

# Best of the NETWORKER

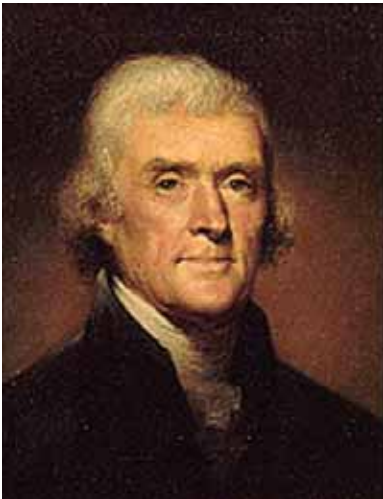
## Feature Articles from Past Issues

The Northwest Youth Networker; newsletter of the [Northwest Network for Youth](#), edited by [Jerry Fest](#) of the [InterNetwork for Youth](#)

October 2008, Issues 21-25

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### Insufferable

By Jerry Fest

The following is purely my personal opinion, driven by two seemingly unrelated things that caught my attention recently. But, with a dash of wisdom from Thomas Jefferson, they became related in my head.

First, unless you've been in a sensory isolation chamber for a few weeks, you're aware that our federal representatives -- both Republican *and* Democrat -- have completely screwed up the economy. Even if they stop pointing fingers and put their political self-interest aside long enough to *really* fix the problems (and, considering their 10% approval rating, I'm not hopeful), things are bad enough now that they are very likely to get worse before they get better.

Second, if you read Debra Boyer's "[Who Pays the Price? Youth Involvement in Prostitution in Seattle](#)" featured in last week's Networker, you saw that early in the report Boyer provides an assessment of service gaps, with the second point being "*Key services directed toward street youth and other youth populations at high risk for sexual exploitation readily acknowledge their need for training to be more effective with the sexually exploited youth population.*" My reaction to that was one of frustration and dismay. It was the issue of juveniles involved in prostitution that was the catalyst for the creation of most street-based services back in the early 80's. The original system of services here in Portland, [Project LUCK](#), grew out of a task force looking into juvenile prostitution. Over the years the manner in which marginalized youth are commercially sexualized has changed, strongly impacted as Boyer points out by technology and the internet, but it has not ceased to be an issue. Yet the issue has moved from an area of our expertise to one where we "readily acknowledge" a need for greater training and effectiveness.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that "*mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable.*" That could describe our relationship with youth homelessness. Since the passage of the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act](#) of 1974, we have created a government sponsored homeless youth "industry" that, while helping countless young people, may also have made youth homelessness in our communities *sufferable*. We began as advocates to help communities recognize and respond to our most marginalized youth, but instead we became the *caretakers* of those youth. And, in order for our agencies to survive on the limited funding available to ensure that *some* youth received *some* care, we've gradually moved away from the hardest to reach and serve segments of the population in favor of those who demonstrate "better" short-term outcomes. The result being that we now "readily acknowledge" a deficit of training and effectiveness for the most exploited segment of the youth we purport to serve.

And now we sit on a precipice of economic challenges, to put it mildly. You think funding has been difficult? The next few years may make the recent past look like we've been riding a gravy train. And a bad economy will only contribute to increased youth homelessness and sexual exploitation.

There is no question that we have done good work, but we seem to be missing the mark. We've helped individual young people, but 34 years -- nearly *two* generations -- have passed since 1974, and those of us who

have been in the field since then live with an ever present sense of déjà vu when we speak of street youth and sex trade exploitation. And the next few years will require even more of us with far less resources. If we keep doing what we've always done we can expect to get what we've always gotten; individual success stories out of a constantly refreshed population that is too large for all to be helped. As resources dry up, only the very large agencies will survive and our focus will continue to shift to youth populations that are more cost-effectively "salvaged," once again leaving street youth to fend for themselves. I would suggest that this is a good time to reassess our entire approach, and in future Networker's I'll share thoughts on what we might consider doing differently. But the starting point is to admit that change is needed. It's time to act as though youth homelessness, and the sexual exploitation of young people, has become insufferable.

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## **KICK THEM WHILE THEY ARE DOWN**

By Gary Hammons

I recently had a very disquieting experience in trying to assist a chronic street person in recovery of his belongings after having been in jail for several months. This person had/had a long history of mental illness. This condition became instantly obvious when he went the police property manager's window and found that his possessions had been thrown in the trash since he had been in jail more than 60 days. Their excuse was that since he had been transferred briefly to the state mental hospital while in jail they thought that he would not be returned to the jail.

