

# Things Portlanders can do to help

Everywhere I go people ask me, "What can I do to help people experiencing homelessness? I feel helpless and I'm not sure my voice actually matters."

What do I do when people ask me for money on the streets? It's really up to you. The Oregonian asked me the same question this year and this is what I had to say, "Obviously, I'm biased and would encourage people to pick up a Street Roots. Saying that, I have a one quarter or dollar rule. The first person who asks me for change each day gets a little something. After that, I tell people no. It's a quick and easy way to give, but to not bother myself with the complexities of trying to understand if I should give or why I should give to a specific person.

I would advise people to be aware of their environment, to use your gut instinct and to give as little or as much as you like. There's nothing remotely fun about living in poverty and having to beg for money. The idea that people panhandling are somehow are making out like bandits is an urban myth."

Can I organize my family, friends and/or business to do something for organizations working with people experiencing homelessness? Yes you can. From getting your peer network or business to engage in helping gather materials for organizations working with people experiencing homelessness to crowdsourcing online to help someone stay in

their home — this can be a great way to engage and educate your network and do something good for the community.

How would I go about this?  
Connecting with a

nonprofit and asking what specific needs might be is a good place to start. You can also look up non-profits online and see if organizations have wish lists. For Street Roots, fresh socks and Little Hottie Handwarmers become lifesavers in winter months.

Can I offer my labor to support organizations working with people on the streets? Yes you can. Volunteering your expertise is one of the best ways you can get involved. From simply volunteering a day out of your week or month to trying to get on a nonprofit board of directors — your shared experience in the world adds value to many groups working with people on the streets.

Should I give a donation to a local non-profit working with people experiencing homelessness? How do I choose who to give too? From a little to a lot, it all matters.

It's my opinion that you should give to organizations doing a lot with a little. Of course, everyone has a different view on this. Researching organizations that have been effective in providing services without a lot of overhead and organizations that provide successful advocacy efforts are critical at this time.

There are a lot of ways to think about giving. For example, if you have a family, engaging your children to take part in giving

will introduce them to philanthropy at a young age. We know that when younger people are introduced to giving they are more likely to become lifelong donors and volunteers to great causes throughout their lifetime. Plus, it's a great way to educate your kids on helping others.

Street Roots also recommends looking to the Willamette Week's Give!Guide during the months of November and December and giving a donation to one of the many great nonprofits throughout the Portland region. Give!Guide's launch is right around the corner.

Businesses can also get involved by giving a

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percentage of a night's profits to a local non-profit working with people on the streets. It's a great way to engage your customers and to get customers engaged while also supporting your business. Not to mention it's a tax write-off.

Beyond giving your time, expertise or money — people want to know how they can help move the issue of housing in our community forward.

Besides reading Street Roots, two groups you should be following are the Welcome Home Coalition and the Community Alliance of Tenants. They both can be found on Facebook and Twitter. I would also recommend signing up for their newsletters online, which provide you with a lot of opportunities to take action in the community.

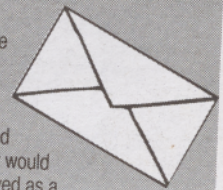
The next thing you can do is contact elected officials and tell them you care about housing. I realize this feels like a hollow action, considering that rhetoric oftentimes outweigh substance in American politics. Saying that, our local government just did declare a state of emergency on housing and homelessness.

I would argue that making your voice heard today is more important than it has been in years — that's at the local, state and federal level. Elected officials need to hear a clear message that the rental crisis is affecting all Oregonians. We need our city council members, mayors, state legislators and members of Congress to step up to the plate. We need both new legislation and revenue to support giving all Oregonians a safe place to call home.

It's easy to become cynical and jaded when it comes to the issue of homelessness and poverty. Saying that, your support matters. Seriously. Given the opportunity to do something good in your community will make you feel better and it will also go a long way to support your fellow neighbors. We all need a hand up. It's up to all of us collectively to chip and support making our community the best it can be.

## Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



## Street Roots

211 NW Davis St.  
Portland, OR 97209  
503-228-5657  
Fax: 503-227-3117  
www.streetroots.org  
www.news.streetroots.org  
Hours: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Sat. and 7:30-11 a.m. Sun.

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Interested in advertising in Street Roots?  
Contact Israel Bayer at israel@streetroots.org

## Staff

**Executive Director** Israel Bayer  
israel@streetroots.org  
**Managing Editor** Joanne Zuhl  
joanne@streetroots.org  
**Vendor Coordinator** Cole Merkel  
cole@streetroots.org  
**Operations Director** Sarah Beecroft  
**Development Director** Sarah Clout  
**Program Assistant** Scott Jackson, Jesuit Volunteer  
**Development Assistant** Ann-Derrick Gaillot  
**Reporters** Emily Green, Sue Zalokar, Ann-Derrick Gaillot, Sarah Hansell, Lenora Ko, Sam Bouman, Jared Paben  
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If you are interested in volunteering with Street Roots, please submit a volunteer application at streetroots.org/volunteer. Or call our volunteer coordinator for more information at 503-228-5657.



## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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