protect himself from "the boogeyman" until one of them woke up. He cut himself while sharpening the knife and bled so much while waiting on a parent that he had had to go to the ER.

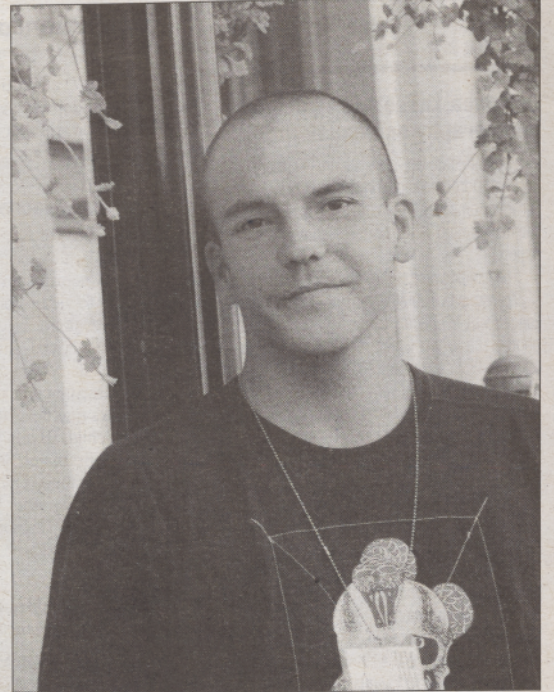
Childhood memories and feelings of not being good enough to be taken care of bring him down. At such times it is hard to resist, in the words of a Pink Floyd song, "just a little pin prick." He knows the horrors of living his life "comfortably numb," and resists as best he can.

Somehow, the boy made it through the eighth grade in public school and learned to read well. He managed to stay away from heroin until the day after his father died in his arms of an overdose. That night, his mother tried to commit suicide and was hospitalized in a psych ward. With no parents left to live with, he went to a relative who offered him heroin.

Anthony's first response had been to hit the guy, he said, but then he changed his mind and accepted. He had wanted to find out what was so wonderful about the drug that had cost his father his life.

"Talk about a monkey on your back," he told me. He now understands about his dad. "It was the beginning of the end," he said, even though he's searching for a way out so he can be a parent to his 6-year-old daughter. He'd like the cycle of addiction to stop with him.

He's done AA and NA. He became a born-again Christian. He is currently in

PHOTO BY  
ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ

counseling at Allied. "They say life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent attitude."

Anthony works hard at improving his attitude, especially his negative self-talk about how worthless he is. "I want to be who I really am, the authentic me, instead of a product of my circumstances."

"I've learned a lot about the power of words while selling Street Roots." A kind word, or eye contact and a smile from a passerby often helps him stay clean another day, he says.

"What about going 'green' for how we treat each other?" he asked me. "What if everyone in Portland gave someone a little word of encouragement every day, not just for me but for anybody?"

Anthony sells Street Roots papers, but can get along without the money. What he needs most from you is "a simple smile and a 'Hi. How you doing?'" Don't give him a donation if you don't want to, he says, "but treat me like I'm a human being whether you buy a paper or not, like a person worthy of acknowledgement that I exist. Everyone deserves that."

Perez has found out the hard way why his dad let heroin destroy him. Hopefully he can put that knowledge to good use for others. He'd certainly like to.

Anthony is on methadone treatment, so he has a chance. He just needs "a little help from his friends" and people who are willing to treat him with dignity and respect while he is trying to stay clean.

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