

EDITORIAL

We need to update our perceptions about poverty

Time was that moving out of the city and into the suburbs was a mark of success, a move solidifying a family's foothold in the middle class and a future of upward mobility.

In the 1960s and 70s, the federal government encouraged suburban living, investing in incentives for homebuyers to fill row upon row of shiny new homes. It was the commercial format for the American Dream.

Today, however, suburbs have reached the tipping point. Suburbs today are home to a larger and faster growing poor population than both cities and rural areas — 16.4 million residents and counting. That's according to a new report by the Metropolitan Policy Program of the Brookings Institute. In the Portland metro area, the city saw its poverty population increase 71 percent between 2000 and 2011. In its suburbs, during the same period, the increase was 99

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percent, nearly doubling in 10 years.

What does this matter? Here, there, poverty is all the same, right?

It matters because we cannot solve a problem without first understanding it. Indeed, there are similarities among people

experiencing poverty regardless of where they live, but there are differences as well: challenges to less-affluent schools shouldering more and more children in need, obstacles in transportation access and costs, and an overburdened safety net of services

It matters in how we plan for affordable housing. Portland proper became a high-cost housing destination while the suburbs became the last affordable place for low-income and subsidized renters, including the elderly and disabled on limited incomes.

But perhaps the most problematic challenge is the least concrete: Our perception of who is poor and homeless today.

The 99 percent, as it were, are families, with both parents working full-time and then one, if not both, losing their job. They are children, struggling in school where free and reduced-lunch programs are filling in for meals missed at home. Foreclosures and long-term unemployment have derailed families across communities with few resources or direct service.

The city's one-night homeless count found 2,869 people sleeping in emergency shelter or on the streets. An additional 1,572 people were counted in transitional housing that same night. In addition to those figures are more than 4,800 people who received rent assistance or permanent supportive housing on the night of the count. Altogether, the city is looking at a 10 percent increase over the 2011 count. But those figures don't include individuals and families who are doubled up, and the city's report suggest that they may account for as many as four times the number of people sleeping in shelters or on the streets. They are, for now, far on the periphery of our political consciousness, our social programs and our solutions.

We need more flexible funding streams and greater regional collaboration to turn this around. Our perceptions must change about who is living in poverty today if we are to see the political will and collaboration needed to reverse this terrible trend.

Paying it forward still an inspiring way to live

Feeling overwhelmed by my busy week at Street Roots, I was reminded last week by vendor John Michael of a simple message — that all anyone really

needs is to know that they're loved.

I stopped in my tracks.

He smiled at me and gave me a hug. We each shared a story with one another, laughing at our silly ways. We fist bumped and went about

our day. It was magic.

Each day, we are bombarded with different messages and tasks and things we have to do. The daily grind of life can take a toll on all of us. Sometimes, it's hard to stop and recognize that at the end of the day, we are all just simply doing our best to make it through each day.

The reality is people are people, and I would like to believe that deep down we all want what's best for the people in our lives and the world we live in.

Sometimes we forget that a simple smile or a "hello," or taking the time to do something nice for a stranger has a huge impact on people's lives and the community we call home. It's also good for the soul.

I was forwarded a meme this week on Facebook that talked about the idea of paying it forward. The idea is to ask people that may owe you something to pay it forward and to give to others — possibly even a stranger. Another rendition is that

when eating out or getting a coffee or purchasing a Street Roots, that you make your next purchase for a stranger that may not have the resources.

I thought to myself, what a great idea. I started telling friends and co-workers about it. They laughed and said, "Um, there was a movie about that called Pay It Forward. I think it starred Kevin Spacey and Helen Hunt."

Oh. OK.

After doing more research (Google, Wikipedia), I discovered that, apparently, the idea has been around for centuries. What a relief, I thought to myself, knowing this idea wasn't invented in Hollywood.

Regardless of where the idea began, or entered into pop culture, or was dropped in our lives, the idea of doing for others still bears weight. When we are able to rise above the madness that life sometimes brings, and give to others, than we are setting an example for everyone around us. It becomes contagious.

So, to quote Kevin Spacey's character from the movie, "What if the world is one big disappointment? Unless, you take the things you don't like about this world and flip them upside down. You can start this today."

