

City collects figures from street count

Outreach workers, advocates and volunteers were out in force this past week as part of the city's one-night homeless count, done every other year in conjunction with the annual shelter count.

While the final figures for the count will not be known for several months, the trend has shown an increase in then umber people sleeping in shelters and or on the street.

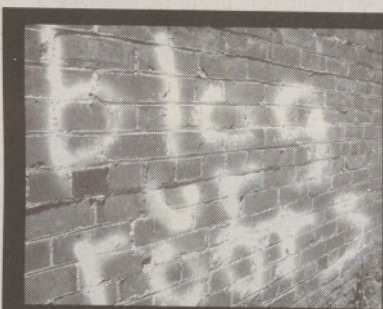
Street Roots was one of several organizations assigned geographic regions of coverage for the count, covering a section of the inner eastside. Street Roots counted more than 70 individuals sleeping out or in cars.

The count is recognized as an undercount, given that not everyone on the street can be reached. But it is used as an indicator on the need for services and shelter space throughout the city and Multnomah County.

In 2009, the one-night count recorded 820 people in emergency shelters, with 27 assigned vouchers for hotels and motels, which is done when shelter space is at capacity. That same night, there were nearly 1,600 people found sleeping outside on the night of the count, up more than 150 individuals, or 11 percent, over the previous count in 2007. Combined, the 2009 shelter and street count was up 13 percent over 2007 figures.

Statewide last year, the annual shelter count recorded nearly 20,000 people as homeless across Oregon, 2,000 more than the previous year, even without the Portland street count included. One-third of those counted were under the age of 18.

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A student of the streets of Portland

BY KAISA MCCROW
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

If you have been short on good conversation for a while, head to NW 23rd Avenue and Thurman Street to buy a Street Roots. Terris, the vendor that sells on this corner in front of Food Front, seems to have a talking point for anything, whether it be theories of eco-psychology, gaming, how to end homelessness, or recommending your next good read. At the onset of a conversation with Terris, his articulate speech and keen sense of self are striking—this man knows he is a born thinker and intellectual, and he'll get you on his side of that argument in minutes.

Terris doesn't just know a lot of facts, he has a lot of ideas, and they are good ones. Straight away, we began discussing the

VENDOR PROFILE Terris Harned

meaning of the word "home." He immediately challenges the commonly held assumption that simply having a house equals having a "home." Although Terris grew up in Portland and Vancouver, WA and did not begin experiencing homelessness until he was an adult, he says in many ways he did not have a "home," at all while growing up. His parents divorced when he was 18 months old, and his entire childhood was spent shuffling back and forth between them, unstable and consistently uprooted. Now, although he "sleeps outside"—his preferred terminology when referring to homelessness—Terris will tell you with conviction that Portland is his home.

And all signs point to this being true. Terris is ingrained in this community. He is not only active with Street Roots but also with Home PDX, a non-traditional church group that meets under the Hawthorne Bridge and is active in the community of people who sleep outside. When asked if he was religious, Terris referred to a broad definition of spirituality, focusing on a message of love and acceptance of people from all walks of life.

"Jesus was a bum," he says plainly, when discussing Christianity. "He was homeless. He slept outside." In this way, Terris says, he can consider himself a follower of Christ, and he uses this outlook to discuss how he believes we should be helping the less fortunate. "If you want to be like Jesus, don't go somewhere and tell people they should come up. Go and accept them for who they are." Terris believes this, and he practices his belief with dedication to his community and with love and respect for



PHOTO BY KAISA MCCROW

everyone that he meets. "Love everybody. It can be a challenge. Stop looking at people as having faults, but instead ... as challenges." He explains that this outlook will allow people to look at both themselves and others with more hope and possibility.

This perspective is possibly what makes Terris so good at selling Street Roots, which he has been doing for roughly a month now. He has been quick to excel. He says that he is just getting to the point where he is learning the faces of his regulars and in true Portland fashion, the names of all their dogs.

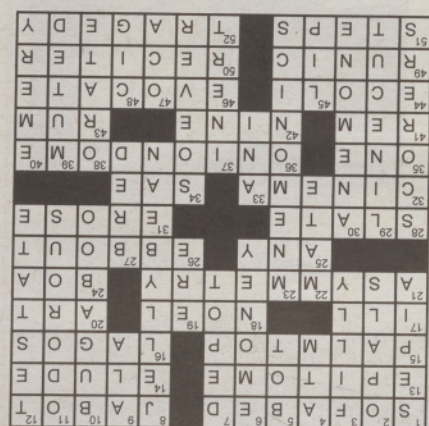
Despite the sense of community Terris has found in Portland, he isn't romanticizing about the hardships that he has faced in his life. Experiencing homelessness is his reality, and it is a harsh one. "In the city you are overwhelmed; you are bombarded by stimuli," he explains. "We have less barriers between us and the city than most people do." He goes on to say that when you sleep outside, you are still surrounded by the same "city-noise" and chaos as everyone else, only there is no escape, no respite, no place to retreat to. "The sounds of the city when you are outside will drive you crazy," he says.

In his perfect world, Terris would live away from the city, perhaps somewhere along the Gorge, near Hood River. He imagines a smaller, simpler community; in his version of the world, he would be the village blacksmith. It's a nice dream, and none of Terris' dreams are something to

shake a stick at. He wants to attend PCC, then PSU, and finally, Lewis and Clark to get a master's degree. His goal is to study psychology and then eco-psychology, which studies the way environment affects the psyche. The experiences Terris has had on the streets richly inform these studies. We talked at length about how eco-psychology critiques "symptom-focused" cultures. Homelessness is a perfect example. Terris says that the existence of homelessness is not the problem itself, but a symptom of a bigger problem. Terris sees himself as fully engaged in trying to open the eyes of others to these kinds of misconceptions, and hopes that his education will make this more possible.

In the meantime, Terris can't help but continue to learn, to read, to excite, to discuss anyway—it is his baser nature. He is thinker, a poet, an educator and a community member. He believes that in addition to choosing to love all people, a good education for every person is fundamental to heal society and to make people active participants in finding real solutions to homelessness. He wants that education. Until he can get it though, he'll continue to curl up with a good book on his days off, and to engage in a kind of learning that doesn't come from school. Anyone can experience some of that learning from Terris while he is working outside of Food Front, just one corner of Terris' city-wide home.

Answers to puzzles on page 16



If you've missed a copy of Street Roots, check with your local vendor or stop by the Street Roots office at 211 NW Davis St. Or read up on past stories and comments at www.streetroots.wordpress.com.

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