

EDITORIAL

Homeless deaths report a shot over the budget bow

It's budget season, and a lot of numbers are bandied about, nearly all in reference to cuts in funding for programs. The statistical spaghetti of percentages to be reduced, of dollars in decline and the speculative banter of where and what might be salvaged is dizzying to the point of distraction.

Beyond the halls of government, however, is the real world where these numbers represent life or death, from its most literal meaning to the Constitutional fulfillment of having a productive, engaged and successful role in the community.

This past year, 47 people died homeless – literally – on our

city streets, our parks, and the dark recesses they were reduced to. That's the findings of a new report on homeless deaths by Multnomah County, as tallied by the Multnomah County Medical Examiner's

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office. Street Roots is proud to be partnering with the county to publish the report, which sadly gives only a glimpse into the harsh realities of people experiencing homelessness.

The report states, "While this is only a snapshot of the complete picture, the data provides demographic information about the people who are dying while homeless in our community. It tells us that many who died experienced violent ends and struggled with alcohol and drug addiction. Finally, the data lays bare the despair among those living on the streets, as evidenced by suicide."

The recommendations drawn from this report are not groundbreaking – a renewed rally for access to housing, health care, addiction services, information and referral. But they are nonetheless paramount, because all of these services are in jeopardy of being further reduced in this budget cycle. These services, these people, are not expendable, especially in these difficult economic times.

Local governments also need to lead the charge in ensuring that socio-economic issues of homelessness, addiction and mental health concerns are a part of any reformed health care structure for low-income residents. We have the opportunity with the restructuring of the Oregon Health Plan to make sure we don't lose more people through the cracks.

There are a lot of cracks, and they're growing wider.

Just this month, the Portland Children's Levy eliminated its funding to support mental health and substance abuse treatment for the city's homeless youth. It was part of a series of major cuts to programs that help low-income, largely minority youth, succeed. The shortfall creates a significant gap in health care for young adults at such a pivotal time of their lives.

We know there's no magic wand to create money from thin air, but priorities put people's lives first. There are 47 lives, and many more, who are already gone, lost prematurely to the streets. There are thousands more in various stages toward that end.

The county's report on homeless deaths is only in its first year. Each year, it is our hope the report becomes more comprehensive, incorporating the many others who die homeless outside of the medical examiner's jurisdiction. In those numbers is the true measure of our care or neglect of the safety net.

In order to truly understand why people are dying on the streets, what can be done about it and how we may curb or target specific solutions, we have to understand the problem at a deeper level. Street Roots looks forward to partnering with healthcare providers, non-profits and local government to achieve just that.

From Toronto to Portland, Street Roots is on the move

Street Roots works tirelessly to present Portlanders and all readers with quality journalism coupled with advocacy that works toward solutions for people experiencing poverty.



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

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

This past week, Street Roots reporter and advocate Kate Cox visited Toronto, Canada to present our four-part series on Traumatic Brain Injury at a Trauma and Neurosurgery conference. Since the articles ran last year, they have been viewed by leading sports injury experts in North America and are helping contribute to a larger conversation about homelessness and brain injury in the medical field.

You'll also see in this edition of the paper that Street Roots worked in collaboration with Multnomah County to produce the first-ever homeless deaths report. The report will help guide local nonprofits, health care professionals and local governments into a larger conversation on how to end people's homelessness. We would like to send a big shout out to everyone at the Multnomah County Medical Examiner's office, including all of the death investigators for their hard work. Also crucial in creating this report were County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury, the Portland Housing Bureau, the county health department and lastly the McKenzie River Gathering. Again, Street Roots thanks them for their support in this effort.

