

## EDITORIAL

## Safety Net a lesson on the work to be done

Looking at the numbers of homeless people struggling these days, the people unable to get adequate health care, or the job services to get them back on their feet, it would be easy to say that our social-service systems don't work.

But it would be wrong. The systems are working. People are getting help, getting back into housing, back to health and stability, but they are beyond capacity and underfunded at both state and national levels.

The case of Safety Net of Oregon and the human fallout from its closure sheds light on the fragility of one such system. As the largest representative payee in Oregon, Safety Net provided a valuable service to people by

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managing Social Security payments on their behalf, ensuring that rent was paid, the utilities stayed up to date and their daily financial needs were met. For most of our readers, the payee system may seem an unusual and unfamiliar

necessity, but for thousands of Oregonians it is an essential service of financial management that, for mental, physical or circumstantial conditions, is beyond their capacity.

When Safety Net closed, under the weight of a federal investigation of financial mismanagement, its 1,000 clients were left with only a few weeks to regroup and find a replacement. As of April 1, they would be on their own.

It is unfortunate that it took a lawsuit by Disability Rights Oregon and the Oregon Law Center, and a judge's restraining order against the Social Security Administration, to prompt the proper outreach and corrective measures. With that, the agency has stepped up its efforts to connect with former clients, those who could not be reached by mere bureaucratic notices in the mail, or who are unable to process the information upon receipt. We have hope, with local social service agencies at work, that they will all be paired with new payees as soon as possible.

In the public dialogue about homelessness and poverty, talk runs between emotions and statistics, often with little room for productive discussion about the real mechanics that push people to the edge. The story of Safety Net lays that bare.

Nan Roman, the president and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, writes in this edition about a time when we didn't have the massive numbers of people experiencing homelessness that we have today. When it comes to homelessness, we know what to do, but we don't do enough of it and we don't do it long enough, she says. And unless we get unlimited resources, she adds, we don't do it efficiently enough.

She also noted that, with the right systems in place, nearly 80 percent of people who experience homelessness get back on their feet. Programs do work, but we have to be vigilant when they fail. Safety Net's collapse was an incident, but this kind of failure can impact people for the rest of their lives.

## Keep the presses rolling — every week, with your support!

Did you know Street Roots is working towards going weekly? It's a big deal. Going weekly will mean stabilizing your neighborhood vendor's income. It will mean fostering more relationships between people experiencing poverty and the general public. It will mean more quality journalism

and voices from the community. It will mean supporting Street Roots to be strategic and bold in the work we do on the poverty front. A stronger Street Roots means a stronger social justice

and stability have everything to do with Street Roots. They are my family. They are my love."

Street Roots is love. Street Roots takes on and covers some of the most complex and intense issues facing our community, yet still, it's about love. It's about connection and self-worth. It's about overcoming obstacles and working together. It's about being a team player and searching for solutions. It's about making individual and social change in our community.

This spring offers readers a chance to double your impact with a gift to Street Roots. We encourage you to give a one-time or ongoing donation online at [www.streetroots.org](http://www.streetroots.org). You can also send a check to 211 NW Davis, Portland, OR, 97209.

"Thank god for this paper," says Louis, a Street Roots vendor. "If I didn't have this paper I'd probably perish. This paper's a big help, let me tell you. A big help."

Your donations will go towards creating real change in our community. Your donation will mean making Street Roots strong. Your donation will mean allowing Street Roots to dream big. We can't thank you enough.



## 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.

community in Portland. A new and generous donor believes so much in Street Roots going weekly she has offered to match your donation in April up to \$10,000. That's amazing! We're asking readers to give a donation this spring to help us on our journey towards weekly.

"I'm going to stay awake all night tonight and look out the windows to make sure this is not a dream," says Charles, a Street Roots vendor who obtained housing. "My housing

## LETTER

## Kudos (and a correction) for work on Social Security benefit problems

## 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)

I applaud Street Roots for the article "Checks and imbalances" in the March 14 edition. As a social security disability lawyer who sees firsthand the misery that many folks endure while they wait two years (and longer) to be approved for benefits, I have been dismayed by the media emphasis on excessive approvals. For every questionable approval, I can show you ten folks who should have been approved and whose health and lives deteriorate while they appeal wrongful denials of benefits to which they are legally entitled.

I do want to correct one factual error: the article reported that I take only 12 cases a year in order to provide quality representation. I wish that were possible but because the law severely limits how much a

lawyer can earn, it would not be possible to practice in this area of law and do that. What I do is limit myself to 12 hearings a month, so that I can consult with clients' physicians, prepare legal briefs on their behalf and above all, spend time preparing my clients for hearings.

I have observed many times representatives from disability mills meeting their clients for the first time at the hearings office, and I feel sorry for those clients.

No attorney would be reluctant to represent a disabled individual, no matter how challenging his case. It's representing those who are not truly disabled that attorneys like me refuse to do.

— CHERYL COON  
Swanson, Thomas, Coon & Newton

## Thumping Heart

by Alex LaFollette

Anything to keep alive  
Stay breathing for morning's light  
We are hot, we are still  
The Devil's one last kill  
The gears they move  
Moving is more to do  
Anything to keep alive  
In the city we make our stride  
Keep your hand in my hand  
Ground is rough, but it still is land  
Forbidden apple from the tree

Guess my hunger got the best of me  
Anything to keep alive  
Anger knows how to dive  
Moon with its eyes on me  
I finally am learning to see  
Night is brighter than days of death  
Broken and cold and out of breath  
Anything to keep alive  
One thing we must do right

## 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 International Network of Street Papers.

Street Roots  
211 NW Davis St.  
Portland, OR 97209  
503-228-5657  
Fax: 503-227-3117  
[streetroots.org](http://streetroots.org)  
[news.streetroots.org](http://news.streetroots.org)



## Staff

**Executive Director** Israel Bayer  
[israel@streetroots.org](mailto:israel@streetroots.org)

**Managing Editor** Joanne Zuhl  
[joanne@streetroots.org](mailto:joanne@streetroots.org)

**Vendor Coordinator** Cole Merkel  
[cole@streetroots.org](mailto:cole@streetroots.org)

**Operations Director** Sarah Beecroft

**Program Assistant** Grace Badik, Jesuit Volunteer,  
[grace@streetroots.org](mailto:grace@streetroots.org)

**Development Director** Sarah Cloud

**Office Assistant** Amber Bielman

**Reporters** Jake Thomas, Alex Zielinski, Nathan

Gilles, Sue Zalokar, Ann-Derrick Gaillot

**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](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.