

Sisters Of The Road MLK 2008

Before I can talk about why I participate in the Civic Action Group or CAG for short, I feel that I need to give some background information about myself, and how I was empowered by people who had the strength to love me, and how that love has saved my life and made me who I am today.

I grew up in a dysfunctional family in the 50's. My parents divorced when I was 7 and I stayed with my father, at 12 I dropped out of school and ran away. All my life I was searching for something, but did not know what. I tried to fit into society, but finally gave in to drugs. Using drugs I did not have to feel the pain that I was constantly in. I was homeless many times in my life the longest time for 3 years.

I did many things that I am not proud of and I went to jail many times because of my drug use. The last time I had an experience that changed my life forever. To make a long story short I became a Christian while in jail. I was given a Bible and since I had lots of time on my hands I began to read it. The main focus of the book was love, unconditional love and how we need to share this love with others. It was during this time that I realized what it was that I had been searching for all my life. I just wanted to be loved. It was this love that made my life turn around.

After I got out of jail for the last time I was so fortunate to be placed among people who had the strength to love me unconditionally and could teach me how to share this love.

This is where Sisters Of The Road and the Civic Action Group come in. Sisters philosophy of non-violence and gentle personalism is love in action.

Why do I participate in CAG? Because I feel that I have something important to say in the discussions of homelessness and poverty. I have experienced both. I believe every experience that I have lived through has happened for a reason or as Eleanor Roosevelt so perfectly put it, “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” These words have motivated me to take the next step.

I am a part of the Civic Action Group because I believe that we should be the change you want to see in the world. I feel the need to make a difference and I believe that nothing will change unless I contribute to making that change happen.

CAG is made up of homeless and formerly homeless individuals. As people who are homeless or have been in the past, we’ve been told that we are not capable and told that we need to do this, and then do that, and jump through this hoop just to get a meal or a place to stay for the night. But at CAG we can think on our own

and we are not told what to do. This is important because we have a space where we don't have to worry about someone thinking we're incapable and where we can empower and encourage each other to try new things and get involved. And we can believe in ourselves.

I would like to highlight a just a few items we have been working on:

- One thing that CAG has been working on is registering people to vote and getting people involved in the voting process, which I believe is very important. We can change the system if we all get involved and take part in the process and hold officials accountable for their actions. We have a goal of registering 300 people and have registered 190 so far.
- The Civic Action Group, working thru the SAFE Oversight Committee convinced the city to open a restroom 24 hours a day.
- We need to go to the people affected by policies or legislation and ask how they feel about it so they feel listened to. So we worked with the city's BHCD to form focus groups, allowing our community a voice in decisions affecting them.
- Continues to educate the Community on the root causes of homelessness and helps define the steps on how to end it.

- You can get involved in CAG'S "flagging" of a downtown park on Mayday! Where we will plant flag's to represent each homeless person in Portland.
- Race Portland's streets with us during our "restroom orienteering" event where we will use compass and map to navigate between the public restrooms of downtown to show the lack of restrooms available to our community.

My opinion has worth. I am not discounted or devalued here. For the first time, I feel like I'm being taken seriously. One of the dreams that I have is that as we get more people involved, we will be able to eventually raise someone up to become an elected official.

So if you are someone who is homeless or has been and you have ideas and a voice and want it to be heard, then we can be a vehicle that can help to get your voice heard.

If you're not homeless, you can be our allies. We all need to work together in order to end homelessness. You can inform others and teach people the truths about homelessness whether it's by writing to our legislators or writing letters to the editor or countless other ways.

I'd like to thank you all for joining us today in keeping the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's hopes and dreams alive. I will close with one of his quotes, "Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly". Thank you!