

Journalism that makes a difference on the streets

How much difference can one newspaper make? It can be a difficult question to answer in the age of media on demand, and a city like Portland that soaks it up in all shapes and sizes.

But even in this environment, Street Roots is making a tremendous difference by connecting readers, vendors and the community at large.

This past year – based on our new July-June fiscal season – our reporting has taken us forward into issues both familiar and new.

In November, in partnership with the Regional Arts Council, Street Roots and award-winning photojournalist Leah Nash produced a series on the lives of people with Asperger's Syndrome. Nash spent a year photographing and filming five fascinating people in our community who live within the spectrum of autism that few people understand.

We've also shined a light on the often-overlooked connection between traumatic brain injury and homelessness. The three-part series looked at how undiagnosed TBI can both cause and perpetuate homelessness, and how homelessness can turn a curable condition into a crippling, life-long disability.

In 2011, 47 people died homeless on the streets of Portland, and Street Roots broke open the coverage on the new tracking system between the medical examiner's office and Multnomah County. At nearly one a week, we will continue to report on this information, its expansion to include more of the people experiencing homelessness, and how local governments respond to the tragedy.

It's hard to believe it's been almost a year since we chronicled the birth of Right 2 Dream Too. We will continue to report on its endurance against the stereotypes and political machinery that threaten to end its existence.

Throughout the year, we've kept health care reform, the foreclosure crisis and the housing agenda front and center in our coverage, and will continue to do so as new faces and dynamics take hold in Washington, D.C., Salem and Portland City Hall. Likewise, we hope to build on our coverage of veterans' issues, as Oregon soldiers return home to new challenges.

At the same time, we've incorporated

more personalities and entertainers into our pages, including Mickey Hart, Noam Chomsky, Grace Potter and the Dalai Lama.

We've welcomed new writers to our team, including economist Robin Hahnel, the Partnership for Safety and Justice, and Ramona's mom, Melissa Favara. Equally important are the poems and essays from our community, including a powerful collection of work of the young adults at the Native American Youth and Family Center. And we're proud to continue our partnership with Portland State University's Capstone program, helping deliver a course on Street Roots, journalism and homelessness.

We intend to build on these relationships and the concept of a community newspaper with more contributors in the coming year. Our new website will feature a news section that will bring closer together the voices from on and off the streets. Look for new faces, new voices and a new look to SR in the coming year.

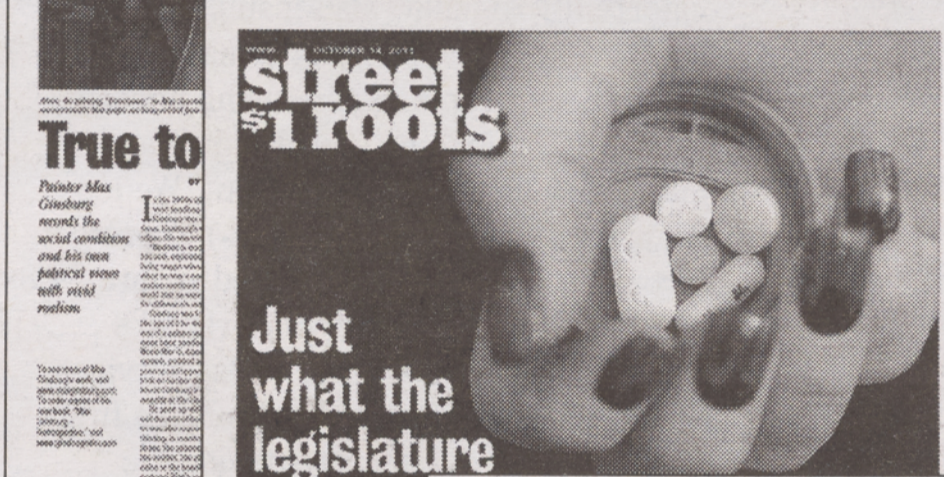
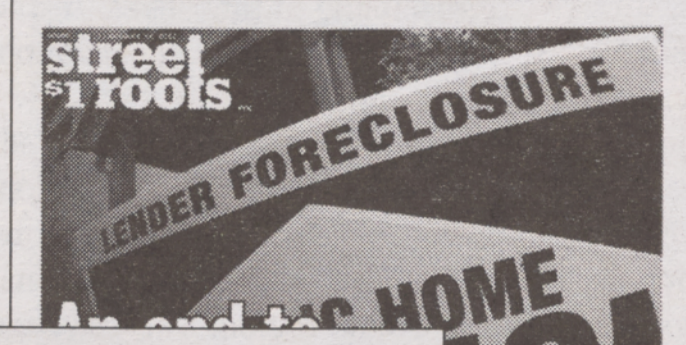
And if you still have doubts about how much difference a newspaper can make, take a glance at a special project we completed in December. On the cover were dozens of our vendors holding a sign saying, in one word, what Street Roots means to them. It's a powerful collection of faces, many of whom you probably know. And it's a powerful expression of what we do. Hope. Independence. Survival. Self-Esteem. Purpose. Life. Employment. Opportunity. Inspiration. Living. Success. For one little newspaper, that's a good place to start.

Thank you.

*James Zisk*

Street Roots will help you if you want to help yourself. It's a very good paper."

Willie Bradford  
SR Vendor



"I like the feeling of honesty that comes from selling Street Roots. I may not make a lot of money, but I feel good about what I'm doing. I feel like I get an added sense of satisfaction when I'm able to turn somebody on to the newspaper for the first time, especially if they end up buying one because it's something that I feel a strong alliance with. It's something I'd like to be an advocate for long after I need to actually sell it myself."

— Jonathan Bartley  
SR Vendor



Throughout 2011, Portland photojournalist Leah Nash documented the lives of five people (including the people featured above and at left) living with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism that was slated for elimination from the medical books. The series was a combined production with the Regional Arts & Culture Council and Street Roots. The series, which debuted in Street Roots in November, chronicled the diversity of this complex diagnosis of autism, illustrating the challenges and beauty of an unconventional life. The collection was on display at I Witness Gallery in Portland in May and honored in The Best of Photo Journalism 2012. Left, a photo of Leska Adams kayaking with her water therapy service dog, Orka.