

## EDITORIAL

## Real change starts by changing the rhetoric

Language is a powerful thing. And the rhetoric of late around issues of national and local importance is at its typical fevered pitch – for all the wrong reasons.

The federal food stamp program, known formally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, is defending itself against a proposed \$40 billion cut from House Republicans. The conversation, in Washington and at home, is tainted by speculative allegations of abuse and overuse, fraught with ideological rights and wrongs and far removed from the lives of real people. It's the hubris of the deserving

versus the undeserving poor, and the politics of shaming people into getting jobs and starving them into self-sufficiency.

In fact, food stamps are considered by both federal and state agencies as one of the most effective

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programs in alleviating the impact of poverty among families. Indeed, the number of food stamp recipients is at an all-time high – 47 million Americans rely on the monthly stipend to feed themselves, including more than 800,000 in Oregon. The numbers are high because the Great Recession never ended in their world. Their well-paid jobs and 40-hour workweeks are gone, along with their savings, health care and all the other anchors of stability. People are still struggling and losing ground, and they need help.

Across the state, the demand for safety net programs, including assistance to pay utility and energy bills, rent, medical needs, food and child care. The state's call center for these services, 211info, received more than 275,000 calls last year, and the numbers are rising.

In Portland, the homeless organization Right 2 Dream Too has sparked stereotypes that run the gamut from uninformed to slanderous, for a group of people with next to nothing doing something amazing.

It's time to change the dialogue. It's not a crime to be poor, but the conversations around poverty are too often hijacked by fear mongering and social distain. It's not illegal to be homeless, but our best and brightest automatically revert to aggressive police action to clear people out of the way. Needing a helping hand is not something to be ashamed of, but some people are so stigmatized that they forego assistance they need and qualify to avoid being labeled a freeloader.

This rhetoric needs to be recognized for what it is – a major obstacle to any meaningful discussion toward real solutions. And it's being constantly reinforced as long as we let it continue. Programs do restore people's lives, people do return to housing, the workforce and stability, and it happens because people stopped blaming the poor and engaged in frank discussions about the real economic and social problems shaping our landscape. Let's fan the flames of progress, and let the others die out altogether.

## Support your community through the Give!Guide

Street Roots is a proud partner again this year with the Willamette Week's 2013 Give!Guide and more than 100 community organizations. These

organizations work day-in and day-out to make Portland a better city – a city that we can all be proud to call home.

Giving to the Give!Guide is as simple as going to [www.giveguide.org](http://www.giveguide.org) and choosing from a range

of amazing and diverse organizations. From animal and food justice to tackling poverty, to giving young people and elders an opportunity to be successful – the Give!Guide gives our region a platform to give back.

Last year more than 5,500 people gave to an organization highlighted in the guide and helped raise nearly \$2 million. That's amazing. This year, collectively we're trying to raise \$2.7 million. You can help.

There are a lot of different reasons to give a donation to your favorite organization. First, it makes you feel good. Second, there's nothing better than knowing that when you give directly to an organization you are helping create long-lasting change in the lives of people, the environment and those furry little creature friends of ours. Lastly, when you give, you're able to establish a relationship between the organizations you support and your own world – possibly that's helping introduce friends or family to new and creative ways to help and get involved. Maybe that's being able to offer your own

expertise or experience.

Whatever the reason, giving through the Give!Guide is one of the best ways you can create real change in your own community.

This year, the guide is accessible for the first time on mobile devices and allows the public to give freely on the go. Part of the goal is getting young people to give. We know that when younger people begin donating to local organizations they are more invested in their community and will continue to give throughout their lifetime.

Luckily, the Give!Guide is for everyone, regardless of your age. Saying that, it's a real opportunity to engage younger people in giving. Having your kids home for Thanksgiving and/or Christmas break? Trying to teach your children about giving? It's a great opportunity for a group activity and a teachable moment for the family to engage in learning about important issues and giving to causes they believe in. It's also a great opportunity to engage your peer network to challenge them to give back to the community.

Obviously, we would love to have your donation to Street Roots. It means the world to us and we are embarking on an important campaign to go weekly in the fall of 2014. A donation to Street Roots will go directly to improving vendor income and stability. It also means giving you important journalism and highlighting under-represented voices throughout our region. We believe in giving people a hand up. We believe in giving people the tools they need to be successful. We also believe very much in the Give!Guide. Give today at [www.giveguide.org](http://www.giveguide.org) or at [www.streetroots.org](http://www.streetroots.org). Thank you for the love!



## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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

## LETTERS

## Solutions require dollars and a change in attitude

I want to comment on the articles, "Four days after major ODOT sweep" and "State DOJ to look into reports ..." from the Oct. 25 edition of Street Roots.

In 2003, I attended a meeting of the East County Caring Community where Rockwood Police explained their policy towards both people experiencing homelessness and at risk youth. That policy was "move on." They explained that they try to make life so uncomfortable for people considered "undesirable" that they will go somewhere else. They added, and I believe this is still true today, that the increase in both people experiencing homelessness and gang violence in East County was that this is also the attitude of the Portland police who had encouraged "undesirables" to relocate out of Portland and encouraged them to go to East County or really anywhere but Portland. Ten years later we still have a nationwide policy of

"move on." People don't have a clue how their quality of living could improve if we actually looked at the complicated problems of homelessness and poverty. These are issues with no simple solutions. When we as a nation see how these issues are making us all miserable and decide to make the changes necessary to eliminate homelessness and poverty, all of us will have an improved quality of life.

All the solutions will require both dollars and a change in attitude. Somehow we need a national ethic that practices that "an injury to one is an injury to all," and that gives more than lip service to the notion that our children are our most important resource.

Again thanks to Street Roots for helping us understand these complicated issues and urging us to look for and implement solutions.

ROBIN CASH  
Portland

## 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](mailto: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 guides, call 503-228-5657. Resources are also available online at [www.rosecityresource.org](http://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.