

EDITORIAL

Death on the streets is cruel, premature and preventable

Last year, 56 people died while experiencing homelessness in Multnomah County. In 2011, the figure was 47. In addition to these numbers, we know that even more people on the streets died in local hospitals that were not counted by the medical examiner.

Why should we care?

On its face, what does the number 56 even mean? In an age when we are overwhelmed with the number of people dying for any number of poverty-related issues, it's hard to give context to what the numbers mean.

What we know:

Research shows that people experiencing homelessness age prematurely. We know that homelessness takes a toll, mentally and physically, on the human body. We also know that homelessness contributes to death at far too young an age. This year the average age of death was 46.

These individuals were not only someone's family, or friend, they were human beings that could have gone on to do great things in their lives given the chance.

In many cases, the manner of death was horrendous.

Someone burned to death, one froze to death, and another drowned. Seven people died of heart and vascular disease. Ten

people committed suicide, possibly due to the lack of hope. Twenty individuals suffered of drug- or alcohol-related deaths. The list goes on.

When you begin to think of it in terms of how many people are dying each year while homeless, across the United States, the number may be in the thousands.

We as a community should pause and understand that each one of these individuals were human beings and passed away far to early in life.

What should we do?

Housing is not only the safest way to provide people adequate health care, it's also the most cost effective. Housing should be a key component in Oregon's strategy for health care reform, period. We know that by providing people a safe and stable home that we can give people the opportunity to live long and successful lives.

Suicide prevention must also be a focus among people experiencing poverty, whether someone is actually homeless or about to fall into homelessness. Among the biggest keys to suicide prevention is education, an adequate health care network and a strong social safety net.

Opiate overdoses continue to be an overall public health problem throughout Oregon. We must do better to explore harm reduction models that let health care providers engage and work with I.V. drug users. That includes education, needle exchange programs and thinking about out-of-the-box methods used in other parts of the world, such as injection sites. We know harm reduction models of health care work when given the chance.

Moving forward, Street Roots, Multnomah County and the city of Portland will continue to track the outcomes of people on the streets and advocate for the social safety net.

These individuals were not only someone's family, or friend, they were human beings that could have gone on to do great things in their lives given the chance. Creating and maintaining safe and stable housing for people in distress is one way we can honor those who have passed, and prevent thousands more from having the same fate.

Team Street Roots is working on many fronts

Street Roots has been very busy on the homeless advocacy and policy front as of late.



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

Street Roots, along with many of our partners are helping lead the, "We are the Safety Net" campaign. The campaign has worked very hard to secure local funding for homeless and housing services.

The campaign worked with people experiencing

poverty to tell a broader narrative through social media about obtaining housing and accessing services. At the same time, the coalition worked very hard with local officials to help secure funding.

We're happy to report that the city is prioritizing the safety net for the most part and funding more than one million dollars in programs that many thought were lost.

Commissioner Steve Novick told Street Roots, "I'm very pleased that the safety net programs have been preserved, it reflects our values in City Hall." Amazing.

It's important to also recognize the leadership at Multnomah County for prioritizing the safety net. The county has projected a multi-million dollar increase to funding for human service programs that include rent assistance, programs for runaway youth and homeless families.

Saying that, we still have work to do. We have numerous programs that still face an uphill battle, including needle exchange, mental health services and more. Over the past three decades we've seen the federal government slash funding for poverty programs and the recent recession has compounded the problem. We still face a massive shortage of affordable rental and subsidized housing. Street Roots will not rest until we feel like we as a community have tackled these important priorities.

One of the most important pieces of the puzzle to maintaining adequate services and giving individuals and families the opportunity to be successful is identifying a long-term, permanent funding source for homeless and housing services. Street Roots along with our partners will continue to explore and work toward this goal. We

believe by partnering with a wide-range of community members and interests we can get there.

Another priority in the housing front is health care reform. Money for housing should be considered a key strategy in driving down the costs of health care.

Street Roots has also worked to deter legislation in Salem that will impact local communities throughout Oregon and allow for local governments to create stricter sidewalk laws. The legislation appears to be a runaway train. In the coming months expect a lively debate among advocates for the poor, business groups and City Hall.

We believe the issue of sidewalks and panhandling detracts from the larger goal of getting people off the streets. We also believe very much in the civil rights of people experiencing poverty. Whatever the outcome of the legislation for stricter sidewalk law — we hope something productive will come out of the conversations.

Lastly, Street Roots has worked hard to advocate for and co-author the second annual Domicile Unknown report (See page 3). The report looks at how many homeless people passed way last year and offers a small glimpse in the harsh realities of homelessness. We believe by tracking this data that we will eventually be able to build the political will to create some real preventive measures to deter the experience of homelessness all together.

Street Roots is a small train that carries a heavy load in the community. We hope the advocacy work we do reflects this. From our indepth reporting and platform for people and communities that are underserved, to the vendor program that helps more than 500 people each year improve their quality of life, to publishing more than 100,000 Rose City Resource Guides, we are constant optimists at Street Roots. Even in the face of the some of the cruelest conditions human beings endure, we believe in the power of people and community. We believe in the power of love. But just as important, we believe in working hard and providing solutions to some of the most difficult problems our city and society face. We are proud to have so many readers on our team. Thank you.

Caution

By Anonymous

Enter a world of possibilities
Where the mind's imagination
Is never ending, where your brain
Can become consumed
By images of naked pixels,
Where the numbers 0 & 1
Can make your eyes run
From one end of the screen
To the other.
Behold the Internet.

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

Development Director Sarah Cloud
Development Assistant Cynthia Kiehl

Reporters Jake Thomas, Alex Zielinski, Nathan Gilles, Robert Britt, Sue Zalokar, Erin Fenner

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

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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.