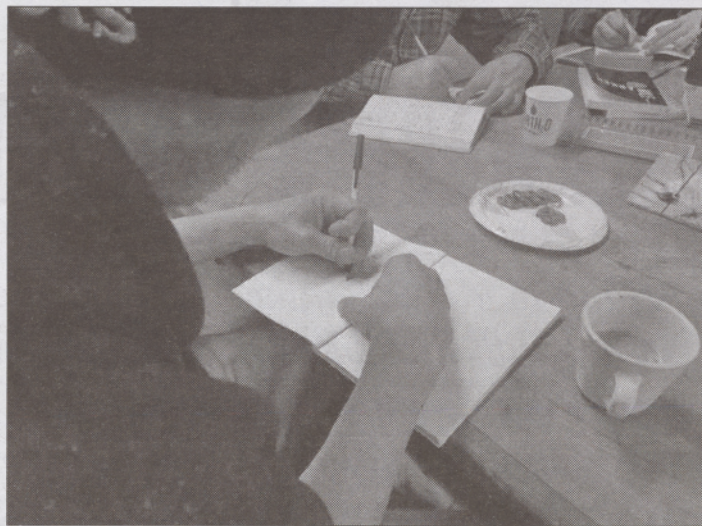


# Power *of* Creativity



*Street Roots vendors espouse respect, community through Write Around Portland*

Since Feb. 12, a group of nearly 20 Street Roots vendors has been attending a creative writing workshop hosted by Write Around Portland, a nonprofit that has brought the healing power of writing to Portland's most vulnerable for 15 years. Write Around's philosophy of respect, writing and community has been taught to more than 4,400 participants across 600 unique workshops.

"It's awesome! You get to learn a lot, and everybody helps each other," says Willie Bradford, Street Roots vendor and workshop participant.

"Lara, our instructor, is awesome to help us out," vendor and participant Paul Ortiz says. "She helps me write what I want to write, and she does a lot. I really like the workshop on Thursdays. I get to meet different people. The piece I wrote went into the paper, so that was pretty cool too!"

The Write Around Portland workshop will be hosted April 16. Each participant will have a chance to be published in an anthology, and vendor participants will be invited to read a selection of their work at Write Around Portland's anthology release party after the workshop has ended.



PHOTOS BY COLE MERKEL

Street Roots vendor Paul Ortiz dictates a poem to Write Around volunteer Tom Shi. Above, vendor Nick Sullivan concentrates on his work.

## DIRECTOR'S DESK, from page 3

I would have a hard time finding a house in an inner city neighborhood. Portland still doesn't know what it's going to be when it grows up. Housing is a big part of that it.

**I.B.:** *Oftentimes we have very green reporters coming to us asking fairly elementary questions around these very complex issues. With the changing media environment, I don't think that's changing anytime soon. What's your advice or thoughts on how the media covers homelessness?*

**A.G.:** I think the challenge is that usually we're covering homelessness, and I include

myself in this, we're covering it from an institutional sampling. We're covering Multnomah County or the city of Portland or the Legislature, and it crosses so many institutions. This is part of the problem, right? You have so many institutions, so many governing agencies that are responsible for various forms of poverty. The most valuable reporting for me, on this topic specifically involves actually going out and talking to people who are experiencing homelessness.

**I.B.:** *What can government and private sector do?*

**A.G.:** I think in the last of the series we laid it out. What it's going to take. I think of

breaking the problem down into multiple parts: You've got the short term. We need places for people to go tonight. Everybody involved in the 10-year plan acknowledges the pendulum swung so far away from the emergency shelter system, for some good reasons, but that the reality is that until we have a larger housing stock, which is going to take a while, we need more shelter beds and alternatives tonight.

Saying that, everybody I talk to says, "We need an investment in housing." I'm curious to know how you sell that politically. I think that's a hard political sell, especially in a place where, I mean, I'm a taxpayer and I feel like I'm a little dazed every time I look at my bill and see everything I'm paying for.

It's not a sexy issue. It is a black hole for

some elected officials. You don't have a core constituency that you know is going to go vote for you with the homeless issue. You have a visceral reaction among a lot of the people who do vote that says, "I just don't want to think about that problem. I don't want to look at those people." And you have, especially in Portland, a downtown business community that has a very vested interest in just getting (the homeless) people out of sight. That's a difficult combination for a politician and government.

*You can read the eight-part series and much more about the topic of homelessness here: [www.oregonlive.com/portland-homeless/](http://www.oregonlive.com/portland-homeless/)*