

Partnering income, housing gets us all across the finish line

Recently, a Street Roots vendor showed up in our office refreshed. His face looked smoother, more rested, than it had earlier in the week. His speech, calmer and clearer. His mood, more optimistic. And his black eye had begun to disappear.

It had been only two weeks since

someone had beat him with a beer bottle when he was asleep in his sleeping bag in an attempted robbery.

What was the difference? One night indoors in a safe space. A friend had

given him a night's respite from the exhaustion and insecurity of homelessness, a little time to heal.

The next day his weariness returned. He was back on the streets, careful not to overstay his welcome, he said. But oh, would he like keys of his own, a safe place to sleep each night.

At Street Roots, we work with about 175 vendors each week, more than half of whom are homeless, and most, deeply poor. On the streets, people are subjected to violence, stress, sleep deprivation, exposure to infection, and other struggles that result too often in early death. Four Street Roots vendors or former vendors have died in the last month, decades before their time. Two other vendors died earlier this year. We have been running tributes to our late vendors in recent editions of the paper.

People need safe dwellings. This includes self-governed, secure places to camp, places like Right 2 Dream Too. And this includes a place indoors to call their own.

There isn't a quick fix to getting people housing, but there are many fixes. And that's what we need – a lot of collective energy toward many fixes.

There is a constant energy at Street Roots. The door swings open with people offering what they can. I could fill columns singing the praises of community partners who find a way to offer their skills and their resources.

That's what happened when Laura Locker of Mercy Corps Northwest began brainstorming with Street Roots Vendor Program Director Cole Merkel about how Mercy Corps Northwest – based only blocks from Street Roots – could make a difference in the local struggles around homelessness. Locker manages the organization's Individual Development Account, or IDA, matched savings program, which works with low-income, entrepreneurial people to help them build their assets and become more financially resilient. She decided to take the tools she has to apply it to the problems of homelessness.

"We work in Old Town. We care about the people we see," Locker said. She reached out to Street Roots, she said, because, Mercy Corps Northwest works with

entrepreneurs, "and Street Roots is all about entrepreneurs." Our vendors buy the newspaper for a quarter and sell it for a dollar. The currency is often in pennies, nickels and dimes, but they are doing all they can to make that grow enough to survive, managing ledgers in pocket notebooks and sharing marketing tips with each other. Each day, they must summon the gumption to hit the sidewalk and earn money.

Locker realized that she could use the IDA program to increase fivefold the money earned by at least a few Street Roots vendors when they save that money toward housing.

Over the next year, Mercy Corps Northwest is piloting this program with a handful of vendors. Participants open a bank account, and every dollar they save is

matched with \$5. Through the program they create a plan that helps them analyze barriers to housing and create a budget, and they attend rent-well classes. Up to \$600 will be matched with \$3000, which can go toward many expenses of housing – deposits, first and last month's rent, moving expenses, application fees, furniture.

Locker hopes that this program can grow, and we can apply it to more people on the streets. That's the goal. Street Roots vendor Cory McKelvey is participating in this program with a determination that,

should he secure housing, any success he achieves helps more people secure housing.

"We are not measured as a people by how the first of us cross the finish line but how the last of us cross the finish line," he said, and this philosophy guides him.

Housing is sky-high expensive and subsidies are few. We need to get more money into people's pockets and we need to get the cost of housing down for more people. At Street Roots, we take Cory's

philosophy to heart as we fight for systemic change, but we also know that, one-by-one, if we can get a few people closer to housing – across that finish line, as Corey put it – that matters. As we pilot a program like this one with Mercy Corps Northwest, we aim to carve out a model that can be extended.

Life shouldn't be so cruel that someone should fear falling asleep each night, prey to violence, delirious from sleep deprivation. If one night in a safe home did one Street Roots vendor wonders, just think what his own house keys would do. That's what is at stake.

There is a constant energy at Street Roots. The door swings open with people offering what they can. I could fill columns singing the praises of community partners who find a way to offer their skills and their resources.



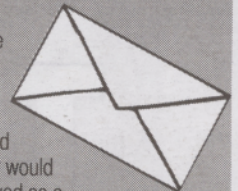
DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Kaia Sand

Kaia Sand is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach her at kaia@streetroots.org. Follow her on Twitter @mkaiasand

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 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 7:30-1 p.m. Sun.

Advertising

Interested in advertising in Street Roots? Email Andrew Hogan at andrew@streetroots.org

Staff

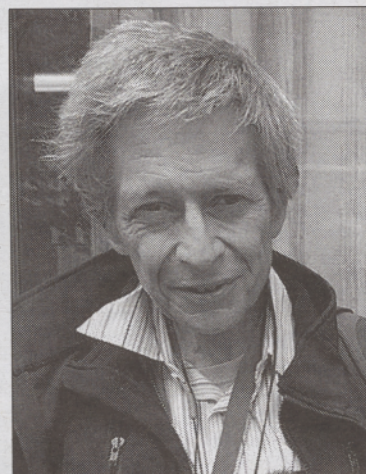
Executive Director Kaia Sand
kaia@streetroots.org
Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl
joanne@streetroots.org
Vendor Program Director Cole Merkel
cole@streetroots.org
Development Director Andrew Hogan
andrew@streetroots.org
Senior Staff Reporter Emily Green
Program Assistant Caelin Miltko, Jesuit Volunteer
Vendor Assistant Scott Jackson, Alex Gillow-Wiles
Development Assistant Rosemary Wilson
Editorial Producer Monica Kwasnik
Reporters Sarah Hansell, Leonora Ko, Emily Prado, Ellena Rosenthal, Amanda Waldroupe, DeVon Pouncey, Helen Hill
Photographers Diego Diaz, Arkady Brown, Celeste Noche
Canvasser Desmond Hardison

Board of Directors

Chair Rachel Langford
Vice-Chair Dan Jones
Treasurer Heather Stadick
Secretary Alison Hallett
Directors Michael Anderson, Sandra Hahn, John Brown, Nels Johnson

Volunteers

John Barker, Stacey Heath, Anjali Rathore, Dennis Hogan, Lucas Hawthorne, Thomas Buell Jr., Jason Cohen, Doug Spangle, Susannah Kamala, Jon Raymond, Diana Richardson, Paul and Madeline Gefroh, Mary Anne Joyce, Brooke Anderson, Gillian Floren, Mark Oldani, Bianca Butler, Camber Hansen-Karr, Miranda Woods, Henry Brannan, Helen Hill, Mary Emerson, Brooke Anderson, Kathleen McFall, Robb Hengerer, Maile Yeats-Rowe, Erin Parsons, Faye Powell, Danny Moran and Megan Pickerel-Winer. If you're interested in volunteering with Street Roots, please submit a volunteer application at streetroots.org/volunteer. Or you can call for more information at 503-228-5657.



Street Roots Vendor Cory McKelvey.