While the sleeping bag and ratty clothes were not valuable, the person also had some artwork and other items that were very special to him. Unfortunately, this was not the first time that he had had his possessions trashed by police property managers. With so little means already, this callous additional punishment by the police was/is heartbreaking to observe.

As Jerry Fest observed in his "The Epistemology of Street Culture" there is often an irrational attachment to possessions when a person is on the street for an extended time. Such possessions probably represent the only connectivity with "home" and their loss can be devastating. Retaining them in police storage is problematic, however, as the items are often dirty, smelly, and even hazardous.

An alternative could be to have a nearby agency that provides services to/for homeless populations to hold the possessions in lieu of police property treatment as it now functions. While some regulatory changes would be needed, there could be a very positive alternative in that a connection with post jail supports would already be in place as a result. Then, the police would not be in a position to add to the punishment that street dependent people usually experience.

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## **Insufferable: Part II**

### **Advocacy 101**

By Jerry Fest

Last week I wrote that it was time we reacted to youth homelessness as though it were "insufferable," and promised to share some thoughts on how we might go about that. On the theory that there is no time like the present ...

For me it's hard to discuss the end without examining the means ... so before I share my suggestions, I'd like to make sure we're all on the same page regarding advocacy. For many of you, this will be a refresher, but since I'll be referring to these concepts in the coming weeks, a refresher seems in order. The best analogy for advocacy I've seen came in the form of a story:

While sitting by a river a person saw someone drowning. They immediately jumped in and pulled the victim out of the water. As they were catching their breath they heard a second cry for help and, after rescuing the second victim heard a third cry for help. This went on endlessly, and the rescuer was becoming too exhausted to keep helping.

A passerby was watching from a nearby hill. From their vantage point they could see upstream to an unstable old rope bridge that people were falling off of as they tried to cross the river. The passerby mobilized people and resources to go upstream, tear down the rope bridge and replace it with a safe ferry system. When finished, people no longer fell in the river, and the rescuer down river was finally able to stop saving drowning victims.

There are basically 4 types of advocacy. The first is **Advocacy Counseling**, which is concerned with problem clarification and information sharing. It targets individuals or small groups, and seeks to motivate the early stages of change. A counseling advocate was not present in our story, but if one had been there they would have sought to help the victims understand what was happening (that they were drowning) and what they needed to do (learn to swim or get the heck out of the river).

The second type is **Casework Advocacy**, which usually begins as advocacy counseling but differs in that action is taken to address the issue (the “Action” stage of Prochaska and DiClemente’s [Stages of Change](#) model). The rescuer in our story was a casework advocate in that they were helping victims make the needed change. Note that there is a range here. It may be impractical to teach people to swim while they are drowning, but a casework advocate would have swimming lessons as a goal to prevent future danger of drowning.

Third we have **Class Advocacy**, which is when action is taken to improve circumstances for a group or class of people. Again not present in our story, a class advocate would have recognized that many people were drowning in this river and worked to change their *condition*, perhaps by stringing a safety line across the river, or hiring lifeguards, or opening a swimming school -- anything to help with the goal of reducing drowning.

And finally, we have **Systems Change Advocacy**. Our passerby on the hill was a systems change advocate. They didn’t address the issue of people drowning at all. Rather, they determined the *cause* of people drowning and eliminated the cause so that people no longer fell into the river.

I stated last week that we are good at helping individuals, but have not been as successful at impacting the *issue* of youth homelessness. I think a reason for our lack of success is that we have excelled at advocacy counseling and casework advocacy, but we have mistaken *class* advocacy for *systems change* advocacy. Most of our advocacy efforts have been directed at greater financial support for services, or tweaking legislation to improve conditions for youth in systems ... but we don’t often challenge the systems themselves or advocate for *root causes*. Services struggle to survive while we rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic, but little ever really *changes* in terms of the reasons why young people are falling in the river. Until we highlight the problems with the rope bridge we’ll be stuck pulling an unending supply of drowning victims out of the water.

In the coming weeks I’m going to be talking about systems change advocacy with specific application to impacting the issues related to youth homelessness. But before I talk about *what* systems and *what* changes, we have to agree on what a “*system*” is -- that’s where I’ll start next time.

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**3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless  
2008 Homeless Youth & Young Adult Summit**

~ by [George Lee](#), Youth Leadership & Education Coordinator,  
[YouthCare](#) - Orion Center

September 23 & 24, 2008, over 30 youth gathered together for 2 days to develop teams to bring the most important issues of homeless youth to Seattle City Councilors, and Interim Director of Seattle Human Services.



