

EDITORIAL

Investing in safety net pays off in lives, community

Portland's long-standing safety net provides a basic level of security that we all deserve. In particular, when people have a safe, stable, affordable place to live they're better able to invest in themselves, their children and a better city for us all.

City Council's support of the safety net is a powerful stand for Portland values. The safety net consists of critical investments.

There are several vital programs at risk in this year's budget cycle:

We're talking about Portland families at the end of their ropes — families trying any way possible to avoid the streets.

■ **Critical up-to-date referral services for Portland residents in need:** This includes 100,000 copies of Street Roots Rose City Resource guides distributed to more than 200 organizations

and institutions along with services from 211Info, which fielded 240,000 calls from people in need last year.

■ **Short-term rent assistance (STRA) for people experiencing homelessness in our community:** Stabilizes more than 1,300 households annually in permanent housing, freeing up hundreds of spaces in shelter and assisting hundreds more to avoid the enormous personal and community impacts of living on the streets.

■ **Emergency Shelter:** Provides year-round day space and shelter at the Bud Clark Commons, which last year served over 4,300 people, and offer hundreds of additional shelter beds for men and women during the winter months and during life threatening episodes of severe weather.

■ **Homeownership and Foreclosure Prevention:** Assists hundreds of households, especially in communities of color, to achieve homeownership and avoid losing their homes to foreclosure. Our community's foreclosure prevention programs have helped 757 households of color protect over \$132 million dollars in assets.

Beyond the numbers, what we are talking about are people's lives. After years of recession and declining revenues, we're no longer cutting the fat off of an institution. Instead, we're starting to cut into the meat of an already fragile system.

We're not just talking about a growing homeless population. We're talking about Portland families at the end of their ropes — families trying any way possible to avoid the streets.

When a family doesn't have access to housing, their capacity for an education, good health and emotional stability are equally jeopardized. It's all connected. In order maintain a healthy city, together we have to invest in people. When we invest in people, we invest in hope and when we invest in hope, then anything is possible.

We recognize that difficult budget decisions need to be made, but we ask that City Hall find a way to protect the safety net. It's in all of our best interests.

Moving ahead with smart partnerships

Street Roots is happy to announce a partnership with the Meyer Memorial Trust with the goal of publishing weekly at the end of 2013 or beginning of 2014.



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

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Over the past year, along with the help of supporters like you, Street Roots has been building capacity within the organization for such a venture. We have expanded our physical space and opened up a new editorial and

development office at 203 NW 2nd Ave., just around the block from our current office (211 NW Davis) which now serves both the vendor program and the distribution center for the Rose City Resource guide.

We recently built a new ADA restroom in the vendor space with the help of our partners at Innovative Housing. Currently, we offer coffee, fresh water, computers, and hospitality — including hygiene items for vendors. We're hoping to continue to give vendors the best tools available to sell the newspaper.

Ask our vendors what they would change at Street Roots and they will tell you, "Give us a weekly paper." This is key to helping our vendors to continue moving back into the mainstream and to maintaining the mission of the organization.

How do we get there?

Along with the improvements outlined above, the organization is working on a range of outcomes to get us to a weekly publication. We are updating our technologies, including a web-based platform that will help readers and others communicate more directly with us for vendor concerns, advertising, sponsorships, newspaper submissions and more.

We have also created a partnership with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest, giving us additional people to help with the transition, and we'll continue to build smart and effective partnerships to help us move forward. Over the next 18 months, Street Roots will be fundraising and concentrating our energies on building our editorial department — redesigning the paper, fundraising and adding staff to help us prepare.

Each year, more than 250 people experiencing homelessness and poverty gain a hand up by selling the paper. By going weekly, we can significantly increase our impact on individuals and families to prevent or help end their homelessness in the Portland metro area.

There's a lot of work to be done. We believe at Street Roots we are on the right course, and that with your help, we can get there. Thank you, readers, for supporting the organization week-in and week-out. It takes a village, and together we can overcome and do this.

LETTER

Don't dismantle our promise to community

We believe in a Portland where all families can prosper. To build such a community, we need to invest in a continuum of services that helps families not only build stability, but assets too. Homeownership is the single most important way families in our community build these assets. It is not relegated to the wealthy, either. The median net worth of low-income homeowners is 12 times higher than that of renters with comparable incomes.

Portland, like much of the United States, has a checkered past in providing access to homeownership for communities of color. The result has been that communities of color own homes at half the rate of white Portlanders.

The city of Portland, through the Portland Housing Bureau, has made a commitment to address this disparity. We have been partners in meeting that commitment, helping the city deliver on its commitment to equity and fair housing by providing quality coaching to first-time homebuyers, counseling homeowners in danger of foreclosure, and building trusted relationships with families. We do this to bridge the historic and unfortunate distrust of the

government and financial institutions that many communities of color rightfully have.

The work we do is critical to helping first-time and first-generation homeowners achieve and sustain success. Together our organizations have educated and counseled over 3,500 households of color to prepare for homeownership in the past five years, leveraging \$142 million in mortgage lending for the more than 800 families of color who have purchased their home. Foreclosure prevention services have helped protect \$132 million in assets for more than 750 households of color who received counseling in the past three years.

Homeownership also provides a collective vision in our communities. Homeownership inspires our families to make use of services along a continuum: accessing affordable rental housing, financial wellness courses, matched savings programs, career-building skills and other services. The end goal — and primary motivator — remains a home of their own.

The city of Portland has invested in our communities' aspirations, built capacity in culturally-specific service delivery and has achieved success. In

a time of declining one-time resources, however, City Council ultimately will decide if these programs should continue in 2012. If funding is not renewed during this budget cycle, this successful system of creating and sustaining homeownership will be dismantled. The cut to these programs would disproportionately impact communities of color, undermining the city's commitment to equity. We join the city in our commitment to identify more sustainable sources of funding in the long-term, but we cannot risk dismantling this service delivery system in the short term.

We must continue to be a resource for those facing foreclosure. At the same time, current interest rates and housing prices means that homeownership is more accessible to families of color than in the past fifteen years. Now is the time to invest in Portland families — and in Portland's future.

African American Alliance for Homeownership
Hacienda Community Development Corporation
Native American Youth and Family Center
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative Inc.
Portland Housing Center
Proud Ground

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢
goes directly to the vendor
who sold you the paper

25¢
goes toward
printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.