

The Social Justice Column

From Charity to Social Change

By Fadhel Kaboub, Denison University



It is customary during tough economic times for people in the community to come together and pull resources to help the less fortunate amongst them. As a matter of fact, the work of charitable organizations is embedded into the U.S. social fabric so much that their work is not limited to bad economic times. Young people are introduced to the virtues of charitable donation from a young age, and are taught valuable lessons about the importance of volunteering in the community to make the world a better place. According to the National Philanthropic Trust, 89% of Americans give money to more than 1 million charitable organizations. Those donations exceed \$300 billion annually, compared to only \$13.8 billion annually from corporate donors. The average annual contribution is \$1,620. Overall, charitable giving is at 2.2% of gross domestic product. In addition, it is reported that 55% of Americans volunteer, with nearly 84 million adult

volunteers representing the equivalent of more than 9 million full-time workers, which is valued at \$239 billion annually.

The contribution of charitable organizations to improving the well being of the community is indisputable. However, what I would like to argue here is that charity and volunteerism are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for social justice. I would further argue that a community that limits its social action to charity and volunteerism as “patchwork” for socio-economic injustices is implicitly condoning the status quo. I do not mean to belittle the importance of charity and volunteer work in any way, but if society does not take the next step toward social activism and advocacy for change, then it means that we, as a society, are willing to tolerate the root cause of the problem, and to simply remedy its manifestations on the surface.

Charity and volunteerism play two crucial roles in the journey toward social justice. They not only provide the relief and assistance that are desperately needed in the community, but also allow the volunteers to witness socio-economic problems firsthand. Witnessing social injustice must be followed by “detective work” to identify the root causes of the problem, which requires placing injustice in a socio-economic and political context. Once the community has identified the deep underlying causal mechanisms that perpetuate the problem, it becomes incumbent upon us to become social activists, and advocates for social change. This is not about only creating a policy prescription, but also setting up a comprehensive policy agenda to change the system. The change-making agenda often requires a cooperative change in the course of actions of individuals, community groups, the private sector industry, and the government.

Social change entails civic engagement through media and political campaigns: writing letters to the editors, newspaper editorials, raising public awareness, writing letters to people of authority to take action, calling for and organizing a mass movement, calling for better corporate responsibility, transparency, and fairness, etc...

Like democracy, social justice is a very labor-intensive and lengthy process, but it is a worthy cause. Charity and volunteerism are the first (necessary but not sufficient) steps toward social justice, but those steps must be followed by social activism and advocacy for change. Not taking these steps amounts to accepting our role as the obedient cleanup crew for the corporate-sponsored and government-condoned social injustice.

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mean that they're idle.

Homeless people are innovative; finding different and creative ways to survive and support themselves, often by enterprising endeavors – for instance by collecting and selling aluminum. One man sells coffee and cigarettes for a quarter at the shelter so that he can have pocket change to buy food.

Street Speech exists to provide a means of income and employment to people who are homeless and have trouble accessing other jobs. Unfortunately, not everyone can sell Street Speech.

A complex and persistent problem calls for creative measures. Neither the government nor the private sector is currently creating jobs or making it a priority to hire homeless persons, and so as a community we want to bring people together to create these opportunities. For this reason the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless is hosting a the forum on Thursday, January 20th.

At the forum we will review programs and social enterprises that have been sprouting up across the country to create employment opportunities for the homeless. In Columbus alone, Freshbox, a catering company, and Green Works Columbus, a recycling pick up service, are businesses that have recently been started to create jobs for homeless persons. In southeast Ohio, The Refuge church has started a whole set of microenterprises to employ men in need.

The conference will address questions such as how we can address the different barriers faced by the homeless, create businesses to employ them, and help them to start their own microenterprises.

And can we help to solve other problems while doing so – employing people while bringing much needed goods and services into the community?

For instance, can we create green jobs to make our cities more sustainable? Or can we pay people to grow food and bring it to those in food deserts? Homefull, a shelter in Dayton, plans to do just this. Last summer they started an intensive microfarm and, in collaboration with Goodwill, paid shelter residents to grow food. They look toward expanding their distribution network this summer in west Dayton where residents have limited

Finding Hope for the Holidays

By Michael Gray

This time of year is very hard for me.

The holidays are a time of year that brings a feeling of loneliness and despair. I have tried to be festive, but it's hard to remain positive. Though I have family in Columbus, togetherness seems so impossible for us.

From Thanksgiving and Christmas to New Years, it's just a reminder of my have-nots. These last few years have gotten a little better, because of local churches that feed. A feeling of real warmth exists amongst my kind of people. Believe it or not, I have met some genuine friends amongst the homeless.

A sense of humility has started to revive my spirit during these kinds of gatherings. Holidays are supposed to be for family and friends, to come together and celebrate. Good food, music, and celebration of life and/or different belief systems. This is what it's all about, right?

access to fresh produce.

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We invite everyone from the community who is interested in addressing this need – especially those from the business community, students, and nonprofit and community groups – to join us for the conference. You can register for the conference by downloading the form from our website at www.columbushomeless.org. For questions or to request a scholarship, you can send us an email at info@columbushomeless.org.

VENDOR CODE OF CONDUCT

Sale of this paper is approved by the City of Columbus Licensing Department. Street Speech vendors are members of the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless and are trained and supervised by Coalition staff. Vendors agree to abide by the following Vendor Code of Conduct when selling the paper:

1. Street Speech will be distributed for a donation of \$1. I agree not to ask for more than \$1 or solicit donations for any other purposes while selling Street Speech. If a customer donates more than \$1, I am permitted to keep the donation. I will be clear that the donation goes to me and not CCH.
2. I will purchase papers only from the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless at \$0.25 per paper. I will not sell to or buy papers from other vendors.
3. I will present my badge when buying papers and display while selling papers. If I do not have my badge, I cannot buy or sell papers.
4. I understand that my badge is property of Street Speech and I will not deface it. If I lose my badge, I will purchase a new one for \$3. If my badge becomes ruined or weathered, I will purchase a new one for \$1.
5. I agree to treat others-customers, staff, and other vendors-with respect. I will not use abusive or forceful language when selling papers. I will not be aggressive, threatening, or continue to ask after a person has said no.
6. I agree to stay off of private property while selling Street Speech. I will not sell door to door.
7. I will not sell any additional goods or products while selling Street Speech.
8. I agree to respect the space of other vendors, particularly those who have been at a spot longer. If I encounter another vendor selling papers, I will move to another location before selling papers.
9. I will not sell or purchase Street Speech under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
10. I will attend monthly meetings at the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless the first Friday of every month. The next month's papers will be released at the meeting.
11. It is my responsibility to police fellow vendors. I will report violators of these rules to CCH. The value of the paper depends on keeping it credible.
12. I understand that any violation of these rules will result in suspension of my privilege to sell Street Speech and possible termination from the program. Badges and Street Speech papers are property of CCH and must be surrendered upon demand.

Any alleged violations of these rules should be reported to the Coalition by calling 228-1342 and must include the badge number of the vendor.