

# Community fund makes a difference

*MY VIEW: Young panhandlers need a hand more than a handout*

By DAN SALTZMAN Issue date: Tue, May 3, 2005

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**The recent Portland Tribune article on panhandlers touched a nerve among those who work, live or shop downtown (*'Spare change' pleas test city's patience, April 19*).**

Some downtowners feel harassed. Merchants are annoyed. At City Hall, we debate whether aggressive panhandling is a nuisance or a First Amendment right.

But there's a deeper problem.

One third of the city's street kids are foster care system dropouts, according to a report by the Portland Citizens Crime Commission.

Even teens who stick with foster care have serious adjustment difficulties. A new Harvard Medical School and Seattle-based Casey Family Program study shows that many foster care graduates in Oregon live in poverty and lack health insurance. Only one in 50 attains a college degree.

There is hope in our community for these kids. The Children's Investment Fund supports social service agencies that help this vulnerable population.

Voters created the Children's Investment Fund in 2002. It has invested nearly \$16 million in 50 proven programs in early childhood development, after-school mentoring and child abuse prevention.

For many foster care dropouts, the world they enter can be just as disappointing as the one they left behind. Two programs trying to prevent this are Project Hope, run by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Portland and the interagency collaboration called the Metamorphosis Project.

Project Hope pairs adult mentors with foster children, including teens leaving drug and alcohol treatment programs who want to live on their own. Having a caring adult figure in their life during this stressful time can mean the difference between a successful transition and a relapse into harmful behavior.

Through the Children's Investment Fund, Project Hope was able to expand the number of mentor-foster child matches from seven to 52, on the way to a goal of 102.

The Metamorphosis Project provides drug, alcohol and mental health services for the city's homeless youths and then goes about finding them

housing and employment through services delivered by New Avenues for Youth, Outside In and DePaul Treatment Centers.

As they overcome their addictions, teens receive traditional counseling, including education, residential treatment and follow-up care, with the help of peers who serve as “recovery mentors.”

With the aid of the Children’s Investment Fund, the Metamorphosis Project has been able to engage more than 250 youth in recovery services.

Both programs are making progress through daily contact, personal interaction and building trust with the young people placed in foster care because of abuse or neglect by their parents.

Investments in *real* change through the Children’s Investment Fund make it possible to offer something much more valuable and lasting to young panhandlers than *spare* change.

*Dan Saltzman is a Portland city commissioner who spearheaded the ballot measure that created the Children’s Investment Fund. He lives in Southwest Portland.*