Building a better Portland for people experiencing poverty

Welcome to the 2012-13 Street Roots annual report. This past year has been an exciting time for Street Roots, as we continue to grow as an organization and media outlet. At the heart of Street Roots is community. More than 300 men and women earned a dignified income this past year with Street Roots. More than 15,000 readers engaged with those vendors on street corners and neighborhoods around the region. Hope was established in the lives of people on the streets, and the general public who believe that we have a responsibility to maintain a healthy community. People came together across class lines, through conversation and a newspaper. Stereotypes were shattered. Lasting relationships were built.

Street Roots witnesses some of the most brutal and unforgiving realities people experiencing poverty face in our region. It would be easy to become bitter and cynical, and to just publish a newspaper that didn’t concentrate on solutions or innovation. Both individually and collectively, we refuse to accept defeat.

In many ways, Street Roots is that little train that could. The amount of work the organization produces week-in and week-out, with a small staff and a dedicated crew of volunteers baffles me at times. The human spirit and the power of love should never be underestimated. Marry that with smart, innovative people, strategic thinking and a willingness to change the world and anything is possible.

Is it possible for a man to gain hope, after 25 years of being lost and homeless, or for someone coming back from war to regain their trust of humanity? Can a woman go from the depth of hell and domestic violence to standing on her own two feet and providing for herself? We see it happen every day at Street Roots.

We watch in awe at times, when readers like you come together to pay for new dentures for a vendor, or help someone with a surgery, or get a new pair of eyeglasses.

There’s nothing sweeter than watching a vendor get his or her first set of house keys after years of stress, trauma and abuse. There’s nothing more deflecting that seeing another person struggle, only to die literally, on the streets without ever being able to overcome poverty. It’s these individual stories and relationships that drive Street Roots to do what we do.

It is not easy being an organization that will, say, or report what others can’t or won’t. It takes its toll on the organization financially, and sometimes politically. Saying that, Street Roots will never waiver from doing what we feel is right based on our experience and knowledge in the field and the hundreds of hours of research and relationship building it takes to develop the quality journalism in the newspaper.

That’s why the support of Street Roots ultimately lies in the reader’s hands. Since 2007, Street Roots has gone from $30,000 annually in individual donors to nearly $100,000. That’s during the biggest recession since the 1930s. That’s impressive and testament to the public’s support of Street Roots and the work we are doing.

What are we doing?

Street Roots published more than 300,000 copies of the newspaper that put an estimated $100,000 into vendor’s hands this year. Nearly 70 percent of those sales happen during the first week of our biweekly news schedule. During the first week of sales, vendors do well. During the second week of sales, vendors tend to scramble and are not as successful. That’s why it remains the organizations number one objective to publish weekly. We believe that sales of the newspaper would increase dramatically week-to-week, giving vendors more stability in their lives to improve their quality of life.

The organization launched an organizational and news website (news.streetroots.org) this past year. Partnering with the open-source software community and OMBU, a local web development company — the technology industry donated more than $100,000 of inkind services to Street Roots to make sure we stay on the cutting edge of technology and expand our readership statewide.

The organization continue to work towards centralizing our internal communications and systems to improve the work we do and to streamline the services we provide to vendors and the general public.

We added administrative, development and editorial staff. We accomplished this through partnership with the Meyer Memorial Trust and the Oregon Community Foundation.

We partnered with JOIN and Northwest Pilot Project, among others, to help facilitate housing more than 50 individuals. We estimate that we helped prevent more than 100 people from falling into homelessness.

We partnered with Precarious Egg, a local film production company to create a 15-minute training video that gives people experiencing poverty the tools and training they need to sell the newspaper in the community. More than 10 vendors took the time to be part of planning and starring in the training video.

The organization published more than 100,000 Rose City Resource Guides, distributed to nearly 400 organizations and institutions in the community.

We published the second annual Domicile Unknown, a report on homeless deaths in Multnomah County, in partnership with the county health department. We helped facilitate countless conversations about solutions to poverty at local universities, through the media and at conferences around North America.

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What’s coming up?

Weekly publication remains the goal. We hope that in the next year we are able to galvanize more strategic support to give vendors a stable income week-in and week-out, while becoming even more relevant in today’s media market.

We will continue to work on developing support and to create the best opportunities for vendors selling the newspaper — ranging from a motivational speakers series for vendors to creating a speakers bureau.

We will continue to publish and create new, innovative conversations in the community and through the newspaper and online. We will continue to work toward expanding our reach outside Portland and statewide. We believe Street Roots is a vehicle not just for poverty issues, but instead a platform for quality journalism and voices from people working on social justice. A strong Street Roots means a strong social justice community. We will continue to make a real difference, one newspaper and one conversation at a time.

— Rick Phillips

Vendor Luke Sense shows off the key to his new apartment and a new life
Newspaper’s voice rises above

It’s not a typical newsroom – very little about Street Roots is typical. But every other Friday morning, Street Roots is unlike any other news hub in Portland.

On those days, the office is filled to overflowing with men and women experiencing poverty and homelessness, turning their attention to the morning rundown of the new edition. It’s a time when vendors give feedback on what customers are interested in, what they like or don’t like about the new edition, and how their customers are doing to receive the latest Street Roots. Some editions are edgy, some are fun – some are everything in between.

In the past year, we’ve brought you big names and new faces, covered national issues and shared a light on the notable work happening in our community. We’ve spoken with syndicated commentator Thom Hartmann, NPR’s Ari Shapiro and the Nation’s Greg Kaufmann on issues of political engagement and poverty.

