

# Throwing money at this problem really can help it

Late last month saw the opening of the Clark Center, a new eastside facility for homeless men located under the Hawthorne Bridge. Within the last 12 months I've attended two other grand openings for new homeless facilities: Jean's Place, a program for homeless women, and the Royal Palm, a program for chronically mentally ill homeless people. These programs represent the completion of the major components of the Shelter Reconfiguration Plan.

A major complaint against government is that it never finishes what it starts or that it never gets it right. Thanks to the leadership of Portland City Commissioner Gretchen Miller Kafoury, this has been an example of government doing things right and improving the lives of Portland's citizens in the process.



## IN MY OPINION

Chuck Currie

As I know Kafoury would agree, we should use the completion of this plan as both an opportunity to celebrate our success and to launch new ideas that will help those still on the streets. Despite our good work, more people are on the streets than ever before, and the make-up of the homeless population is vastly different than it was just a few short years ago.

I began my work with Portland's homeless in 1986 at Baloney Joe's, a now defunct shelter on the east end of the Burnside Bridge. In those days, the majority of people we served were homeless men. Many had become homeless as a result of what was called the Reagan Recession.

Today we face a growing number of homeless families and children.

As a manager at the Goose Hollow Family Shelter at First United Methodist Church, I spend hours each night holding babies (one arrived at the shelter last week at the ripe old age of 2 days) and being trounced by teen-agers playing basketball.

Homeless families now make up around 50 percent of homeless people living in Portland. These families won't fit any of the stereotypes. Many of the families we serve are employed. Often we serve two-parent families. When we serve single-parent families, it is not uncommon for the parent to be the father.

Agencies like Outside In, where I served as both staff and a board member, work with large numbers of street kids: homeless youth abandoned by their parents. Many have been sexually and physically abused. Some of these kids suffer from terrible alcohol and drug problems.

The Shelter Reconfiguration Plan has not solved all the problems of Portland's downtown population of homeless single adults. There still isn't enough shelter, and the plan's call for more permanent and transitional housing hasn't been fulfilled. Yet at the same time, the plan has done much of what it set out to accomplish: better serving people with the limited resources available.

Portland's homeless families and youth deserve a similar planning effort with similar successful results. A recent businestess community report on downtown homeless youth has called on Multnomah County authorities to plan and serve our street kids more effectively.

Operating these programs doesn't come cheap. A few years ago, Kafoury put together a task force whose goal was to identify \$2 million in operational funding for non-profit agencies. Despite best efforts to raise the money privately, it hasn't materialized.

The money is needed more now than ever. There are ideas on the table, including a restaurant tax, that should be explored.



TIM BRINTON

We won't end homelessness without cash. City and county officials should name a task force this spring to examine new local taxes — or realistic private initiatives — that raise substantial sums of money that provide homeless families and youth with employment training, alcohol and drug treatment, housing placement and mental-health care.

In the meantime, Kafoury's effort to collect bottles and cans at local grocery stores — including Fred Meyer and Safeway — continues. You can drop-off your returnable cans and bottles and donate the proceeds to the Homeless Fund. The money raised is supporting homeless programs in the tri-county area.

Over the years, we have proved

as a community that wonderful things can be done when people gather in good faith to accomplish great goals. Today, homeless Portlanders are better served because of the work this community has done. Now we must do more. If we don't there will be more families and children on the streets tomorrow than there are today.

I want that 2-day-old baby that I held in my arms last week to grow as a child the same way most of us did before homelessness first became a major issue during the '80s: in a world where babies sleep in safe homes with strong families at their side. Working together, that is an achievable goal.

*Chuck Currie chaired the committee that oversaw development of the Shelter Reconfiguration Plan.*