

Oregon Homeless Trail

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paper written by homeless people. To accomplish this end, Sharon pays for the articles. It's a modest sum, but to a homeless person, the money is greatly needed.

While the paper is fairly new, Sharon reports it already has a large circulation. "Our first issue, we sold 1,900 papers. Homeless people are given the first 10 papers free to sell for \$1 each. They can buy additional papers at a reduced price." Sharon believes each paper is read by 3.2 people, so the word is getting out there.

"We've had a very good response from the community. Some of the people buying our paper are having the first encounter they've ever had with a homeless person, and it's a positive one. By selling our paper, it helps to break down the fear some people have of homeless people."

The next day in the pouring rain, we visited JOIN, at 12th and Oak Street in Portland. Rob Justus, the director, invited us into his postage-stamp sized office. The outer room was filled with homeless men, their soggy backpacks and bedrolls, and even a big dog asleep beneath one of the tables. Rob talked of the harassment the homeless suffer as the result of complaints filed by neighbors.

"Neighborhood associations, have, through the police, gained a lot of power," he noted. Rob estimates the number of homeless in Multnomah County to be 6000. "Eric Stinn, a candidate for city council, was pro-low-income housing. He lost. He was about the only candidate who advocated to improve the conditions homeless people face." Rob reported that all county services were being cut back. "I call it creaming," he said, "where only the cream are helped."

Rob told us of the Ross Island Bridge sweeps. Homeless people, 50 at a time, had gathered under the large, concrete bridge. And even though they are invisible from the road, the cops were driving them out. A ridiculous claim that homeless campfires could damage the bridge was voiced. "We went to the effort to get an architect and a civil engineer to check it out," Rob said. "They said a concrete bridge, 50 feet in the air, could in *no way* be damaged by a campfire."

Asked about discrimination against panhandlers, Rob reported: "It's less of an issue here. Our bottle bill allows homeless people to get 5 cents a can, so there is less of it here." He said the next step for JOIN is to establish micro-enterprises to help

On our return trip through Eugene, Tom Musselwhite showed us a hate letter sent by Bishop C.N. Turrell, PhD, D.D., in which he described the "lazy homeless" along with other bigoted language.

On the way home to Santa Cruz, we went to Loaves and Fishes, a church-run service organization for the homeless in Sacramento. Loaves and Fishes is sort of an oasis where homeless folks linger near their vehicles or sit against the building fronts. I met a graceful and dignified homeless woman named Carolyn, who shared with me this passage from her Bible: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." I made a mental note to call Bishop Turrell with that one.

Robert and I began this trip feeling very isolated in our struggle with the City of Santa Cruz to modify or repeal its punitive Camping Ban Law. Many times it had psychologically felt as if we were alone in our outrage and opposition to how homeless people are treated in our community.

While in virtually every city we visited, homeless people were victimized by punitive laws restricting such activities as sleeping on public property, in a vehicle, or panhandling. Yet these laws were regularly violated and publicly opposed by the homeless and homeless activists everywhere. Each group felt isolated, as if they

were the only city in the nation with anti-homeless laws. Each opposing group felt alone in their struggle to oppose the criminalization of homeless people.

Yet we found like-minded individuals and groups in every city we visited. There is a force of like-minded people who "get it." Homeless rights are the civil rights issue of the '90s. What is now needed is for these like-minded people to find each other, support each other, and turn the tide of hate away from the homeless and work towards a society in which all citizens benefit. It's only a matter of time.

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Homeless people earn money. It's not a crime. It allows homeless people to get a can, so the homeless can survive.