A big year in the books, a big year ahead

Dear Street Roots readers,

2019 was a monumental year at Street Roots. We marked 20 years of our organization, took stock of our past and clarified our vision for the years ahead. We’ve grown a great deal over the past two decades — from a handful of vendors to more than 800 last year, from a monthly paper to a weekly paper, from the Rose City Resource as four pages in our paper to 215,000 guides we print and hand out all over the city. All of this other work informs our advocacy, which over the years has meant that we’ve led efforts to both demand more resources for the poor while also calling out the criminalization of poverty. In 2019, this advocacy coalesced into a focused campaign for the Portland Street Response, a plan for a new first-responder system for street crises that emerged from the pages of our newspaper and moved very quickly to the policy of City Hall.

We continued our ongoing collaboration with Multnomah County to count the number of people who die on the streets. This year, sadly, we reported the largest number of reported deaths on the streets since we began this report in 2013 — at least 92 people died at an average age of 47.

We hosted the Domicile Unknown press conference in our small Street Roots headquarters, so that our vendors could more easily be present. Likewise, we hosted a second press conference this fall decrying the Trump administration’s focus on the poor while also calling out the criminalization of poverty. In 2019, this advocacy for the poor while also calling out the policy of City Hall.

Committed to the idea that a vibrant democracy means full participation of the poor, we hosted listening sessions for our vendors to say what was on their mind to elected officials — Mayor Ted Wheeler and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley at Street Roots, and then in collaboration with Sisters of the Road, a listening session with Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty.

At our core, we work so that everyone has access to an income. All of you made sure that every week at least $10,000 reached around 170 people selling Street Roots. In addition, we know that legal barriers prevent people from accessing housing and employment. Through a Portland Housing Bureau pilot, we held a legal clinic for our vendors last spring; playfully dubbed “expungement-palooza,” we brought in pizza and a host of attorneys from the Metropolitan Public Defender office to help vendors remove fines and fees from their records. When possible, the attorneys began the process to wipe old arrests, misdemeanors and felonies from people’s record, a process that can be otherwise very costly.

Partnerships are key to our ability to support our vendors. This happens daily through our work with social services to connect vendors to shelters and housing. It also happens in other ways, from the library that Street Books set up in our office to the ceramic work Gather: Make: Shelter does with vendors, some of whom are now supported by a Gather: Make: Shelter apprenticeship program. Our transportation partners, Uber, Biketown and Trimet through Rides Connection, ferry our vendors to and from their sales posts.

For the third year, Business for Better Portland provided quality holiday gifts for every vendor. Kamp Grizzly has begun creating new branded gear, including the black hoodies you might see vendors donning at their sales posts. Laughing Planet feeds our vendors monthly and in honor of our 20th Anniversary, launched a special beverage and provided food for everyone at our summer anniversary celebration. Like in years past, La Luna Cafe, ChefStable Catering and Grand Central Bakery provided a delicious spread for our vendors at our annual holiday party, while Por Que No taqueria fed vendors at our annual summer taco party. Turo Bravo and Pizzicato fortified our fund drives. Marigold Coffee continues to roast and sell Street Roast coffee, an additional income source for our organization.

The Leadership Portland program at Portland Business Alliance helped us research our need for expanded space by hosting listening sessions, analyzing finances and creating plans.

We also worked with Tusk Consultants to lead an equity assessment, building those recommendations into our strategic plan (which we will release next month) so we can double-down on anti-racist, anti-oppression work as an organization.

Yes, it was a big year, and we commemorated how far we have come by hosting a 20th anniversary event every season. Last winter, Mikki Jordan performed “From These Streets I Rise,” a cabaret performance based on interviews with Street Roots vendors. In the spring, Portland State University public history students staged an exhibition, “Get It On Paper,” in the central branch of Multnomah County library.

This summer, we danced in the streets, hosting the Street Roots Street Party with live music and food to bring unhoused and housed people together. This was so successful that we are hosting another party in July. This fall, we hosted a special anniversary annual breakfast, where we honored Desmond Hardison, our very first fundraiser, for his dedication to Street Roots.

Thank you, all of you, for your part in making 2019 such a significant year for Street Roots vendors. It takes all of us, so we look forward to moving into our third decade together, stronger than ever.

Onward we go!

Street Response. This effort was in collaboration with Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative, Mapping Action Collective, Right 2 Survive, Yellow Brick Road, Sisters of the Road and Street Books. The results were compiled in a report “Believe Our Stories & Listen, released in a September press conference. In November, City Council approved a pilot design for Portland Fire and Rescue to dispatch one EMT and one crisis worker in Lents. Bureau of Emergency Communications will code 911 calls for the new system. Street Roots vendors will next survey unhoused people in Lents with PSU, learning from the pilot while preparing for the next phase of our campaign. This is a big opportunity to update the first responder system, and we will demand that it be large enough to meet the need, and nimble enough to be effective.

