

# Lessons of Occupy camp call for preserving the safety net

A special editorial from Street Roots:

In spirit, the Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Portland protests over the past six weeks are about creating social change, locally and nationally, on a range of policy matters from poverty to foreign wars.

For better or worse, many of the organic protests staging camps throughout the country have gotten a hard dose of reality about what life is like for hundreds of thousands of people experiencing homelessness in the United States.

Prior to the camp sweeps, Occupy Portland, the media, City Hall, police and others around town have, more times than not, keyed in on the mishaps and barriers to people experiencing mental health and homelessness at the downtown camps. What none of the parties have effectively done is put things into perspective and call on specific policy changes and resource development for people experiencing poverty.

In one of his many communiqués, Mayor Sam Adams said, "The Occupy Portland movement has highlighted the challenges our community, like many across the country, are facing with homelessness. Too many in our community are without a safe place to call home. Despite fiscal challenges, the city has continued to invest in long-term solutions to end homelessness. Commissioner (Nick) Fish and I will be working closely with our dedicated network of service providers to make sure everyone at the camp is aware of the resources that are available. Experienced outreach workers will be reaching out to the homeless people at the camp to help them access existing resources in our community, like health care, emergency shelter, permanent housing placement assistance, and short term needs."

The problem is that adequate resources do not exist for permanent housing or



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

mental health services in our community.

The City of Portland is anticipating significant federal and local cuts that will challenge its ability to keep the safety net intact and provide housing for those most in need. No doubt, we live in challenging times. During a period of increased need for our services, and the people of Portland, budgets are declining – seriously declining for the Portland Housing Bureau.

In fact, if projections are correct, the city's essential housing agency is on pace to lose tens of millions of dollars next year due to the decline in tax increment financing, cuts at the federal level, and sweeping city-wide cuts of between 4 and 8 percent to all city bureaus. In addition, one-time general fund dollars allocated for homelessness and housing services are always one crisis away from disappearing. The other side of this

coin is unsustainably high unemployment and dwindling support systems to staunch the flow of tomorrow's homeless.

The system is teetering. Hence, Occupy Portland and the call for social change.

What's the answer? Nationally, the Occupy Wall Street Movement has been met with mixed results and a growing movement of people calling the group disorganized, fractured, and lacking in plans and objectives. Yet even in the face of apathy and a conservative backlash, the movement has inspired close to a million Americans over six weeks to move their accounts from larger banking institutions to local credit unions and community-owned banks. The movement also influenced other banking institutions to drop debit card fees, showing that regardless of all of the white noise, consumer power still has muscle, even if on

a smaller scale.

Locally, the signs of success are harder to pinpoint.

City Hall and others have said Occupy Portland needs a goal, and contrary to the big picture message, that goal doesn't have to be a nationwide sea change to be a success. There are real solutions within our reach, within sight of City Hall, and responsive to the issues Occupy Portland as amplified.

Here's what Street Roots thinks the city and Occupy Portland should work toward:

- Secure \$1 million dollars for rent assistance this winter, protecting vulnerable renters from losing their housing. It is always less costly, and more humane, to preserve housing than to restore it.
- Waive the budget cuts to the Portland Housing Bureau in the 2012-13 budget due to the financial, employment and housing crisis.

- Guarantee one-time allocations towards homeless, housing and mental health services in the 2012-13 budget. There are thousands of people who are one service away from the streets, and countless services struggling to manage that demand.

- Loosen the stringent laws around camping to allow churches and private businesses to host orderly places for people to sleep.

- Work with the county and state to develop a strategy to backfill millions of dollars lost for mental health services.

- Aggressively pursue a regional strategy – working with willing partners at the federal, state and local levels – to develop sustainable, long-term resources.

If Occupy Portland and City Hall are both serious about creating social change and effecting policy in a healthy environment for people on the streets – the bullets outlined above are what help get us there. Everyone deserves a safe and decent home. Everyone deserves opportunity.

## Five Voices

by Aaron Randazzo

Reflecting upon rivers with respect for radical rarities  
Lady Violin chants her magical melodies  
Delicately dancing and deranging in our dream  
She reminds us: not everything is as it seems

Tantalizing the tongue with tales of time  
Mistress Mandolin murmurs her mystical rhyme  
Enchanted with elderly elegance, eagerly  
Salivating for salvation, singing to infinity

Subtly subduing sections of similar symphonies  
Lord Piano regulates these emotional epiphanies  
Fervently fertilizing these five frivolous voices  
His energy gently guides their melodic choices

Foolishly fiddling with flashes of fulfillment  
Radiant Flute fills the space, what an instrument  
Effortlessly conjuring an echoing stillness  
He fills the land, water, mind with bliss

Vibrating in vanity to mock man's insanity  
Humble hymns hint at healing this ill humanity  
Their splendor sending our soles with speed  
Approaching nowhere, we have arrived indeed

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## Eyes on the Street: Three years of Street Roots photography

Albina Community Bank  
430 NW 10th Avenue



Kristina Wright



Ken Hawkins

The exhibit highlights the best original Street Roots photography over the past three years, along with portraits of Street Roots vendors. The show runs through Nov. 28.

Photographers showcased include Ken Hawkins, Leah Nash, Jennifer Janson, Kristina Wright, Israel Bayer and more.