

Keep fighting for what you believe in, Portland

In my time at Street Roots I've watched readers do some amazing things for vendors. Readers helping organize first and last month's rent for a vendor, doctors helping with surgeries, dentists helping people get dentures, people attending Alcohol Anonymous meetings with their favorite vendor and offering up presents during the holidays. The list goes on and on.

One of the more beautiful things about Street Roots is that while we experience the trauma of homelessness collectively, we also witness the best of people

and our community.

Street Roots allows the larger community to build authentic relationships with people on the streets – to help people get a hand up and break down the many barriers facing people in today's climate.

There's so many ways to support vendors, including giving a generous tip or simply offering up a smile. Maybe it's a nice meal, or flowers or some cold water on a hot day.

That's why I'm always surprised to hear people say that Portland has lost its support for people experiencing homelessness.

What a loaded statement, right?

I mean, the fact that people experiencing homelessness are so woven into the fabric of Portland's culture that that kind of statement has to be made in the first place is sad.

The reality is I don't think for one minute that the good people of Portland are sick of the homeless. Maybe people are sick of homelessness itself. But people aren't sick of human beings living without a home, so much as they are sick of witnessing people suffering on our streets without a home.

The reality is that talking about the solutions to homelessness, much like climate change, has become hard to quantify. How do we talk about the need for more resources and political will for ending people's homelessness when we already know we don't have the resources or political will to actually end homelessness? It's a conundrum.

Our system knows how to provide people with a safe and stable home. We are simply faced with outside forces and marketplace realities that

make it almost impossible to solve the issues at large.

Logical and successful outcomes are hard to talk about when the reality is so much bigger than any one person or strategy.

We all know that homelessness is not a normal human condition. Yet, we live in a world that it's absolutely normal. It's a reality.

Elected officials careers are made on the backs of people experiencing homelessness. An entire industry has been created to respond to it. Almost every newspaper in town has assigned a reporter to cover it. Yet people on the streets continue to suffer.

Homelessness is both political and personal in Portland. And unfortunately, the issue isn't going away anytime soon. There's no place for thousands of people to go, regardless of how many resources we pour into dissecting the issue and trying to respond with anything other than housing, health care and employment.

Portland needs to continue exploring ways to generate an ongoing revenue source to support people in accessing and maintaining housing. Walking away from the issue or simply trying to manage it isn't an option.

Today, more than ever, Portlanders need something big to grab hold of – something that gives both individuals and families on the streets and the larger community something to believe in.

It will take real leadership.

It starts with you and it starts with me.

Please take the time to write or call elected officials both locally and at the state level to let them know it's not homeless people you're sick of – you're sick of people having to live without a safe place to call home and what you care about is the human rights of all Portlanders and Oregonians.

Together, Portlanders, we can rise above the noise and work toward giving people a safe place to call home. We can't give up the fight, not today and not tomorrow. It will take time. It will take a village. It will take using our voice.

Real change in our community always starts with relationships and Street Roots can't thank readers enough for being engaged in solutions – one conversation and one newspaper at a time. Your neighborhood Street Roots vendor thanks you. Portland thanks you.

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.

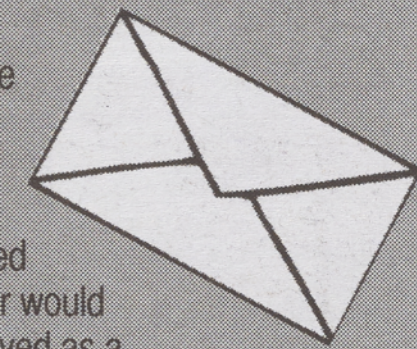


Street Roots vendors pose with Timber Jim, the former mascot for the Portland Timbers, who stopped by the office and delivered a rousing speech just before the May 12 paper arrived

PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

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.



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