While downtown dynamics often get the bulk of the media’s attention, we turned our eyes and ears to the suburbs and the communities around Portland where poverty has doubled this past decade. It’s an issue we will continue to cover as suburban poverty outpaces its urban counterpart, drawing down tens of thousands of families and individuals along with it.

Our coverage on regional farmworkers and the challenges they face economically and socially took us into the homes of people working hard to rise above and create a better life for their children.

And of course we’ve never lost our voice with people experiencing homelessness, from the hard realities to the stories of friendship, camaraderie and hope.

We were honored this year to partner with The Mission Continues to bring Army veteran and writer Robert Britt to cover veterans’ issues. Likewise, we’re proud to publish commentaries and opinions from the Coalition of Communities of Color, Partnership for Safety and Justice, the ACLU and of course our local and state representatives.

Street Roots has expanded coverage of the music scene, both local and national, featuring interviews with Natalie Merchant and the Indigo Girls, along with Liv Warfield and Sallie Ford, among many others.

Of course, media today cannot thrive on paper alone. This winter we experimented online and in print with #SR24, a 24-hour Twitter project to observe and report on the lives of people on the streets one night in Portland. We echoed that project this spring, spending a day covering the lives of our vendors, from the first cup in the morning to finishing a busy day of sales on turf.

Behind every edition are dozens of volunteers who write columns, poetry, take photos, help copyedit and do all the things that it takes to make this paper and the organization one of the best in Portland.

This past spring, our journalism took home four awards from the Society of Professional Journalists of Oregon and Southwest Washington, including three top honors for investigative, social issues and arts reporting.

Next year, as we reach the ripe old age of 15, we hope to be bringing you even more. As an organization, we’re ramping up our operations to prepare to publish weekly. It’s a big move and a big investment, but one that will mean more income and sustainability for vendors, and a stronger arm for news and advocacy for readers.

This means more coverage of issues affecting nearly everyone in our community, and delving into the big picture concerns that connect all of use around the globe.

Of course none of this is possible without you, and all of us at Street Roots are immensely grateful for your continued support into the coming year. Together, we look forward to another great year ahead.
Street Roots Rose City Resource

The Street Roots Rose City Resource is the most comprehensive, updated list of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty in Multnomah and Washington counties. Street Roots produced 80,000 guides last year – 40,000 in the summer and 65,000 in the winter. The guide is distributed to more than 300 organizations and institutions throughout the Portland region. The guide is used by social services, local businesses, law-enforcement, health care organizations and hospitals, among other agencies and organizations. For more information on the guide, go to www.streetroots.org.

Revenue: $290,269.52
Newspaper sales: 15.8%
Individual donations: 28.9%
Foundation support: 30.8%
Government (Rose City Resource Guide): 15.7%
Business/Nonprofit Support/Sponsorships: 6.3%
Advertising: 2.5%

Expenses: $281,168.04
Newspaper & Vendor Program: 67.6%
Rose City Resource: 20.4%
Administration: 12.8%

$48,879.05 was carried over for reserves and grants allocated for the next fiscal year of 2013-14.

We are proud to partner with the following organizations and institutions that support the guide and Street Roots. If your business or organization is interested in becoming a sponsor of this great resource contact us at israel@streetroots.org.

The City of Portland, $30,000
Multnomah County, $20,000
211Info, $3,000
Washington County Homeless Connect, $1,500
NW Natural, $1,000
Oregon Food Bank, $1,000
Sisters Of The Road, $1,000
Home Forward, $1,000
Office of Neighborhood Involvement, $1,000
United Way Columbia-Willamette, $1,000
Portland Patrol Inc., $1,000
Salvation Army, $500
Planned Parenthood of Columbia-Willamette, $500
The Portland Trail Blazers, $500
Potluck in the Park, $500
Swanson, Thomas, Coon and Newton, $500
JOIN, $500
Transition Project Inc., $500
Central City Concern, $500
Portland Rescue Mission, $250
Janus Youth Program, $250

More than 700 individuals supported Street Roots last year. Individual donations made up nearly 30 percent of our annual budget. Your support means the world to all of us at Street Roots. We can’t thank you enough!

People can’t believe that, to look at me, that I was homeless, but my motto is just because I don’t have a home doesn’t mean I have to look like I don’t have a home. I’m getting my pride back and my self-esteem. I’m learning to like myself again and like myself. Thanks for helping a lot of people.

— EILEEN VIZENOR
You can show your support by making a one-time or recurring donation.
You can donate securely online, or mail in your support directly to Street Roots, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209
www.streetroots.org

Recognitions
Street Roots received several top honors in three categories by the Society of Professional Journalists 2012 Journalism Contest for Oregon and Southwest Washington. Street Roots competes in the 8,000 circulation and above for the region, including the Willamette Week, The Portland Mercury and The Portland Business Journal, among others.

Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl received first place honors for her coverage of the Domicile Unknown report from Multnomah County, a first-ever report produced by the county and the state medical examiner’s office, in conjunction with Street Roots, that documented the deaths of homeless people on the streets.

Zuhl was also awarded first place in social issues reporting for her coverage of a day at the 211Info center, the reference center hub where people help find resources for people in need of housing, shelter, employment and relief from poverty.

Arts reporter Sue Zalokar received top honors in arts reporting for her interview with former Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart.

Reporter Alex Zielinski was honored in the social issues category for her report on sexual abuse among the homeless community.

“I make a few dollars for myself but also represent Street Roots. It’s about getting the word out and representing as best I can. I give Street Roots a good name and people get to know who we are — it definitely works. It helps people get on their feet.”

— KENNY CHOW