



"In here there are no strangers..."

# Sisters Of The Road

...just friends we've never met."

## 2008-2009 Successes & Accomplishments

### AWARDS & KUDOS

- In November 2008, Sisters received the *Spirit of Portland Award* as one of two top Portland non-profits.
- Our Personalist Center (PC), designed by communitecture, won a *first-place Root Award* in the 'Work: Entry' category from *Portland Spaces* magazine.
- Sisters Of The Road was named a *2009 Oregon Food Bank Agency Excellence Award* winner in the category of Excellence in Client Services. The award came with a \$500 prize to support the many warm, nutritious meals served in our cafe each day.
- *Voices from the Street* was named *Silver Medal Winner for the 2008 Nautilus Book Award*; also nominated for the *Robert F. Kennedy book award* and the *C. Wright Mills book award*.
- Another year of three 100% on health inspections by the Multnomah County Health Department in the Cafe! This is our second year in a row of all 100% scores!

**STRATEGIC PLANNING** - 2008-2009 was the first year of our 2008-2013 five-year plan. To view this plan go to our website ([www.sistersoftheroad.org](http://www.sistersoftheroad.org)), then to our *Mission and Philosophy* page under the *about us* tab, and click on the light blue [click here](#) in the first paragraph.

We formed an *Anti-Oppressions Steering Committee* to guide and support Sisters as we further our work affirming the equality and full participation of all people.

**CAFE & BARTER PROGRAM** - Beginning in February 2009, our Cafe shifted our 29 year model of customers waiting in line to be served to a more standard restaurant practice of a greeter taking names and number in party then calling parties up as tables become available. Doing this has allowed us to slow the pace in the cafe and have more time for authentic relationship building. This model has also proven to make many feel more dignified and valued as customers; reduced line disputes, violence and crowding in the Cafe; and has slowed the pace of meals being served so we can provide more deliberate and personal service and hospitality to each customer. The average number of meals served is down from 371 per day at the end of fiscal year 2007-2008 to 331 per day from January through April, 2009. This lower volume of meals served will help us maintain safety for all people inside the Cafe.

Our kitchen team advocated to try a different model of team work and has been operating as a cooperative mentor team; with two kitchen co-managers and two kitchen staff serving as mentors for each other. This model is possibility in action and one direction our organization could take as a whole in the future!

**SYSTEMIC CHANGE PROGRAM** - On Thursday August 7, 2008, around 50 people filled Sisters during our Truth Commission on the Sit/Lie law. Approximately 30 people provided testimony that expressed the unfair enforcement of Sit/Lie and the harsh realities of being homeless. A panel of Truth Commissioners reported back on what they heard. In attendance were City Commissioner Nick Fish and then-City Commissioner Candidate Amanda Fritz. Info from the Truth Commission was compiled into a short report which we delivered to the Street Access For Everyone (SAFE) Oversight Committee public hearing on Monday August 11, 2008.

Sisters and our Civic Action Group (CAG – made up entirely of people with experience with homelessness) continued to work for the repeal of Sit/Lie. CAG members created a petition and collected signatures. They then met with City Commissioners to tell them why they should not re-authorize Sit/Lie and to urge them to stand up for the civil rights of all Portlanders. Although Sit/Lie has not been repealed yet, the law was declared unconstitutional and enforcement of the law is suspended.

CAG held a neighborhood cleanup on February 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentine's Day and Oregon's sesquicentennial! 46 people attended including CAG members, volunteers, and a Gresham church group of adolescents. The cleanup went from the Hawthorne Bridge down Waterfront Park to the Steel Bridge and through the neighborhoods back to Sisters. After the clean up, people enjoyed food, music, and conversation. This was a great cross-class community event! This was the second clean-up of the neighborhood this year.

**RESEARCH-** With the invaluable help of a Capstone Class in the Computer Science Department of PSU we were able to get our research project database online in September of 2008, and attached to our website ([www.sistersoftheroad.org/voices](http://www.sistersoftheroad.org/voices)). The database includes all the data from the 515 interviews, over 2,000 individual codes, done from 2001-2004. This was only possible because of the hard work of 6 students. The cost for such a project was estimated at \$30,000, donated entirely in-kind by the PSU students.

Speaking of the powerful on-line database, we have had almost a 1000 visits from 15 different countries and territories. Folks have visited our database from as far away as South Africa, Singapore, Japan and Saudi Arabia! And people from forty-three of the fifty United States have accessed the website.

