



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

We're inviting ourselves inside your home

A student asked me this week why some of the homeless camps are so hard to keep clean.

I ask the student to imagine: The entire world stepped inside your home at this very moment. Not just anyone, but everyone. The evening news, elected officials, neighbors and friends. Strangers took photos of you and all your belongings, especially your mess. I hope you're presentable. They ask you questions about how you're living and if you chose the life you live.

Some guy in a uniform asks to go through all your stuff. Is your bathroom clean, the kitchen, your bedroom? What's in your bathroom cabinets? Do you have a prescription for those?

We're going to need to see that now. I hope you took the trash out already. I really hope you aren't sneaking a toke of marijuana. God help you if you have any extra bike parts lying around your home or garage.

All of this, of course, will be aired tonight on the evening news. It will be written about in tomorrow's paper. Experts and strangers will weigh in and comment on your behavior and your lifestyle. Are you deserving of your home or not so much?

Now imagine doing all of that each and every day with only a tent, if you're lucky and a hand full of belongings. You will have no access to running water or a working toilet. No electricity. No trash pick up. No access to a safe place to call home. Nothing. Most likely it will be hard to sleep. You'll be wet, and anyone at any time could come unannounced and wake you up. Best-case scenario, strangers want to help you. Worst case, they are there to harm you.

You are a refugee in a modern land. Cast out for the world to see. How would the world feel about you and they way you're living?

My point is, it sucks to be homeless. Some people think that it's easy in Portland. They are

wrong.

I recently had the chance to volunteer with Free Hot Soup, a group of local Portlanders who volunteer each week doing mobile outreach to homeless camps throughout Portland. It was inspiring to know that so many unsung heroes go out every night to make sure people are safe. But it wasn't a walk in the park. It's hard times in the city. The resilience of people, given their circumstances, is always eye opening. It's a sad affair. Human suffering is not a pretty thing.

That's why I was glad to see Mayor Charlie Hales take action this week. A new set of camping guidelines were released that outline a new approach to allowing tent camping on public property and the ability to organize larger homeless camps, including trying to find places for people sleeping in their cars and RVs. The proposal isn't perfect, but it's something. Haters are going to hate. It's a pilot program that was created through a lens of compassion and practicality. Will it work? I'm cautiously optimistic, understanding that nothing is perfect and not doing anything isn't an option.

It's important to remind ourselves that the current housing crisis didn't arrive yesterday. The latest homeless emergency is just the latest response to a crisis that's been going on for far too long. We need to work toward solutions that will create safety for people and alleviate the suffering for our most vulnerable neighbors.

The reality is homeless camps, tent cities, tiny homes and shelters aren't the answer to homelessness. Housing – and housing alone – is the only solution to homelessness. It's why things like inclusionary zoning, eviction prevention and more resources to build affordable housing are critical. It's not getting any better out there, friends, and in fact, it's probably going to get worse for a whole lot of people. Without that support, it will continue to be a hard knock life for thousands of our friends, family and neighbors.



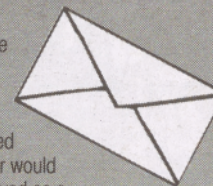
DIRECTOR'S DESK

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.

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.

Advertising

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 Cloud
Program Assistant Scott Jackson, Jesuit Volunteer
Development Assistant Ann-Derrick Gaillot
Reporters Emily Green, Sue Zalokar, Ann-Derrick Gaillot, Sarah Hansell, Leonora Ko, Jared Paben, Amanda Waldroupe
Photographers Diego Diaz, Joe Glode, Ben Brink
Editorial Assistant Monica Kwasnik
Canvasser Desmond Hardison

Board of Directors

Chairman Bruce Anderson
Vice-Chairman Brad Taylor
Treasurer Heather Stadick
Secretary Amber Bielman
Directors Rich Rodgers, Michael Anderson, Leo Rhodes, Nora Coon, Darren Alexander, Eddie Barbosa, Rachel Langford, Marcus Swift

Volunteers

Jan Bayer, John Barker, Stacey Heath, Brian Ritchie, Anders Frederickson, Stephanie Holum, Anjali Rathore, Sam Bouman, Joanna Chase, Zoe Klingmann, Haven Herrin, Eliese Baker, Dan Jones, Rob Shyrook, Tom Ray, Doug Spangle, Susannah Kamala, Jessica Pollard, Lee Ko, Diana Richardson, Cherie Manning, Thomas Buell Jr.

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.