

in humans to fly into our hair or touch our skin, but they aren't shy, either. There was one particular fellow who seemed to enjoy his audience and responded by clowning around and fearlessly approaching near enough for us to take stock of one another. Moments like that are thrilling. Sadly it has been three weeks since one has appeared. I hope they're off hibernating or migrating safely somewhere and will return with full vigor next summer.

*Tim Hilton
Springfield*

TESTING MADNESS

They say love means never having to say you're sorry. I guess that's why 30,000 California high school students will be retroactively awarded their high school diplomas that were unfairly withheld based on bogus high-stakes standardized high school tests. In mid-October, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the law that does away with these worthless and cruel elements of the corporate model testocracy. In the meantime, lots and lots of damage has been done to kids who did nothing to deserve it. Nothing.

These tests, which a whole lot of supportive politicians could not themselves pass, are going the way of the dinosaurs. This week, Idaho suspended their use for high school graduation. There are now only 20 states that still cling to this foolish and crazy practice. Oregon is one of them.

It seems we have lost our minds. The average public school student in the U.S. now takes 113 standardized tests. Oregon is now giving standardized tests to kindergarten kids. Yes, we are tracking 5-year-olds, teaching them that they are dumb before they step foot in first grade.

It is up to parents and students to say "no" to the testing madness. Now.

*Roscoe Caron
Eugene*

THE KARENG FUND

You've been to Saturday Market. You know what's up: People make stuff and sell it, eat delicious food, do the twirly dance. It morphs into Holiday Market, then opens again in spring. Your friend sells jewelry there, and your mom did a zombie flash mob. Free music!

You feel some old-style hippiness. It's a nonprofit membership organization formed in 1970. A lot of volunteers make the decisions, and they still use a consensus-seeking process, sitting around a table for hours to handle what comes up. Over 45 years there have been thousands of people who have started small and now range all over the world. For a miniscule investment of your soul, you can be a craftsperson, or find out that you don't have what it takes. You want a retirement fund and overtime, but you wish.

There is a semi-hidden continuing community going on in the gathering place, which includes all of the visitors as well as the maker-sellers. Right from the start, a hat had to be periodically passed to help community members in crisis, and in 2002 some kind-hearted people created an emergency-relief fund, the Kareng Fund.

That hat has collected enough to give

Care of the Unhoused

OUR FELLOW CITIZENS ARE PERSECUTED FOR BEING POOR

We at Occupy Medical see suffering, lots of suffering. We see people, fellow citizens, who have been hungry for so long that they aren't used to consuming more than a cup full of food at a time.

The food that they do get is often from garbage cans. They soften food with milk or water to make it easier to chew as they are losing their teeth from poor nutrition.

We see people, fellow citizens, who walk tenderly to clinic because the tissue of their feet are swollen and tattered by trench foot. These are people who have to keep walking in wet shoes because it is a crime for them to sit in public. Our city has taken away benches in public places and resting on the sidewalk is the only viable option.

We see people, fellow citizens, with bruises across their back from beatings they received by thieves. All of their meager belongings have been either stolen or torn apart. As we treat their wounds, we suggest they report the crime. They shake their heads. Who would listen to them? They have given up.

We see people, fellow citizens, who are so sleep deprived that their heads drop to the intake table as we try to check them in for care. They have been chased from resting spot to resting spot. They have a backlog of camping citations that they have no hope of contesting. They are guilty of the crime of being poor in public.

Occupy Medical offers free health care to all in the Park Blocks of downtown Eugene every Sunday. This is community supported care. Donors bring in boxes of granola bars, bags of socks or hand-made sewing kits. Our volunteers offer the kind of service that is needed with sometimes inadequate supplies.

We have doctors, nurses, herbalists, nutritionists, mental health specialists and medical transcriptionists sharing their skills on their day off every week. We train students from as far away as Portland in the principles of patient-driven care.

We have a special niche. Free health care has no walls that keep back the poor. This means that our volunteers see patients who do not show up in clinics or hospitals that require pay. The population that we serve is diverse. Some are housed. Some are unhoused. Some have insurance. Some do not.

Most patients come with us with preventable conditions. In many cases, we are able to make suggestions for preventative care and treatment. Diabetes? We share nutritional information on controlling blood sugar. Muscle pain? We dig for a list of physical therapists that still have openings and will take OHP. Problem filling your prescription? We direct

patients where to go to get a prescription voucher until their insurance cards are activated.

What do we do when the problem that brings patients to our door is that they are homeless? What do we do when the problems (there are always many for those without a roof to shelter them) are a direct result from the societal disdain tied with living in a town that sees their very existence as reprehensible? How do we fix this? What solution do we offer those whose crime is despair?

There are those in the community who dispute the claim that homeless citizens are treated poorly. Those who question the persecution of the unhoused need only look at Kesey Square. Once a resting place for citizens housed

and unhoused, this plaza is eerily vacant at night. Blaring stadium lights give the square a concentration camp image. The unhoused, after being menaced by police officers under the direction of aggressive business owners, moved to the sidewalks. Now we hear grumbling of government officials who, though they were instrumental in the trail that led the homeless to the sidewalk, are disgusted by their arrival.

This is the criminalization of the homeless. Petty offenses such as leaning against a wall or jaywalking results in an expensive citation for the poor and only the poor.

They are in a social chokehold. The bathrooms are closed and they are condemned for using the bushes. The shelter beds are open only to a few and they are condemned for sleeping in public spaces. Those with unmet addiction issues are condemned for not searching services that do not exist. This badgering is similar to the emotional cornering behavior in

domestic abuse. It is entrapment and does not end well for the victim.

We at Occupy Medical are used to grasping at straws. We have a host of volunteers who have worked behind the scenes trying valiantly to support existing services and encourage the opening of services that are yet to open. Our patients need them desperately. This despair eats at us every week. There comes a time when you know too much to be silent.

We need a healthy system with single-payer health care for all and reasonable housing options that reflect the diversity of our community. We need a society that stops seeing poverty as a crime for which the poor must be punished. Decriminalize homelessness. All citizens deserve care.

Sue Sierralupe is the clinic manager of Occupy Medical in Lane County.



PHOTO BY ROB SYDOR

over \$25,000 in small grants. Another \$25,000 waits to be given, and our hippie connections just brought a successful application to the Rex Foundation for their gift of \$5,000. No longer just a fall-back plan for Saturday Market crafters,

this little nonprofit is aiming to give \$1 million statewide. People donate with their Market fees, with the Auction with Percussive Interludes at the Holiday Market, and you could give, too. Like each weekly happening, it is what you

bring it. You're not shallow, and when you look, there's a lot of light in that rainbow crystal. All those colors! Everybody gets to shine. Go to karengfund.org

*Diane McWhorter
Eugene*