

## EDITORIAL

Some refreshing dialogue  
around mental health

Street Roots has worked in and around the issue of mental health since our inception, some 14 years ago.

We've watched many individuals and families struggle with the issue of mental health, both through the services we offer at Street Roots and through the institutions and policies we cover editorially.

Fewer than two months ago, a person who was clearly struggling with mental health problems used Street Roots as a safe place during the day. The man walked around our block, hour after hour, in the pouring rain. He was obviously scared and not familiar with what resources he had available to him. He was reaching out for us to help.

**When we hear our local and state leadership not only openly talking about the importance of mental health care, but also offering a calculated path forward on the issue, we have hope.**

Being a small, grassroots organization with a limited drop-in service, we did everything in our power to help. We called a range of services. He refused to engage, and no one, including ourselves, deemed him harmful to himself or anyone else. Were we making the right

decision? We don't know.

After several days, and one staff member dedicating herself to working with the individual, we finally got him to start communicating to a mental health outreach worker. Things were looking up. Days later, he was gone. We have no idea where he went or if he was helped. His story was replaced by others with severe mental health disparities who each day access groups such as Street Roots for basic services, like a restroom or a cup of coffee. It's overwhelming at times.

Recently, the Street Roots viewed "Alien Boy: The Life and Times of James Chasse," a film that we highly recommend, and one that offers a dark and emotional insight into the failures of our mental health system. Likewise, the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary, and the countless souls that have been forgotten on our own streets, deserve our paramount attention.

That's why when we hear Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen, Mayor Charlie Hales, and Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney not only openly talking about the importance of mental health care, but also offering a calculated path forward on the issue, we have hope.

Cogen, in his State of the County address, proposed a first-aid training program. Cogen expects the county to offer two-day seminars for mental health training to front-line responders, like county workers, nonprofits, teachers and law enforcement officers.

Hales has promised to continue to work with law enforcement and the city to broaden training and offer resources for mental health services.

Sen. Courtney recently proposed a \$330 million plan in Salem to target a wide array of services for mental health, including housing, jail diversion, employment programs and training, to name a few.

We commend all of our representatives for their actions. What's needed now is a broader political will, locally and around the state, for their peers to follow the call to action.

## Everyone is equal at Street Roots

"Bill is a hero!"  
That's how the email ended from an employee at Powell's who recently communicated a story that unfolded with a Street Roots vendor.



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

DIRECTOR'S  
DESK

By Israel Bayer

Earlier this month, Bill found what turned out to be a Bronze Star issued to a local military veteran. William let Powell's know that he had found the medal and that he had placed it on a cross in his apartment. If the owner were to

call, he had the medal waiting for the person.

A couple of days later, the owner of the medal did in fact call Powell's as a last resort, thinking possibly someone might have found it. It was a prized family keepsake.

Realizing that the family was coming back for the medal, Bill put it in a small, black jewelry box for a nice presentation.

According to the Powell's employee, he witnessed the exchange between the woman and Bill. "I could see from afar, handshakes, hugs and tears. It was a beautiful site to behold."

This is just one of many stories that come through the Street Roots door from customers and local businesses. On dozens of neighborhood street corners throughout Portland, you'll find a local vendor who has become a staple in the community.

But aren't homeless and poor people supposed to be scary? Don't homeless people just sit around and drink and take from society? Aren't they a menace to commerce?

We believe Street Roots is shattering those myths.

We'll be the first to admit we're not perfect. One bad interaction with a Street Roots vendor probably equals 100 great interactions, especially for people that might not know about the paper. You could also probably argue that Street Roots is made up of dozens of people, including myself, that

aren't polished and are rough around the edges.

Street Roots is a community. In the face of some of the most brutal conditions that one can face in the United States, we watch vendors come together every day to better themselves. They choose to work hard, to make a dime and to change the way people see the face of homelessness in this city.

We're not talking about some survival-of-the-fittest mumbo-jumbo or how one rugged individualist can conquer all. We're talking about how a collective group of people can come together and do better for themselves and the larger community.

We believe everyone is equal at Street Roots. It's not always easy.

Bill is a long-time drugstore cowboy. Jimmy is a former Crip and coming off 4-year run in the pen and wants to leave street life behind. George use to run with the Aryan Nation, and turning his life and belief system around. Bobby has cancer and is dying a slow death without adequate treatment. Tammy just became homeless and is running from domestic violence. Carol has finally got it together enough to try to kick the dope. Tom is coming back from two tours in Afghanistan and is fighting demons in his head. Dick has been homeless for 20 years after growing up in abuse. The names have been changed for privacy, but the list goes on and on.

What we all have in common is Street Roots. More important than this is the love for one another regardless of our past. Today is a new day, and together we can do great things. Believe.

Great things show themselves in many different ways at Street Roots. In the case of Bill, it was returning a Bronze Star to a family. In the case of all of the vendors, it's the idea that with each newspaper or interaction that all of us — including you the reader — can help individuals overcome the tragedy and heartache that poverty brings. We are a tribe of 15,000 readers and vendors, and together we are making a difference, literally.

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.

## The Poem

By Avendor

Here is a poem  
Sitting all alone  
There is no one else  
It's a rough place to start  
Its journey into the newspaper  
But the pen is carried away  
By a man whose faith of ten wavers  
The poem is merely something  
For the man to do  
To make his time meaningful  
And the life he must live through  
The poem won't pay the rent  
And probably won't be posted by the last supper  
But you can read it with your coffee  
And show it to your mother.

## 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.

Street Roots  
211 NW Davis St.  
Portland, OR 97209  
503-228-5657  
Fax: 503-227-3117  
www.streetroots.org  
www.news.streetroots.org

## Staff

**Executive Director** Israel Bayer  
israel@streetroots.org

**Managing Editor** Joanne Zuhl  
joanne@streetroots.org

**Vendor Coordinator** Cole Merkel  
cole@streetroots.org

**Operations Director** Sarah Beecroft  
**Program Assistant** Kara Dimitruk, Jesuit  
Volunteer AmeriCorps Member  
kara@streetroots.org

**Grant Writer** Sarah Cloud

**Development Assistant** Cynthia Kiehl

**Reporters** Jake Thomas, Alex Zielinski, Robert  
Britt, Sue Zalokar

**Photographers** Leah Nash, Ken Hawkins, Kristina  
Wright, Christopher Onstott

Stay connected with us online  
through Facebook and Twitter



## Board of Directors

Bruce Anderson (Chairman), Michael Anderson (Vice-chairman), Heather Stadick (Treasurer), Eddy Barbosa (Secretary), Rich Rodgers, Brad Taylor, Leo Rhodes, Ken Hawkins, Nora Coon, Darren Alexander

## Volunteers

Mary Pacios, Jan Bayer, Ann Erelina, Vinnie Kinsella, Sharron Thompson, Ann-Derrick Gaillot, Art Garcia, Joe Thick, Erin Fenner, Stacey Heath, Taurin Skinner-Macginnis, Amber Bielman, Bethany Hague, Michelle Holbert, Leah Ingram, John Lisifka

## 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.