

EDITORIAL

We have to move beyond triage and to the front lines

It's no surprise that homelessness in Multnomah County is on the rise. A new report released this week shows an eight percent increase in homelessness over the past two years. The number of people sleeping without a stable home is in the thousands, 4,625 to be exact, and those are universally considered undercounts.

A thirty-five percent increase in families with children, a 12 percent increase of U.S. Veterans and nearly half of the people counted without a safe place to call home are people of color in a town known for being one of the

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whitest cities in America. This comes on the heels of a census report that shows a mass migration of people of color moving outside of the urban core.

What does this mean? Depending on what group, or institution you speak with, it could mean any number of things, for any number of reasons.

In the past two decades the U.S. has seen an unprecedented

disinvestment in the middle class, and people experiencing poverty. The result is ongoing homelessness and poverty. After the slashing of housing programs at the state and federal level, a recession caused by the very institutions that we are told will lead us out this mess, and a foreign policy that has siphoned billions of dollars from the American people, we are left holding the bucket, pointing fingers at each other.

Is there a silver lining? Our politicians think so, especially in the context of getting re-elected. Clever one-liners and prepared messages take the place of informed action and leadership that truly moves the poverty agenda forward. We're told to be patient and to listen, to build community and to understand that we are a city in transition. New development deals and tax-breaks will spur more growth. Living-wage jobs will be had. A good life waits in the wings.

In the meantime, poor and working people are getting screwed, and the bottomline is that if you don't have the resources, the education or a living-wage job (which the majority do not) than you most likely don't count, or just as important, you probably don't vote.

A high-ranking City Hall insider once told Street Roots off the record that poverty and advocacy groups don't really matter. We are great community partners, but we are calculated white noise that can be used for leverage to move an agenda forward, or simply be ignored. That person went on to rattle off other coalitions; people of color, police accountability groups, immigrants, etc. As troubling as that message was, it came through crystal clear and gave us insight into exactly what time of day it really was.

So should we really be scratching our heads at yet another increase in homeless figures? Or at the Census report showing the loss — and it is a damaging loss — of 10,000 people of color from Portland's core? Should we be surprised that people don't trust the system and the institutions positioned all these years as the answer? The number of homeless families in Multnomah County continues to increase year after year, while we sit stymied by a crisis of confidence.

New leaders must emerge, and we need to push current electives and bureaucrats to do more than hold down the status-quo, and to maintain a triage attitude toward the poverty that lays underneath each new development and next door to each emerging coffee shop or café. We are going to have to create that change ourselves. People lives depend on it.

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.

Summertime, but the living isn't always easy

It's summertime. Time to soak up the sun, and be outdoors. If you're new to Portland than you're experiencing what it's actually like to live in a city where people are abound. For months, Portland



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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feels like a sleepy little city tucked away in the beautiful Willamette Valley — lost somewhere under a cloud that stretches for thousands of miles across the Pacific. In the summer, the town comes alive and you

may find yourself thinking aloud, "Where did all of these people come from?" Enjoy it.

Summertime is also a time when SR paper sales dip for vendors. We understand. People's lives are busy, and the idea of curling up at home and reading a newspaper feels less appealing. It's also a time when popular sales locations like Portland State are on break, and many family and friends find themselves traveling about and vacationing.

Many tourists visiting Portland from rural and suburban environments around the globe may not know what SR is or the concept behind it. Our diehard fans aren't always present, and it can be a challenge at specific locations for vendors.

So while you're out running around and

enjoying the sun this summer, just a friendly reminder not to forget about your local SR vendor. Standing in the sun all morning or afternoon can be just as challenging as standing in a steady rain.

The summer also brings different challenges for people sleeping outdoors. Homelessness, and many of the hardships that go along with it are much easier to identify in the cold and rain. Individuals compassion tend to stretch further, too.

The reality is that being homeless isn't fun, regardless of the time of year. Longer periods of daylight are a welcome sign for many Portlanders (unless you're a vampire), but for some people on the streets it can mean going long stretches of time without adequate sleep, and becoming dehydrated and sickly on the dime. And we all know that getting sick in the summer is the worst. Without a place to call home, it downright sucks.

Check out our tips for supporting your local neighborhood vendor on page 16, and don't be afraid to grab an extra water bottle on the way out of local establishments and pass it along to vendors. And more important to vendors, don't forget to grab a copy, or two of the latest issue of SR and pass it along.

Lastly, look for I (heart) Street Roots bumper stickers from vendors this issue. Share the love. It's summertime. Enjoy the sun!

LETTERS

Brain injury, homelessness series opens eyes

Great article. I was unaware that TBI affected such a high percentage of the unhoused. Definitely a serious medical condition requiring support and treatment! Sad that the medical community often doesn't get to the heart of the issue and so many go undiagnosed.

— MANDY LEHMAN

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.

As a TBI survivor, I have known what it is to fear becoming homeless as personal relationships fall apart and my relationships on the job become strained. I have scouted out remote entrances to city waterworks tunnels and such in case homelessness should ever become a reality ... short-term memory loss always being an issue, losing my job and my system of pre-allocation of payments such as rent could very likely put me there.

— GALEN BRENT ROBERTS

Nick's story was heartwarming and inspiring. I love to hear how our system worked well for someone. And the article was well presented and thorough. Hopefully it will help many realize that people who are homeless often have a serious problem that can be helped if the proper services are provided. Then we are all better off.

— CHRIS WASHBURN  
Portland

I have a friend who's husband had a brain injury. He was also addicted to Meth. He went to treatment several times, but because he was a vet the only place he could afford to go was the Veteran's Hospital. Obviously their program was not working for him. He ended up jumping off the Morrison bridge and leaving behind a wife and two beautiful young girls. The system failed him somewhere.

— EMILIE CRAIG

Re: "Bike sharing could be coming to Portland," Healthy Streetbeat, Bicycle Transportation Alliance,

(Portland Streetcar Manager Rick) Gustafson must be kidding. The people who depend on the Free Rail Zone the most are people with mobility challenges, senior citizens, people with limited health, and of

course street people with their giant backpacks and bedrolls. Is he really expecting them to ride a bicycle year-round, especially when it is rainy and is dark by 4 p.m.? Or, like other policymakers in the city, he can only imagine the fantasy world of the middle-class young people who came to Portland for retirement?

The realistic implementation of a shared bicycle program, like those in Europe, would require ways to keep users accountable — and that would most likely be done through either a credit card or a verified user pass with RFID smartcard technology, which would be issued if one presents a proof of identification. Again, this presents a near-impossible challenge that would essentially bar many low-income people, many of whom experience so-called homelessness.

— SARAH MORRIGAN  
Portland

Re: Rose Parade campers:

Hopefully the camping event will become an annual public statement — reminding those who are lucky enough to feel secure in their housing that there are folks in our community who camp out nightly, not just to save themselves a place to watch a parade but because modern cities, with their laws, zoning and codes, have displaced the extremely poor.

— LYNNE  
Portland

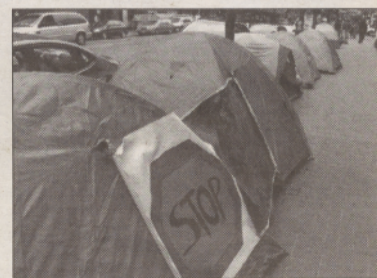


PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Around 80 individuals experiencing homelessness and supporters pitched tents along the Rose Festival Parade route in protest of Portland's camping ordinance, which criminalizes people sleeping outdoors.