**VOLUNTEERISM**— Estimated total volunteer commitment was around 5500 hours by about 350 different volunteers to our organization this past year! Our speaker's bureau, SisterSpeak, presented at 323 events to about 1,250 people at elementary, middle and high schools, college classrooms, churches, professional meetings, political clubs, prisons, and other community events.

**PHOTOVOICE** - Approximately 8,000 people saw Sisters' PhotoVoice Exhibit (photographs and testimony by people experiencing homelessness) this year. It was at larger events such as Wordstock, The Better Living Show, Project Homeless Connect, and Sisters' MLK event. It also traveled to Lincoln City and Newport for events and Kelowna, BC Canada for the British Columbia Social Worker's regional conference.

**LIVABLE WAGE** - Our lowest wage for employees – including on-call staff - was raised to \$13.40 per hour (plus 100% employer-paid health, dental and disability insurances for permanent staff at 20 hours a week or more), which is considered a current livable wage for a single person in Multnomah County. Due to a difficult year, salaried staff will forego a Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA) pay increase. This represents a 3% increase at the lowest wage level, and a 0% increase at the highest paid levels of the agency, further closing the wage gap in the organization.

**ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP** - The kitchen team has formed many relationships with local organic farmers, ranchers and other food providers. Currently we are receiving much of our food through donations from these businesses.

The Cafe had an environmental impact study done by Metro this year. We were given lots of ideas and next steps for becoming a greener, more resource-conscious organization, which we are beginning to implement.

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT** - We hosted several forums to share the work with our community and get feedback; including monthly nonviolence trainings and discussions on neighborhood concerns.

We provided two civil disobedience trainings for anyone in the community who wanted to attend. One of the trainings focused on the basics of civil disobedience and the other was a 201 course for people who were already familiar with it or who had already attended our basic training.

Civic Action Group (CAG) members participated in forums and community meetings on topics such as the city budget and conducted outreach under bridges and at the feeds informing people of CAG and inviting people to share their voice.

The Civic Action Group worked with the city's Bureau of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) on several projects, including creating focus groups of homeless citizens and helping with the outreach for the creation of their Vulnerability Index.

CAG registered over 450 people to vote over the last year and a half. Our original goal was 300 people!

**PUBLIC SPEAKING AND TESTIMONY** - CAG members shared their stories with many different people including students from Linfield College, OHSU nursing students, and a film maker who videotaped CAG members (available on YouTube).

Lisa Hawash, Development Manager, and Heather Fercho, Research Coordinator, did a presentation at the Central Multnomah County library on the *Voices* book and our research project on February 25<sup>th</sup>. Sisters had a booth at the Better Living Show March 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> which featured Sisters, *Voices* and the research project. Devin DiBernardo, Systemic Change Manager, Heather Fercho, and Julio Vazquez, on-call Cafe staff-member, presented at the Neighbors West Northwest community action forum on March 31<sup>st</sup> - it was well-received!

Heather Fercho, Executive Director Monica Beemer and Katie Morrissett, MSW Intern, spoke at a Canadian Social Workers' symposium on poverty May 2<sup>nd</sup> in Kelowna, BC. We spoke about Sisters' work with people experiencing homelessness (day-to-day operations, philosophies, relationship building) and the research project!

Heather Fercho and Katherine Moore, MSW Intern, presented at the Coalition for a Livable Future's Livability Summit (a regional conference) at PSU on May 20<sup>th</sup>.

We continued to provide nonviolence training and support across the city and state to interested organizations. Monica Beemer presented a nonviolence class to over 70 people at the statewide Oregon Coalition on Housing and Homelessness. This was the second year for this training in this venue.

**DEVELOPMENT** - Sisters has amazing support from individuals in the community. The majority of our support (64%) comes from individual contributions, the vast majority of which are \$100 or smaller contributions. In December 2008 we raised a record \$420,000 in mostly small donations from individuals.

At the end of June 2009, we had over 18,900 active supporters on our mailing list; and sent email updates to over 5,500 people each month.

**FINANCE** - We received yet another positive audit report and we increased our operating reserve by almost 10%, finishing a challenging fiscal year \$8,000 in the positive.

Our administration and fundraising costs lowered to 17% of overall expenses, a 2% decrease from the prior year. We receive no large federal, state or city grants and we are not a United Way agency.

In order to plan ahead, in October 2008 Sisters began creating plans for what we would do if we were 5%, 10%, 15%, or even 20% behind in revenue. In January we implemented 7% in expense reductions, without laying off staff, reducing services or lessening systemic change & organizing activities.