

## EDITORIAL

## State should support innovative programs to house students

There were nearly 3,200 unaccompanied minor students in Oregon schools in the 2012-13 school year, according to the Department of Education. But those numbers only represent the children reported to the department by their school district's homeless liaison. And like most figures associated with a population encouraged to hide, the actual number is expected to be much higher.

That's an appalling figure in the land of milk and honey, where resources run rich for some, and wither for others.

One example is the Host Home Project, featured in this edition. Host Home is a partnership between the North Clackamas School District and the nonprofit homeless program called The Inn. Together, they have

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networked to secure housing for unaccompanied homeless students in the district. It's a very small operation on a shoestring budget, able to serve only a small fraction of the nearly 70 known unaccompanied youths in the district.

Just at a time when The Inn was ready to serve more, to help more young students get into a home, the state rescinded its pledge of a five-year grant of \$75,000 citing an error in the scoring process. The state will continue funding The Inn through October, but the nonprofit missed the window for reapplying for the nominal county grant that had previously supported the project.

For want of \$15,000 a year, these homeless youths, living without a guardian, will be left out in the cold. The odds will remain stacked against them in completing their education to graduation and escaping the trauma of the streets and social isolation. But apparently the state is willing to take that gamble with its money.

What it should be doing is tapping resources to support innovative, low-cost programs that have a direct impact on the survival and success of young students.

And the Host Home Project is only one example.

The Beaverton School District has the most reported unaccompanied students in the state, nearly twice as many as the runner-up, Eugene. The district's homeless liaison, the city and the faith-based community there formed a partnership to house an average of 10 to 12 students each year — all for only \$20,000 a year and none of it from the school district's coffers. It's a model program that places students in the homes of host families. It means not only housing, but also a secure family environment. It means help with homework and dealing with peer pressure. It means learning how to be a good student, and aspiring to be much more.

That's where Oregon in all its bureaucratic forms — housing education and human services — should put its money to see real returns.

## Plans come and go, but progress needs sustainability

The story of ending people's homelessness in our community and around the country over the past 30 years is so dysfunctional it's hard to explain to the general public what's worked and what hasn't worked.

A little history might help. Between the years of 1979 and 1983 more \$54 billion were cut from federal affordable housing projects. We never got that money back. In fact, the cuts just kept

coming, forcing local communities to carry the burden of ending homelessness for 30 plus years now.

Mayors and elected officials who campaign on ending their city's homelessness come and go. Bureaucrats and advocates working to end homelessness come and go. National strategies to help build the political will to end homelessness lay strung out in political graveyards from Washington D.C. to Portland. It's frustrating, to say the least.

I'm not saying we should all throw our hands in the air and stop working to end homelessness. Anyone who reads this column and Street Roots knows we're constant optimists regardless of the challenges we face. We know housing equals opportunity. We also know it's cheaper to house someone than it is to let individuals or families remain homeless.

Homelessness is the result of outside forces related to numerous realities. The recession, the war, the health care system, a broken foster care, mental health and justice system, domestic violence — the list goes on and on. Regardless of what your crazy uncle might have told you about people choosing to be homeless — that's simply not the case. I've never met anyone in my life that woke up one day and said, "I want to be homeless." It simply doesn't happen.

Our community is in the process of unveiling Home For Everyone: A United Plan to End Homelessness for Portland and Multnomah County. In layman's terms, it's a plan to bring together the community to oversee an array of complex services to help deliver the best outcomes for ending individual and family homelessness in our region.



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.

## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Before the Home For Everyone plan you may remember the Bush Administrations 10-year plan to end homelessness. Before that there was the Clinton five-year plan to end homelessness. The reality is that there have been a lot of plans to end homelessness since the 1980s.

Needless to say, I'm a bit skeptical about the new plan. Call me crazy, but it's one of the reasons I accepted the opportunity to serve on the board for Home For Everyone. I believe there's a collective sense on the board that if this plan is going to be successful then we're going to need the leadership to make this something more than the status quo. This has to be more than simply rearranging the deck chairs.

It all starts with Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Portland Mayor Charlie Hales. It's one thing to develop a plan and to bring people together. It's another thing all together to lead our community in prioritizing affordable housing and homelessness.

For years, housing has been a central focus of Multnomah County and the City of Portland. What hasn't been the focus is gaining additional ongoing resources in a way that changes the playing field. For far too long we've been funding homeless and housing systems around the edges, while state and federal cuts continue to bleed our communities dry.

If Multnomah County is to set itself a part and practice what we preach concerning sustainability and equity in our community than we're going to have to create something that has never been built before.

How might we get there, you ask? It starts with holding state and federal officials' feet to the fire. It makes me cringe every time I hear our governor talk about health care, jobs and education without ever once mentioning housing. Without access to affordable housing, everything else becomes a moot point. Local officials need to direct government lobbyists to put the full court press on elected officials in both Oregon and in D.C. concerning housing.

Locally, it's a matter of building the political will to move additional ongoing resources forward. Without it, the Home For Everyone plan will simply be spinning its wheels.

## darkness in arduous retreat

By William Holmes

subtle shadows trip over the early light clouds coordinate in accord to the windows frame room for two without furniture or fret patient to wake the hazel gaze

## 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](mailto: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, Adrienne Burkett

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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 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.