

EDITORIAL

Equity must be a priority for Portland leadership

We are a great city. And we are a city of inequality. Without adequate shelter, people on the streets are criminalized by local government. African Americans are faced with staggering unemployment. Latinos and other immigrant neighbors are forced to go underground and hide family members and friends for fear of being deported. Refugees from war-torn countries are told to integrate into a new culture, language and economy on a dime. The LGBTQ community and others are faced with hate and

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intolerance, including being denied the rights of marriage. People with disabilities and the elderly are rarely employed. The list goes on, entrenched from generations before us.

It has been a hard fought battle for marginalized people in this city to get a seat at the table, to be a voice in the conversation.

But who among us can say with any confidence that we have even come close to striking a balance?

There's no question that Portland must move forward on a new Office of Equity. With more than a quarter of our city being people of color, and thousands of people sleeping outside or living in extreme poverty, upholding equity is a civic priority.

Merging the office with the Office of Human Relations is a logical pairing. The Office of Equity could focus on clear goals and objectives on important matters internally at the city, and externally with the addition of the Human Relations Commission.

Street Roots also believes there needs to be action steps moving forward that will help eliminate discrimination and create a pathway for social justice in our community. That means giving the equity agenda the teeth to be independent and transparent. The office should report to the entire city council, instead of one commissioner.

We agree with Commissioner Dan Saltzman when he says that we shouldn't create a debate club. Street Roots, as a grassroots nonprofit — along with many others — simply doesn't have the capacity to waste any of it on rehashing tired rhetoric in countless meetings when the missions of our own groups are stressed beyond our limits.

We need action, simple as that. This office will provide the structure — a civil process with a range of people involved. Time is short and the recession is breaking us apart. The Office of Equity can help facilitate real solutions, and give non-profits and other community members more capacity to get things done.

We also agree with Mayor Sam Adams and Commissioner Amanda Fritz in pushing this agenda forward and helping build an impressive grassroots coalition: a coalition that will one day, with the help of the Office of Equity, produce solutions to so many problems we already know of, and many more we must be prepared to address.

To put things into perspective, this week the county lost another \$11 million dollars, mostly for mental health and elderly services. That, on top 11 straight years of budget cuts. The state has gutted the human services budget for the past two budget cycles. The feds are cutting their support of human services, housing, and more, while tens of millions of dollars in revenue decline for affordable housing is happening in the city.

We are becoming more imbalanced than ever. The Office of Equity could not come too soon.

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.

Jump in to the SR summer drive

With so many readers' support, we have raised a tad more than \$3,000 in the first two weeks of our summer fund drive. Three thousand dollars is a lot to some, and a drop in the bucket to others.



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

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

At Street Roots, we are as grassroots as grassroots gets. With our humble budget of \$237,000 we are able to deliver readers something special — news and commentary you aren't finding

anywhere else locally. We are able to live on the edge, and to report and offer insights that many other newspapers in Portland, for one reason or another, simply won't touch.

With every edition, we put from 10,000 to 13,000 dollars into the hands of people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Simply put, you're giving people a hand up and not a hand out. Hundreds of people are

given a chance to engage with the larger community, and become productive members of society.

"It's really great that there is a program that is helping people experiencing temporary homelessness or unemployment," says Raymond, an SR vendor. "For me, I'm waiting for an operation, and this affords me not only a way to satisfy that urge to get up and go do something with my day, which is inside every man, and it puts money in my pocket."

We are hoping to raise another \$5,000 dollars this summer. We need your help in doing that. We know it's hard times in the city, and that money isn't growing on trees or in your own backyard. But if you have a dime to spare, we could use your help.

Please consider giving this summer. You can write to 211 NW Davis, Portland, OR 97209, or go online and give at www.streetroots.org. Your support matters, be it \$5 or \$10, it's your generosity that will keep the organization moving forward. We appreciate the consideration.

LETTERS

Regional Vets for Peace establishes project for homeless vets

Thank you so much for your outstanding piece by Martha Gies on the Veterans For Peace National Convention held in Portland, August 3-6, 2011. ("But then the vets came to town", Aug. 19, 2011)



Ms. Gies accurately captured the essence of an inspirational and enlightening convocation of peace activists who have seen the darkest sides of war. Her description of the truth-in-recruiting work done by VFP was spot on and will hopefully motivate

others to become involved in this valuable service to our nation's youth.

But, I am writing today concerning the homeless. Veterans For Peace has recently begun a national "working group" focused on homeless veterans. Our strategy begins with gathering success stories from across the country and to serve as a clearing house for information that our VFP chapters can use to implement programs in their communities. We hope to expand our efforts as our working group grows.

Our working group co-chair, Jack Doxey, recently reported on a program his VFP chapter in San Diego has implemented over the past year called the "Campaign of Compassion." These are his words:

"In many respects the city of San Diego reminds me of the mythical Emerald City of Oz. When the brilliant lights of the city fade into the nighttime darkness, you don't have to look very hard to see another 'facet' of this Emerald City. With very little effort you can find thousands of homeless people scattered throughout downtown San Diego. Looming beneath the darkened underpasses, they huddle together to keep warm. Many trying to claim a piece of pavement they can call home for the night. Many of them have only one thin piece of cardboard that protects them from the cold pavement. The number of homeless in San Diego County is currently estimated at approximately 10,000, of whom 3,000 are veterans. This winter, my organization, the San Diego chapter of the Veterans For Peace got involved. We have distributed over 500 sleeping bags and rainwear to the

homeless. Here is what one of our members said about his experience:

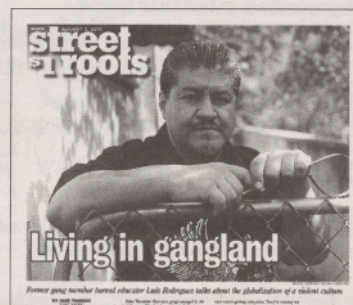
"One night we went to 16th Street where we found families with young children living outside. We passed out our very last sleeping bag for the night and said to the families that we would be back to provide toys for the kids. We passed out all we had that night and left feeling that we wanted to do so much more."

We recognize that the actions we've taken so far do not solve the problems of the homeless. But it is a start. To quote Margaret Mead, a renowned sociologist: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Thank you, Street Roots, for all the work you do for your homeless veterans and all of our homeless brothers and sisters.

You can read more about Veterans For Peace, our activism and our working groups at: www.veteransforpeace.org.

BART BOLGER
Veterans For Peace
Corvallis, Oregon



Re: "Living in Gangland," Street Roots, Aug. 19

A awesome article. I grew up in Southern California and have the experiences of growing up in the hood. Now I'm in North Portland and I see the neglect and poverty that can lead to a growing gang problem. Let's support youth programs and anti-poverty programs folks. That's the only way to protect the next generation.

ED
Portland

Our blog and our Facebook page are great ways to join the conversation. Visit www.streetroots.wordpress.com and friend us on Facebook to chime in!