

# Inmate labor 'insanity' when worthy programs can do more

Street Roots has advocated for years that the city expand the Clean and Safe program that gives people that have formerly experienced homelessness job opportunities to help clean up the city.

There are many reasons why people

experiencing homelessness face the backlash of the general public, none more so than the build up of trash.

It's my humble opinion that Portland liberals don't so much see homeless people as inhumane, but they see

large amounts of trash and homeless people and they begin to think people are inhumane. Now, I'm not saying that's fair, it just is.

By now most Street Roots know the housing crisis has driven many of our neighbors and friends to living under bridges, in doorways and in city parks.

When the general public witnesses people experience the trauma of poverty it sometimes isn't pretty.

The lack of privacy for people experiencing homelessness means the public is going to see all of the things we as humans get to experience in the privacy of our own homes.

Both the city of Portland and Multnomah county are starting to see the importance of beginning to invest more in alternative methods of helping clean camps and creating economic development opportunities to support people on the streets.

Partnerships have been created with Central City Concern's Clean Start PDX program. The program is composed of three, two-person crews that collect trash at homeless camps around the city outside of downtown. (Read our July 28 story on the issue, "People on, off streets work together on universal problem: garbage," at [news.streetroots.org](http://news.streetroots.org).)

Currently, Clean and Safe has 32 formerly homeless individuals working downtown to clean the streets on a daily basis.

Expanding the program is a win-win for our community. It's giving more people the opportunity to gain an income to support their

quality of life after getting into housing and it helps keep homeless camps clean around the city.

If government agencies want to invest in something that works they should be investing more in programs like Clean Start PDX program.

Unfortunately, many local governments agencies continue to use Multnomah County jail work crews to clean up homeless camps.

A recent article in The Guardian by Willamette Week columnist Thacher Schmid highlights that county inmates clearing homeless camps and picking up trash receive \$1 a day for their services.

That's prison labor. Some might even call it slavery. Some call it rehabilitation. I call it utter insanity.

Sure, I get that some inmates probably love being on a work crew that allows them to get outdoors. And in some strange universe one might be able to argue that it's rehabilitation.

It doesn't change the fact that these inmates are cleaning up the camps of people that are being criminalized for sleeping outdoors. Again, it's insanity. It's wrong. It's backwards. It's outdated. It's unacceptable.

In short, using inmate labor to clean up homeless camps should be stopped immediately.

An organization such as Central City Concern, and other nonprofits that have the capacity to help create job opportunities for struggling Portlanders, should be our highest priority.

I've asked the county for the budget of the work crew program — wondering how much money they get from other agencies to do these camp clean ups versus how much money it takes to run the program. I mean, if you're paying inmates \$1 a day. It can't cost that much money.

If I were a betting man, I'd wager all that I had on the nonprofit community being able to take those investments and create more opportunities for people on the streets, while also helping clean up both camps and the city.

Let's find a way to solve some of Portland's most pressing needs on the streets and give people a hand up. It's not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

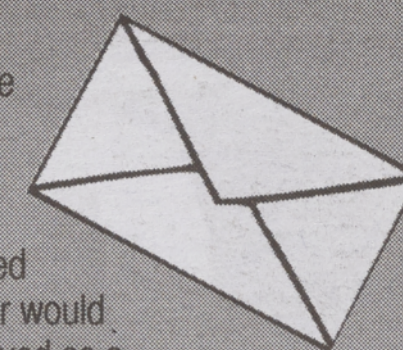


The Clean Start PDX crew with Central City Concern

PHOTO COURTESY OF CENTRAL CITY CONCERN

## 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 Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, [joanne@streetroots.org](mailto: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](http://www.streetroots.org)  
[www.news.streetroots.org](http://www.news.streetroots.org)  
Hours: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. and 7:30-1 p.m. Sun.

## Advertising

Interested in advertising in Street Roots?  
Contact Israel Bayer at [israel@streetroots.org](mailto:israel@streetroots.org)

## Staff

**Executive Director** Israel Bayer  
[israel@streetroots.org](mailto:israel@streetroots.org)  
**Executive Editor** Joanne Zuhl  
[joanne@streetroots.org](mailto:joanne@streetroots.org)  
**Vendor Program Director** Cole Merkel  
[cole@streetroots.org](mailto:cole@streetroots.org)  
**Operations Director** Sarah Beecroft  
**Development Director** Sarah Cloud  
**Program Assistant** Caelin Miltko, Jesuit Volunteer  
**Development Assistant** Rosemary Wilson  
**Editorial Assistant** Monica Kwasnik  
**Reporters** Emily Green, Sarah Hansell, Leonora Ko, Jared Paben, Amanda Waldroupe, Stephen Quirke, Elizabeth Buelow, Helen Hill  
**Photographers** Diego Diaz, Joe Glode, Arkady Brown  
**Canvasser** Desmond Hardison

## Board of Directors

**Chairman** Brad Taylor  
**Vice-Chairman** Rachel Langford  
**Treasurer** Heather Stadick  
**Secretary** Dan Jones  
**Directors** Rich Rodgers, Michael Anderson, Sandra Hahn, John Brown, Nels Johnson and Alison Hallett

## Volunteers

Jan Bayer, John Barker, Stacey Heath, Anjali Rathore, Zoe Klingmann, Dan Jones, Dennis Hogan, Monica McKune, Susan Wolfe, Lucas Hawthorne, Thomas Buell Jr., Jeanie Lunsford, Jason Cohen, Doug Spangle, Susannah Kamala, Jon Raymond, Diana Richardson, Paul and Madeline Gefroh, Mary Anne Joyce, Del Shawn Davidson, Gillian Floren, Mark Oldani, Bianca Butler, Alex Cherin, Jenny Farres, Evan Firsick, Camber Hansen-Karr, Miranda Woods, Henry Brannan, Megan Smith, Luke Scheuermann, Annie Aube, Helen Hill, Mark Brown, Lily Kral, Mary Emerson, Adam Bruns, Brooke Anderson and Megan Pickerel-Winer. If you're interested in volunteering with Street Roots, please submit a volunteer application at [streetroots.org/volunteer](http://streetroots.org/volunteer). Or you can call for more information at 503-228-5657.