

VENDOR CHAT, from page 7

took steps to get into housing about eight months ago and I was supposed to go through two interviews. But I missed my appointments, which didn't help. I hope I will be eligible for some help soon. There are a lot of places in Montréal where I can go sleep every night. Like shelters where you can go when it really gets too cold outside.

Is there government aid for the homeless in Portland ?

John: *It's mostly donations that come for the most part from the religious community. They help us a lot. And they don't try to convert us, just help. I am really grateful towards these people. A lot of them are regular customers. They help you organize your day. Because what is difficult about being homeless is maintaining a routine. I see some homeless that sleep till noon. It breaks my heart. They don't have an organized lifestyle, so they need to regain one.*

James: What I can understand is that you have

a daily routine, a stable lifestyle that helps you a lot.

John: *Yes, and that's what helped me to get off the street and to be able to sell the newspaper. I meet about 100 people a day and it's always pleasant. They take the time to talk to me, share jokes. What's more, there are plenty of opportunities available to me. Sometimes I am asked to house-sit for some people while they are away. I water their plants, pick up their mail and I can even cook in their kitchen. It's also while I was on my turf selling the paper that I met my current landlord. He asked me if I was able to pay a minimum rent. I said I could, thanks to my paper sales. My landlord's gesture was based on trust and I find that liberating!*

James: I understand. It's hard to feel left out, to be shunned by society ... It's really hard and it can lead to depression. Especially when you feel like a parasite, when people look at you as if you weren't a human being.

John: *You know, it feels good to be clean, to be*

able to sleep in a bed like everybody else. I remember sleeping on the stoop of bicycle shop. I would get up early so the owners wouldn't see me. I toted around a lot of junk. During that period, I was not allowed into restaurants, even when I had money to pay for a hamburger. I am so happy that that's all behind me now. I just kept my old shopping cart as a souvenir. I keep it in the closet in my room.

James: That must be good for your self-esteem. At 52, I'm starting to think that I'm too old to still be sleeping outside. What is Street Roots' contribution in changing peoples' perception of homelessness?


John: *We are our paper's ambassadors. We give off a positive image that helps to change the way people look at us. Street Roots helps us deal with our problems with drugs and addiction. The Street Roots community and the homeless are a good community. There is a lot of hospitality and support. There is a lot of solidarity. The SR team and the vendors are like a big family. It's really great!*

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