

EDITORIAL

TBI research another tool in addressing homelessness

In this edition, we run our second of three installments on traumatic brain injury, or TBI. In the first installment (All in their heads, May 27) Street Roots ran an in-depth feature piece introducing the subject, and Nick Patton, a formerly homeless Portlander who was misdiagnosed with schizophrenia for seven years when he was really having seizures from TBI that happened earlier in his life.

On page 3 of this edition we highlight why diagnosing TBI on the streets matters, in more ways than one. We introduce another individual affected by TBI, Jamie Smith, a veteran who lost his job, ran out of money, and eventually became homeless. Six years later he has finally won his Social Security Disability claim with the help of a local non-profit, Central City Concern, and the law firm Swanson, Thomas and Coon.

The outcomes could be significant, even if we collectively are still at an elementary stage of understanding the problem.

Both Nick Patton and Jamie Smith now have homes, and are productive members of society. But that's not the case for many people experiencing homelessness who may be being misdiagnosed medically, or not receiving the disability assistance they both qualify for and deserve.

SR has talked to many doctors, medical professionals, health department representatives, researchers, attorneys representing cases on brain injuries, along with social service workers who all believe that the TBI is not only a cause for concern, but may make up a significant portion of the homeless population.

"Being able to recognize that there is a true disability as opposed to willful noncooperation is helpful, and worth investigating," said by Dr. Stephen Hwang.

Yet, as Portland Attorney Cheryl Coon told SR, the question remains: "Whose keeping track of TBI? Nobody." That's a problem.

From talking to some experts in the field, it appears that there is a slight caution, or resistance when talking about how to move forward in Portland concerning brain trauma and homelessness. With a lack of understanding of the issue at multiple systems levels, coupled with the lack of practical resources in the health care field, and the lack of revenue with both government and non-profits working with people, it's understandable that the answers to TBI on the streets, and the solutions involved seem overwhelming.

SR will be continuing its coverage on TBI in future editions, including looking at a roadmap of how other communities are moving forward. In cities where studies have already been done, the rate of people with TBI on the streets was through the roof. We will look at how those cities paid for such studies, and what they are doing today to incorporate their findings into different systems. The outcomes could be significant, even if we collectively are still at an elementary stage of understanding the problem.

For example, research locally could help hundreds, possibly thousands of disability claims to move forward. It could also revolutionize the way we think about treating people on the streets, both medically and from a human perspective.

Not to put the cart before the horse, but SR is hoping to build a case for local government and foundations working in the health care field to look further into the matter. We know from working with the medical examiners office and local government on homeless deaths, that there are now new ways to think about identifying systemic problems in the work to end homelessness. There's no reason to think that we can't add another tool, in this case, possibly a major tool in that fight.

Stay tuned.

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.

Hop on the bus with Street Roots

Thousands of you have relationships with our vendors. One by one, newspaper sellers come into the office each day and tell us about the

interactions between readers and vendors.

Maybe it's a cup of coffee, or a lunch at New Seasons.

Possibly it's reading the newspaper and then coming back for a healthy discussion about a specific article or city politics.

our Facebook page. If you have friends or family who take the time to read the national news, or possibly the Oregonian, suggest to them that they pick up a SR. Buy an extra copy of the newspaper to leave in your break room at work, or at a friend's house. Together, we can make a difference — a real difference.

SR is on a roll right now. The newspaper finds itself with a healthy mix of in-depth investigative journalism, thought provoking human-interest stories and regular columns by diverse voices connected to poverty.

Where else in the city can you find someone making an articulate argument for the legalization of drugs, a police officer, business owners, a celebrity, anarchists, people on the streets, health officials and a city commissioner all co-existing through print under the same banner? It's thought provoking.

To steal a phrase from the Bus Project, SR has grown into an organization that believes if you're touching poverty in one form or another, we want you on the bus.

Help us spread the word about Street Roots and join the team.



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at streetroots@hotmail.com.

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

It could be something as simple as saying "hi" each morning or evening on your way to and from work or school.

Our readers go above and beyond. One example is a group of donors getting together this month and helping vendors and volunteers get new SR hats and windbreakers for the many men and women who sell the newspaper to survive.

How can you help? Join the SR team. You can help SR by spreading the word about the newspaper. Join and invite friends to

LETTERS

People of Portland leave a mark with genuine kindness

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Street Roots encourages readers to submit letters and columns for publication. Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mailed to streetrootsnews@gmail.com.

Yesterday at the Max stop at NW First and Davis Streets, I pulled some cash out of my pocket to buy a ticket.

Suddenly an unexpected gust of wind grabbed my bills and blew them up the street along the train tracks and over the streets. As I raced after my cash, just missing each bill as the wind blew it further and further from my reach, I heard laughter from bystanders. Then, from nowhere, a wonderful man was extending his arm, handing me a five and a couple of ones. "I didn't think you'd want to lose these," he said. As I thanked him profusely, he asked if I wanted to purchase one of the Street Roots he was selling. Happily I purchased this very informative paper from him, because now I had enough cash for the paper and the train ride.

Then from across the street another young man walked over and handed me my twenty dollar bill and a one. I returned to the Max stop and as I was purchasing my ticket, yet another man walked over and gave me the last of the bills that had blown away. I completed my transaction and got on the Max in a state of euphoria brought on by the helpfulness and genuine kindness

of the people in Portland. As a visitor to this city I will be forever impressed by your great citizens.

And, I like your newspaper, as well. It is interesting and informative about the issues and causes of homelessness.

NANCY A. MURPHY
Denver, Colo.

Commons' prompts questions about housing

I recently had the opportunity to tour the new Bud Clark Commons building (formerly known as the RAC - Resource Access Center). My concerns were: (1) will drug addicted folks be living next door to those who are not? and (2) if a person does not suffer from mental illness, addiction, or poor health (besides being homeless) then they would not qualify for housing. I did applaud the fact that the new building, will house access to some medical services, but was unsure how law enforcement would be playing a role, if any, at the site (the new building actually houses three separate planned programs to assist the homeless).

MARTHA PEREZ
Portland

The Opiate War

By Ross Robbins

I have called a ceasefire
An end to the shooting
Hollow-point heroin bullets
fly no more
Numb me no longer.

I've waved the white flag of surrender.
Needle cannons stilled,
Syringe caps as grenade pins
No longer held in teeth.

I am calling for peace.
An end to this war on self
Time to withdraw the needle
and squirt this shot to the dirt.

Time to withdraw the needle
Squirt this shot into the dirt.

Haiku

By Kareem Ali

The sun
perishes
into
The holocaust of wind
To save
the leaves.