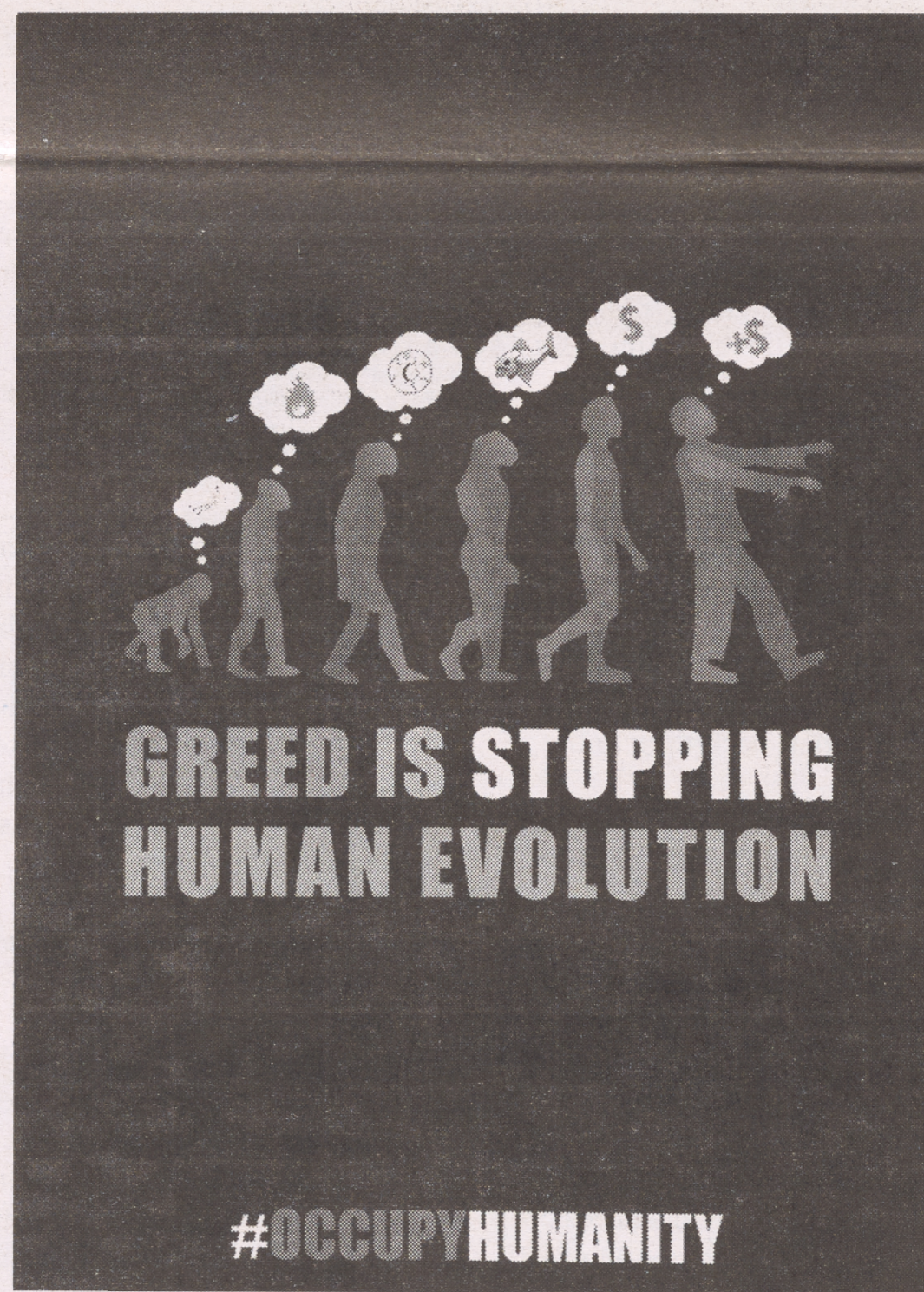
I couldn't agree more. Regardless of your plight in life and the resources at your disposal, possibly it's a smile or a meal or possibly something more, let's start today and pay it forward. You just never know what we might silently inspire.



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



By Teles

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

Reporters Jake Thomas, Alex Zielinski, Nathan Gilles, Robert Britt, Sue Zalokar, Erin Fenner
Photographers 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 guides, call 503-228-5657. 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.