ADVOCACY

Portland Street Response was borne out of 20 years of Street Roots challenging the criminalization of homelessness, but this year, Street Roots tapped into a groundswell of public awareness and political will. In our March 15 issue, reporter Emily Green presented the Portland Street Response blueprint, a first responder system for non-criminal street crises. We then launched a campaign, gathering endorsers, writing letters and testifying at budget forums. By June, the city allotted $500,000 to launch a pilot, and we shifted into a new campaign phase — advocating that unhoused people inform pilot development. Street Roots staff worked through a community outreach work group to host listening sessions with unhoused Portlanders. In July, Street Roots vendors led teams to survey 184 unhoused people on what they wanted in the Portland
EDITORIAL

Honoring the voices from the streets

Recently, Street Roots published an editorial reflecting on our periodic check-ins on our work: “As a Street Roots vendor, I get responsibility, there’s pride in what I know.”

In 2019, Street Roots worked with 822 vendors who collectively earned more than $500,000. Our office is open 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We provide a safe and healthy place to sell their creative goods and earn more income for our vendors. We provide transportation for our vendors to and from their work. Selling Street Roots is a chance to get over my phobias. I still have a hard time leaving my comfort zone, but with Street Roots I can have a good time being around people. It builds relationships with people, very helpful. People love it. They help me sell papers, they’re also very kind people, very supporting of each other.”

“It gives me a purpose to get up every day. Even on the days when sales are slow, it’s OK because I can still talk to people. It builds relationships I wouldn’t have had. If I wasn’t selling Street Roots, I’d be home all the time with nothing to do.”

Jennifer Bradford, vendor

“I want to bring you high-profile interviews on the issues around us. It underscores that it’s not just that we think, it affects all of us.”

George McCarthy, founder 

VENDORS

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Jennifer Bradford, vendor

“Because, Uber and Ride Connection helped get vendors to and from their sales posts all over the metro region.”

Rena Hareenga, Street Roots vendor

“The vendor team hosted the Vendor Marketplace and a holiday social that provided additional opportunities to sell their creative goods and earn more income. Vendors participated in our 2020-2021 strategic planning process, providing important feedback about the future direction of Street Roots.”

“Streets Roots is a very safe place for me to be. It’s not just that they help me sell papers, they’re also very kind people, very supporting of each other.”

George McCarthy, founder

FINANCIALS

For July-June fiscal year 2018-2019

INCOME: $811,265

Newspaper sales 11%

Vendor services 15%

Newspaper sales 11%

Events 11%

Sponsorships 15%

Advertising 20%

Business, Nonprofit, Faith 11%

EXPENSES: $856,096*

Administration and Fundraising 16%

Sales and Vendor Services 15%

The $44,833 deficit in fiscal year 2018-19 represents funds received in the prior fiscal year for use in that fiscal year.

Street Roots is brought to you by readers like you! 1,496 individuals made a personal contribution to Street Roots in 2018-19.

Thank you to the dozens of local businesses that supported Street Roots with in-kind donations, sponsorships and other gifts to keep the office running daily and our vendors safe and healthy.

Street Roots published 215,000 copies of the Rose City Resource in 2019, and Rose was distributed by more than 500 partner agencies and organizations throughout the Metro region. The Rose City Resource is the most comprehensive list of services available to low-income and homeless individuals in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, and it is printed semi-annually. In 2019, we launched the Mapping Action Collective to produce an open-source data online version of the guide.

ROSE CITY RESOURCE

SPONSORS

Multnomah County/City of Portland Joint Office of Homeless Services
Clackamas County Metro
Columbia-Willamette

SW Natural
211 Tout
Cascada Behavioral HealthCare
City of Hillsboro
Home Forward
Oregon Food Bank
Travel Portland
Bassett Foursquare Church
Central City Concern
Downtown Clean and Safe

Home Advisor
Human Solutions
James Youth Programs
JOIN
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Portland Business Alliance
REACH Community Development
Salvation Army
States of the Road
Transition Projects, Inc.
Western Bike Works
William Temple House
NW Pilot Project

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VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

In 2019, 85 volunteers contributed 2,546 hours to Street Roots. From staffing the front desk to copy-editing the newspaper weekly to distributing the resource guide to supporting our events and pretty much everything in between, volunteers keep Street Roots running!

"I am in my third year volunteering at the front desk for Street Roots because it is exciting and fills my heart to be there. In my time at Street Roots I’ve seen, over and over, the transformative power of sharing a supportive space and creating community with a host of wonderful people I wouldn’t have had the honor of meeting otherwise. Our vendors have enriched my life far more than the other way around. I cherish the culture of Street Roots, it starts in the back office with the extraordinary people who make up the administrative and editorial staff and spreads easily out into the front office where non-judgmental, open-hearted support is in endless supply. Sure, there are hard times in the office; the avalanche of need is intense as people grow poorer and more marginalized in Portland and across America, but Street Roots is a haven I believe in."

— Helen Hill
Street Roots volunteer

Thank you to the following foundations for their support:

- Meyer Memorial Trust
- Harbourton Foundation
- The Collins Foundation
- The Coon Family Foundation
- Joseph E. Weston Public Foundation
- of The Oregon Community Foundation
- The Wyss Foundation
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- The Swinerton Foundation
- The Jackson Foundation
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- The Larson Legacy

To all of our wonderful supporters!

You support makes Street Roots possible!

Making a donation today is an investment in Street Roots and our vendors. To give a one-time gift or recurring donation, visit streetroots.org/donate or mail to:

Street Roots
211 NW Davis St.
Portland, OR 97209

Thank you!