

Checks and imbalances

Why does Portland have nearly twice the national average in the number of people waiting for their Social Security disability benefits?

BY JAKE THOMAS
STAFF WRITER

Leone has a roof over his head, medical care and some money in his pocket. Having all this makes him "jealous of himself." That's because things weren't always so gravy for Leone, who doesn't want his full name used for this article.

"When you hear voices, and you try to figure out who's talking, it makes it hard to communicate with people," explains Leone, 61, who spent two decades living on the streets and "yelling at the wind."

Leone began hearing voices decades ago while doing a repair job at a house. They were debating whether they should do "this," whatever "this" was. They were also debating whether Leone could hear them or not. Eventually the voices figured out that Leone could hear them and that's when his life changed. The voices told him to kill himself and kill others and "a lot in between," he says. The voices would scream and curse at Leone

to the point where he lost focus of what was around him.

No longer able to hold down a job, Leone became homeless. During this time, he recalls walking around screaming at the voices until he would collapse from exhaustion. He tried to avoid people, who might think he was talking to them. Once he remembers gathering enough bottles and cans for their deposits and ordering a hamburger at a McDonald's. As he waited for his meal, the voices flared up. Leone began screaming back at them and left without his hamburger.

"It was an actual war to me," recalls Leone.

Some nights, Leone came back to his camp exhausted from battling the voices only to find his gear had been tossed. He spent the night walking and shaking in the cold. Some days, his back ached so bad he would have to lay down for a day or two.

Leone's life changed about four years ago (he

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Feds serve warrant on local payee service

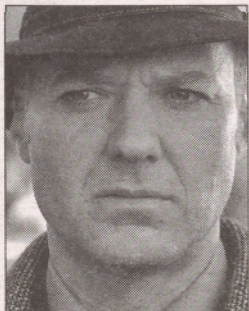
BY JAKE THOMAS
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Nearly 1,000 disabled and low-income clients of Safety Net of Oregon are wondering how they will receive disability benefits now that the company is under federal investigation. The nonprofit organization, which provides money-management services to individuals receiving federal disability benefits, was served with a federal search warrant on Thursday, March 6.

Carla Meredith, resident agent in charge for the Office of the Inspector General for the Social Security Administration, told Street Roots that the warrant was based on allegations that Safety Net was mismanaging clients' funds. Speaking outside of the nonprofit organization's office on Morrison Street in inner Southeast Portland, Meredith said Safety Net managed the funds for nearly 1,000 people

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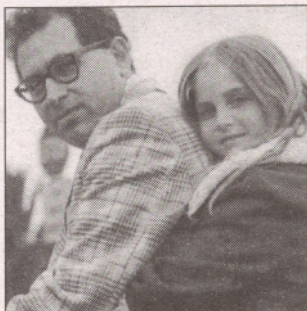
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The Case of Conrad Cooper

Film turns lens on middle-class homelessness

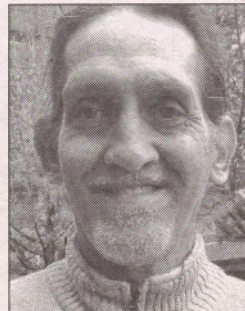
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Out of hiding

Physician and filmmaker Delaney Ruston tackles mental health worldwide

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Harry Richards brings a friendly face to Southwest Portland

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