

EDITORIAL

Downtown Chapel program
a breath of fresh air

A study just over two years ago on the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness in Portland showed a high rate of people with multiple health problems – combinations of mental and health complications, histories of addiction and simply living at high risk of violence on the streets.

We know from our series of reports by Street Roots on traumatic brain injuries and homelessness that such conditions routinely go undiagnosed, and are often aggravating factors toward other afflictions. Imagine if first responders (medics, police and fire, etc.) had the ability to know that a person is diabetic, on medication,

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or has had a serious brain injury in the past? The chances that person receiving the right health care are far greater, and the costs associated with misdiagnoses are much less.

It seems so simple, and often some of the best steps forward are: A bright red pouch containing basic health information to give any medic or caregiver

clues to a person's medical situation when the individual in need is unable to voice it themselves. It's not revolutionary in the housed world, but when applied to people living on the streets, it's a breakthrough in an otherwise catch-as-catch-can world of street health care.

The Vial of Life program (highlighted on page 1) undertaken by the Archdiocese of Portland's Downtown Chapel is taking an old-fashioned approach – by today's digital standards – to helping people experiencing homelessness improve their health care.

The program provides a means for people living on the streets to keep on hand documentation of their health conditions, medical requirements, medications, etc. It comes with the back-up provision that if that information is lost, as it often is on the streets through theft, vandalism and property seizure, it can be replaced, because the records are on file at the Downtown Chapel.

Simple, but powerful and life saving.

We shine a light on this program in the shadow of government budget cuts, and the widening gap between the rising number of people in poverty and homelessness and the limitations of those programs established to provide relief.

Each budget cycle, the social service network of Oregon takes the hit. Services not just for people and families in poverty, but the elderly, the disabled and those with mental and physical health conditions are consistently on the chopping block. These are systems that keep people living independently, and buoy those through the economic and unemployment slump, enabling them to preserve their housing, find employment, and keep their children safe and healthy and out of the grips of homelessness. It's an argumentative process that pits need against need, and the needy against everyone else.

In this edition, Rep. Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland) said of the recently passed state budget, "We have three basic things to do as a state. We have to educate our population. We have to fund public safety, and we have to care for the most vulnerable among us, who can not care for themselves." Greenlick went on to say that we now provide for our most vulnerable with whatever is left over after other programs are determined, saying "We are basically failing our most vulnerable citizens."

That's what makes the Downtown Chapel's Vial of Life program such a refreshing change from the "no resources, no capacity" line. Let us all learn by example.

It's all out in the open – where it belongs

A person in public office recently told me, "Street Roots should start speaking out more, and stop playing your cards so closely to your chest. Don't be afraid to make mistakes."



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

DIRECTOR'S
DESK

By Israel Bayer

The same week a major funder told me that in some circles, SR is just not going to get the kind of support it will take to move the organization to the next level if we remain so politically charged. "You do

want to go weekly some day to support the vendors, right?"

Being an organization that focuses on the wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness and poverty through the sales of the newspaper on one hand, and producing journalism and an upstream approach to ending homelessness on the other, is tricky business.

By the nature of being a newspaper that publishes news and opinions and having a

vendor program that works with scores of businesses throughout the city, everything we do is out in the open. When something goes wrong on the streets, or our reporting challenges the status quo, for better or worse, it's all on display.

It's easy to be critical of an organization like SR for not being mainstream enough, or for being too radical. We welcome it. If people weren't being critical of our work I would begin to worry. We know people are reading and paying attention when they are.

SR's first cue always comes from the streets. Both the vendors and the many sources we speak with throughout the city are the organization's eyes and ears. We work hard to balance the reality of the streets with an understanding of the big picture. We aren't afraid to push it to the hilt and to challenge or praise the outcomes created by groups and institutions working with poverty. We expect the same in return.

Look for an on-line readers survey in August, and please feel free to write a letter to the editor at streetrootsnews@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

LETTERS

Officer's snap judgements miss mark on Copwatch

We are not sure who approached Officer (Robert) Pickett and accused him of harassing a man on the street, ("Street Blues", June 10) but it was likely not someone who was on an organized Portland Copwatch patrol nor someone who had taken our "How to Copwatch" training. If Pickett's description is accurate, the person he describes didn't even wait 10 seconds, got directly involved in the incident, and potentially escalated the incident. Our training instructs people to come on the scene and observe, not interfere, and not to assume who's right and who's wrong. For those interested in receiving our training, send an email to trainings@portlandcopwatch.org.

It is unfortunate that Officer Pickett, who has a good reputation on the streets, chose his parting article to take a swipe at our organization, and to focus mostly on the risks police officers take rather than the reality that many officers engage in misconduct from rudeness to racial profiling to misuse of deadly force. We've always held that the best officers are the ones willing to blow the whistle on the bad ones. The recent lawsuit by a former recruit in which her claims were not validated by a court is only the most recent example of how cop whistleblowers are treated.

We do appreciate those officers who are willing to talk down potentially suicidal people rather than shooting, beating, or hitting them with Tasers, and would suggest that an outcome where both the civilian and the officer can go home at night should be the goal for everyone.

DAN HANDELMAN
Portland Copwatch

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.

issue of brain trauma among long-term homeless. Discovery, and getting a true sense of the damage, is difficult without records. When the trauma is sustained in numerous locations around the country and over an extended period of time, the problem is even greater. What's a healthy brain when the trauma has been the norm for years? But awareness by those concerned for the homeless is a critical piece and SR has certainly helped with that. It's perverse that the person suffering is often unaware of what they're experiencing.

It also goes without saying how single payer, "Medicare For All," would alleviate much of the problem for homeless suffering brain trauma- who by definition are obscure but who nonetheless have as much a right to healthcare as anyone. Thanks to Kate Cox and Susan Brownhill for their contribution.

JAY THIEMEYER
Portland

Increase in homelessness calls for renewed effort on tent cities

It is disheartening for me to read your article on the 8 percent rise in homelessness. A deeper reading shows they admit many times the numbers may be higher.

Being homeless, I was interviewed leaving jail after an unlawful arrest. The following week, I interviewed many people with the first question: Did you sleep outside last night? 75 said yes. Next question: Did you participate in the homeless survey? 15 said yes. This "survey" missed 80 percent.

The guardians of "public" land, cities, counties, metro, and schools are unempathizingly stingy. If land cannot be given, it must be seized in the name of human dignity. We need land to create 200 Dignity Villages. Catch the magnitude?

All over the nation these village birthing processes have been a fight, including our Dignity Village and three 100-person villages in Seattle. All seized land.

My goodness, we have 200 villages to find land for, let's get it on and get em' off. Cooperation or ...?

MIKE O'CALLAGHAN
Portland

Pickett chose to jab at a Portland Copwatch member in his last column.

While the questioning may have seemed overzealous, remember that six people were killed in 2010 by Portland cops. If we want a democratic, just, civil society, it is vital that people hold our police force accountable for their actions.

ANNE LAFLEUR
Portland

Traumatic brain injuries series reflects on insurance woes

SR's writers have done a great service by drawing attention to the largely invisible

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