

Beyond the controversy, the promise of R2DToo lives on

Portland State University and Street Roots partner each semester to produce a Capstone class for PSU students. This year, one of the projects was a visit to the Right 2 Dream Too rest area for the homeless in Downtown Portland. Here is the students' reflection on the people they met there.

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In the background at Right 2 Dream Too, the sound of busy West Burnside traffic is hard not to notice. But so are the sounds of laughter, people talking, a resident's dog barking at a skateboarder passing by. Here, on the corner lot of Northwest Fourth Avenue and Burnside, lives a mother, a chef, and a jack-of-all-trades.

Known as a rest area for people experiencing homelessness, R2DToo serves as an overnight shelter for between 40 to 60 people on any given night. It also serves as a temporary home to an additional 30 residents, each with their own backgrounds, outlooks, and aspirations. It began in October to become a safe place for people to rest and to dream at no cost to taxpayers; a place where people are not judged by their past or their problems, rather by what they do now to better themselves and those around them. As co-founder Ibrahim Mubarak puts it, "failure is not a sin. But low aim is."

Because of code violations, the city has been fining the property owners, who lease the site to R2DToo, more than \$1,200 a month. And while that's attracted the local news, the real story isn't in the codes. It's in the people.

The Mother

Estranged from her family at an early age, Mama Chewy has been living on the streets off and on for the better part of the past decade.

With a sleeveless button up blouse and chipped purple nail polish on her fingernails, Mama is a large and jovial woman. She recalls the first time she heard about Right 2 Dream Too. It was on the local news she saw while at a shelter. It was a godsend. After sleeping in a doorway near the Skidmore Fountain Building at Southwest First Avenue and Ankeny, Mama and her fiancé made a beeline for the area. There, they found somewhere not only to sleep safely, but in the comfort of one another's arms.

"None of this was here back then. We started out with nothing." Mama Chewy sits contemplatively for a moment, eyes gazing out over the neatly arranged tents divided into groups by well-groomed gravel walkways. Though the rest area is now a neatly organized community, Mama recalls her first night at R2DToo as vividly as if it were yesterday,

sitting atop her suitcase waiting impatiently for her fiancé to show up with their tent, drenched in the rain falling upon the empty gravel lot.

Since coming here in the midst of its inception, Mama Chewy says she now has some hope for her future. She is proud to claim nine months of sobriety. And although her health problems prevent her from working, she is now on a waiting list for four different housing prospects. Now, having R2DToo as a home base, she has no trouble meeting regularly with her caseworker to sort out her post traumatic stress disorder. Thinking about her future, Mama Chewy says, "While I appreciate Right 2 Dream Too, I want more. I want my own kitchen, my own bedroom, my own bathroom. My own rules."

It's been over 30 years since she has seen her own mother. At 45, has six children of her own. Although she gave up her parental rights years ago, she still yearns to be reunited with them, hoping they will find her when they come of age.

The support of R2D2 helps keep her sober, she says, and she is working her way to permanent housing. A home in which her children might someday come to visit is no longer out of reach.

The Chef

Small in both stature and ferocity, a young black and white pit bull by the name of Paige can often be found lounging in one of the plastic chairs at the entrance to the R2DToo rest area, leash dangling from her collar. Although her owner, Marty Monahan, has shaved in the last two days, flecks of salt and pepper stubble are starting to show.



Dressed in an oversized flannel shirt and worn black work boots, the many silver rings on his fingers reflect the light of the midday sun. A licensed appraiser, Monahan, 44, had worked in his mother's antiques shop. When the business went under, it was only a matter of months until he blew through his savings, landing himself on the streets just one month before he came to the rest area. He has been at R2DToo since its inception on World Action Homeless Day.

Before experiencing homelessness first hand, Monahan is quick to admit, "I used to be one of those people, you know, driving by and pointing at all those dirty people with their dirty signs."

These days, Monahan is using R2DToo as a place where he can take some time to find out who he is, and what he wants to do next. But for now he is focusing on helping others in his situation stay safe and well fed.

In addition to being one of several organizers at Right 2 Dream Too, Monahan also serves as R2DToo's resident chef. Although the makeshift kitchen is open to anyone that can use a hotplate, many prefer the artistry of Monahan's cuisine. He draws upon more than 15 years of professional culinary experience to create dishes from whatever miscellaneous foods may be in stock. Whether making pasta, soup, or a simple sandwich, ingredients are at the whim of a donations stockpile built on the kindness of others: friends, neighbors, inspired passersby. Not only is Monahan willing to cook for those within the rest area, he often prepares food for those even less fortunate than himself. Making rounds throughout the neighborhood – past doorways and under bridges – Monahan aims to fill the bellies of anyone in need.

It is also up to Monahan to provide refreshments every Tuesday night at 8 o'clock for family movie night. These nights the smell of buttered popcorn competes with the aroma of roast duck from Chen's

Good Taste next door. With a scavenged television set, an extension cord, and a few rows of folding chairs, the residents settle in at the end of their day to watch movies checked out from the Multnomah County Library.

The Jack-of-all-Trades

Every night, Mark Hubbell reads in his tent by the light of a dim Dollar Store flashlight. "It's all I have," says Hubbell, 51, who sports a keenly shaved head. A hint of red in his bushy grey mustache reveals the hair color of his youth. Before coming to

A scene from R2D2: A man reaches out to help a friend carry her things to the train station en route to Santa Cruz, Calif., while a small group of friends gather outside the rest area to say their goodbyes.

PHOTO BY AMANDA SMITH

"If you don't have to worry about where to lay your head at night, it makes all the difference in the world."