

EDITORIAL

Health care crisis far wider
than DOJ report

When it comes to police conduct in this city, there is always a bounty of finger pointing to go around. The Department of Justice's report on its investigation of the Portland Police Bureau points its own fingers, too. It is critical of the police bureau's "unconstitutional" overuse of force, including the repeated application of Tasers, on people experiencing or perceived to be experiencing mental illness. It points to the bureau's administration and deficiencies in policy, training and supervision. We agree, and support the creation of an independent body for police oversight.

The potentially devastating interaction between police and people in the throes of mental crisis has to be a health care priority.

The DOJ also cites a lack of capacity in social services to handle mental health crisis situation, including the absence of crisis triage center. Entire chains of communication had gaping holes between the street and accessing

acute care.

Indeed, the report packs its criticism with caveats around limited resources and an inordinate expectation that police officers take care of mental health crises, at least as they appear on the streets, among those facing perhaps of the worst moments of their lives.

One finger is missing, however. The one that should be pointing back at Washington D.C. and the health care industrial complex. This is a health care issue, after all, and for all the potential the DOJ report can offer us in terms of reform and improvements; it is a view through the lens of the criminal justice system.

The potentially devastating interaction between police and people in the throes of mental crisis has to be a health care priority. We can appeal to local and state services to refine programs and dedicate more funding to the cause, but until we have meaningful health care reform at the federal level we cannot create the systemic change needed to prevent the tragedies occurring on our streets.

The Affordable Care Act significantly improved options for people with mental health issues, but it does not ensure a federal commitment to funding mental health care. For children and low-income individuals and families, mental health care relies on federal and state programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Yet these programs are routinely cut. Medicaid reimbursements are far below the cost of treatment, and states are forced to shift or reduce funding to services for the poor.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, states have cut more than \$1.6 billion from their mental health services over the past three years. Oregon has bucked this trend, slightly increasing its funding for mental health services. But this crisis doesn't have boundaries, and clearly the commitment falls short of the need we see daily in our city.

If the federal government wants to look at the problem of people in mental crisis on our streets, it has to point the first finger at its own policies toward health care, body and mind.

The bell has rung — let the bidding begin!

Street Roots fourth annual online auction is happening now at www.streetrootsauction.org. The 10-day event runs from now until 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7.



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

DIRECTOR'S
DESK

By Israel Bayer

We have some great items for readers, no matter your budget. We have items that would make for a perfect date night, or a fun Portland adventure with the family. Get some groceries at New Seasons, or go to one of the many breweries or eateries that supported us this year. Check out one of our many items in our health and wellness section.

We have a private show available from the great Casey Neill, piano lessons from the Decemberists' Jenny Conlee, hot air balloon rides, lunch with City Commissioner Nick Fish and County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury, dinner with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps Mac House, and a day in the life at the Portland Mercury, to name a few.

We have signed comics from Pulitzer Prize finalists Matt Bors and Jack Ohman, signed artwork from Nikki McClure and photography from yours truly. Not to mention we have a lots of affordable items from around PDX, including tickets to upcoming shows. We have gift certificates to bookstores, museums and a range of local businesses that make up the heart of this city.

Taking part in the online auction is a great way to treat yourself or a loved one or to sock away some holiday gifts. We try to offer items through the online auction that many readers will already use in their daily lives.

So, what are you waiting for? Head over to www.streetrootsauction.org and start your bidding. You can also check out the back page of this issue to see the individuals and businesses that are taking part. Your support of the organization will go toward supporting our award-winning journalism, vendor programs and advocacy work. Your support means the world to all of us at Street Roots. Give some love this week and get something great back in return.

LETTERS

Writer's reflection on homelessness a reminder of common ties

I want to thank Solara McFarland for a well-written essay about life on the streets, and remembering those who still live in that world. Those of us who have our basic needs met in a safe and comfortable manner too often take that for granted, and too easily turn a blind eye to those who are struggling with homelessness. This essay is a reminder to all of us that we are all connected, all human beings who deserve respect, not judgement. Thank you Solara for showing us how easy it is to care.

— KATHY
Portland

I was astonished by the professionalism and salesmanship each displayed. All had their own sales pitch, and one man even convinced me I needed a past edition as it contained the annual report, which I promptly purchased. The articles were of interest and well done. Thanks for starting this program to give a hand up not a hand out. You are, as they say, "teaching people to fish," as opposed to giving them fish; the program provides dignity, confidence and a better world.

This should be what the politicians should be concerned about, the people of our nation!

— JOYCE BOWERS
Orlando Florida

Newspaper a model for
dignity, a better world

I recently visited Portland on a short vacation from Orlando, Florida. I wanted to let you know that you have a beautiful city, a great newspaper and wonderful professional vendors. Over the several days I visited Portland I encountered several of your vendors, two at the Saturday market, in front of the Marriott I was staying in, and several others on my various walks in the

Thanks always appreciated!

I am a middle class, middle aged Portlander. And I have come to realize that your paper is the most intelligent and rational in Portland. Thank you for your good work!

— KATHY
Portland

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?

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

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 pdxxrosecityresource@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.