

EDITORIAL

Trends in child welfare project a tragic state ahead

Oregonians, and Portlanders in particular, enjoy a quality of life that is the envy of much of the nation. We count a bounty of natural, cultural and social resources at our disposal. If we work at it, those resources will be there for the next generation, and the ones to follow.

However, it will take even more work if we want to ensure that the next generation will be able to afford, or even access the Oregon they inherit.

As Street Roots went to press, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released its 2012 Kids Count Data Book, which charts national and state trends in child health and well-being. For more than two decades, the private,

national philanthropy organization has compiled data on children across the country. The data measured economic well being, education, health and family and community.

It's no surprise that across the country some indicators have improved. But many have worsened. State by state, Oregon ranked 33rd. We didn't even break the top half.

In terms of economic wellbeing, Oregon ranks 41st, with all four indicators in decline.

Economic wellbeing for this study is a measure of the number of children in poverty, but also children living in households with a high housing cost burden, and children whose parents lack secure employment. It also includes teens not in school and not working. Their future, statistically speaking, comes with higher risks of poor academic performance, poor physical and mental health, unemployment and neglect than their middle-class counterparts.

According to the data, 184,000 children (22 percent) live in poverty and 315,000 (36 percent) have no stably employed parents. Housing cost factor directly into Oregon families' economic strain, with 45 percent of Oregon children living in families overburdened by housing costs.

This is an untenable situation, and yet we are watching it gradually get worse. With each legislative budget cycle, it has become standard operating procedure to sharpen the axe on the programs aimed at stabilizing our poorest neighbors. Over the years, we have chipped away at Oregon's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to the point of jeopardizing the process of training, employment and stabilization the program is known for. Before the children and families became statistics in this study, they were the families in need of child care and transportation assistance to get to and from job interviews, school or work. They were the families that needed short-term rent assistance to avoid eviction during a rough patch in their income—there were families who could make it, with a little bit of support.

Oregon, on all levels of government and society, cannot dismiss the slope we are sliding down.

The cliché that children are our future has some truth in it, but more to the point is that we are theirs. We live in a land of abundance, but a widening swath of our next generation is falling beyond the reach of academic success, gainful employment, a stable family, and physical and mental health. For that, we all pay the price.

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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Right 2 Dream Too deserves city leadership

The city should find a way to offer Right 2 Dream Too land to relocate the tent city currently occupying Southwest Fourth and Burnside. The

argument that people shouldn't be living in tents as an alternative to housing doesn't hold a whole lot of weight when thousands of people are living in unfair conditions under bridges and in doorways every night.

Like Dignity Village, Right 2 Dream Too is an asset to the community. Both groups have found a way to work peer-to-peer with some of the hardest brothers and sisters on the streets, giving people the hope and discipline to have something stable in their lives.

The city subsidizes operating costs for many different groups that work with people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Right 2 Dream Too should be not be considered any different. The group has proven to the community that they are

organized and have what it takes to create a safe and stable environment for people on the streets.

Right now, the city and Right 2 Dream Too are at loggerheads. The camp is caught in a bitter dispute between the property owner at Southwest Fourth Avenue and Burnside and the city, ultimately leaving the fate of the camp in the hands of Commissioner Dan Saltzman and the Bureau of Development Services.

Commissioner Nick Fish and the Portland Housing Bureau should step in. If Right 2 Dream Too is going to be successful, it's going to be the leadership of the Portland Housing Bureau that makes it happen.

Right 2 Dream Too has the support of local foundations, organizations such as Street Roots, and many other community members. It's time for the city to support the group.

In a time of great need, when housing for people experiencing homelessness continues to be one of the biggest challenges in our community, we're looking to both Right 2 Dream Too and the City of Portland to find a way to do the right thing.



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

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

LETTER

Scary moment ended by a kind vendor

Anytime you lose your wallet, panic sets in. It's been felt by all of us at some time. When I came out of Powell's Books and purchased a copy of Street Roots from a vendor I didn't know, I was carrying a vest, a book and my wallet, and it all looked a little clumsy. Nonetheless, I purchased a copy and added it to my load. I fumbled with the cargo as I raced to make the "Walk" signal to the other side. While getting organized, I realized I didn't have my wallet anymore.

I panicked. I looked around but didn't see it. I figured it was gone, what with all the people passing by. I returned to the store counter to see if I had left it there. No. As I turned to leave, the vendor I had just purchased the paper from was on his way in with my wallet. He had found it in the street.

He didn't have to do that. He could have easily put it in his pocket and no one would be the wiser.

Except him.

But he is an honest man, and chose to return it.

I introduced myself and learned his name was Bill. And I thanked him.

I just wanted to let you know about this, and appreciate your publication and its vendors. Especially Bill.

GARY BANEY

Look to the Future

By Wallace E. High

Look to the future, waiting, so far away
As yet just one notch before the next second,
Daring the present instant to longer stay
And draw upon the sweet moment that beckoned.

Imagine if you will, the excitement and the thrill
Of the pregnant visions and dreams locked in place
Waiting for fulfillment just over the hill
To carve a fulgent smile beaming on every face.

So many times, deceived, we fell hurt and lost
As we try to salvage mean segments of our lives
And finally direct our focus upon the cross
Where good folks' faith still grows and thrives.

We speak so artfully into the wispy ether
To sculpt our radiant words like pearls to shine
Across the great span of endless time sparing
Neither passion nor purpose of grand design

Fear not the lurking pitfalls in shadows far ahead
And welcome the risk of romance in the venture
As golden dreams bring content to your warm bed
When you joyfully awaken and look to the future.

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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.