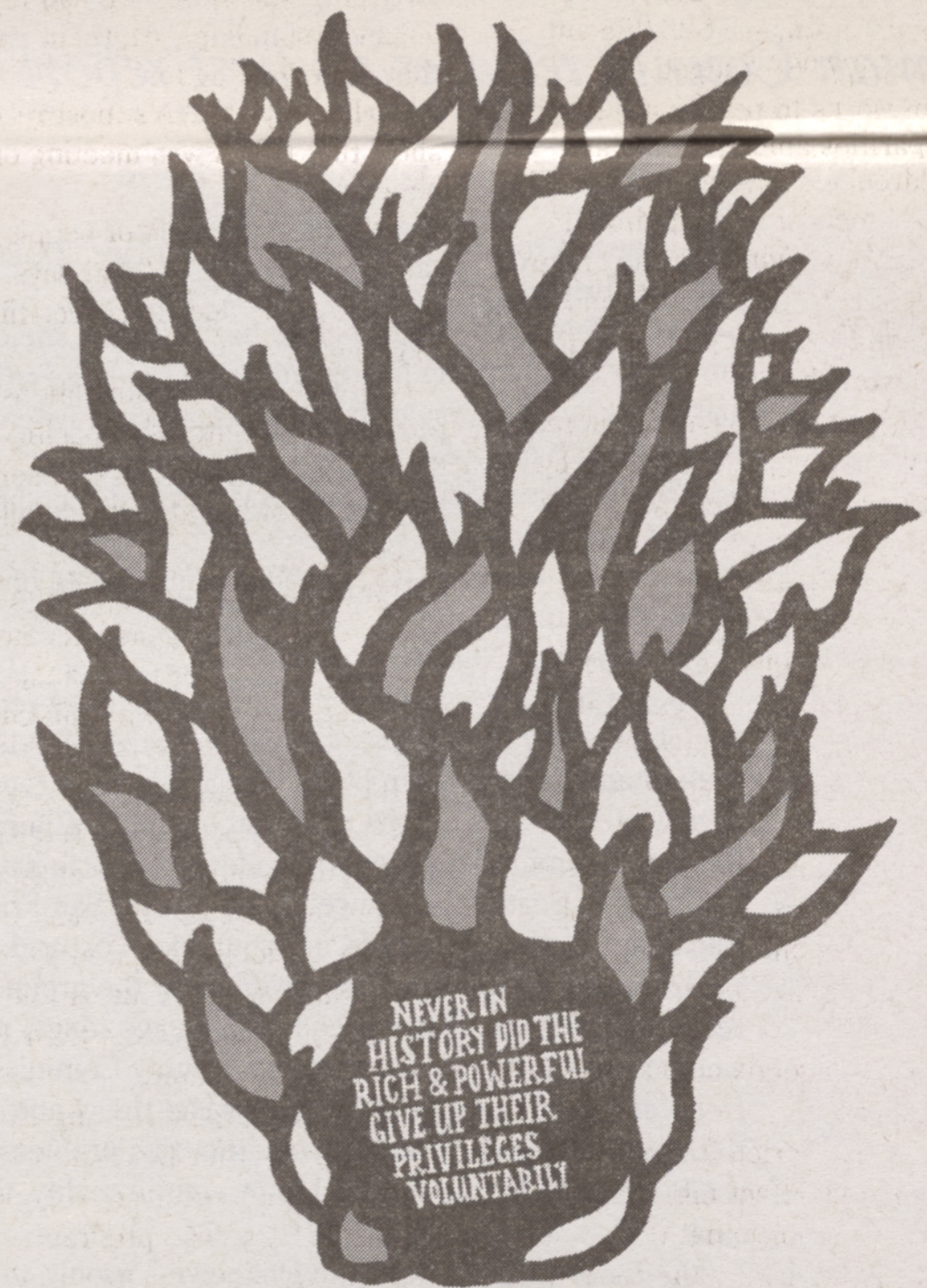
Street Roots continues to collaborate with photographer Leah Nash, who spent an entire year photographing and telling the stories of people living with Asperger's Syndrome. (The five-part photojournalism series is available on our blog at www.streetroots.wordpress.com) We believe humanizing people living with autism is one step in having a larger conversation about mental health in our community. On May 4, in partnership with the I Witness Gallery (See ad on page 6), the Regional Arts and Culture Council, and several autism organizations we will be presenting the photo series. The event will be held at the I Witness Gallery, 1028 SE Water Avenue, Suite 50, at 7 p.m.

Beyond the stories highlighted above, Street Roots continues to work to present ongoing coverage on veterans, local political races, budget forecasts, health care reform, and the civil rights of those living in poverty. We've also increased our coverage to highlight musicians that work toward the greater good.

Plus, when you read Street Roots you're getting some of the most gritty poetry and art in the city along with a broad spectrum of community voices and organizations. None of this would be possible without our hard working staff and volunteers, our reporters and Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl. Together, we continue to grow and learn right alongside readers and vendors selling the newspaper. Together, we believe we can change the world, or at least are little part of it.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.



Jared Davidson

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.