Seven trained peer leaders and a youth peer lead coordinator led the entire event with minimal service provider intervention. The event was a success for building youth self-advocacy, homeless youth advocacy at the local level, and solidarity and community building for this population. [Check out the pictures and short video clips.](#)

Planning for the summit began in August at the SKCCH Youth and Young Adult Committee. I volunteered to head up the recruiting and training of peer leaders with the help of Charlotte Tucker of 45<sup>th</sup> street who did this job the two years prior. When I returned from vacation at the beginning of September, I set up a meeting of organizers including Lee Colbert, Marci Curtin, Charlotte, and me. Here it became evident I was going to take on primary responsibility, with the support of Charlotte, for the following parts of the summit:

1. Keeping the master list of RSVP'ed participants, peer leader applicants, and service providers
2. Managing recruitment for the summit
3. Planning and executing the actual summit agenda through the youth peer leads and peer lead coordinator
4. Developing interest group teams with talking points to speak to city councilors Wednesday
5. Orion breakfasts both days
6. Running the pre-summit training for service providers and peer leads

On Friday September 19, 2008, from 12-3 at the 2100 building, I led the pre-summit training. The purpose of the training was to competitively select peer leaders, train peer leaders in leadership skills for the summit, and train service providers in their responsibilities for the summit. Also, the training was to get this core group excited and pumped up about the upcoming summit the following Tuesday and Wednesday. Charlotte brought pizza and her past expertise, Marci brought her City & County 101 presentation, Lee her support, and King County paid for all the lunch food.

**Friday, September 19th**

12:00 Sign in. Welcome, eat pizza, drink... Introduce yourselves.  
 12:30 Ice Breaker  
 12:50 City & Government 101  
 01:10 Break  
 01:20 Review expectations  
 01:25 Review agenda play by play for both days.  
 02:10 How to lead a group meeting - Role play in small groups  
 02:40 Break - Staff will meet to choose peer leads  
 02:45 Group Closing & Review  
 03:00 Peer leads announced - Meeting Closed  
 03:15 Peer lead meeting closed.

The training was a huge success. The element of a selection process during the meeting kept youth very engaged and positive. Role playing was a good time, and became very applicable during the summit. Peer leads were overheard during the summit saying something to the extent of, "and I had a shy one, and a dominating one, just like that role play in training." Six peer leads (turned into seven during the summit), and one peer lead coordinator were chosen from the youth present by about 10 service providers. When we closed the

meeting by announcing peer leaders, everyone clapped and was positive.

On Tuesday September 23, the summit began with its first day at a conference room donated by REI at their flagship store. Peer leads met in the morning at Orion to go over the agenda they were running. Beau, peer lead coordinator led the morning prep meeting. Participants ate breakfast served graciously by Orion staff, and we all met at REI at 10.

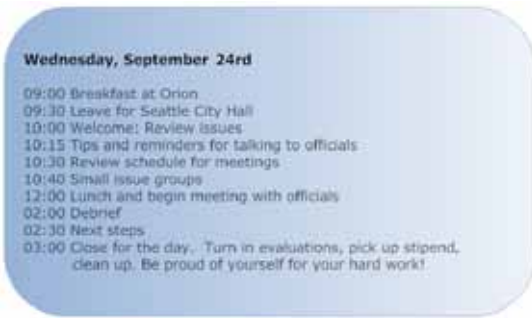
**Tuesday, September 23rd**

10:00 Sign in. Welcome and overview of agenda  
 10:30 Ice Breaker  
 10:50 Presentation on Human Services, Budget/Money, & Advocacy  
 11:30 Explanation of process for prioritizing issues  
 11:40 Brainstorming issues - small group discussions  
 12:10 Report out issues and record/categorize  
 12:40 Lunch/Break  
 01:15 City & Government 101  
 01:30 Vote on top 5 issues  
 01:45 Break  
 02:00 Small group discussions of top 5 priorities  
 03:00 Report out issue discussions to larger group  
 03:30 Break  
 03:45 Role Play  
 04:00 Practice talking to (mock) council members in small groups  
 04:45 Review for Wednesday  
 05:00 Close

Service providers were instructed to be scribes, and to only offer leadership assistance when peer leads faltered several times without succeeding. Peer leads led the day's activities, kept in line by Beau, Youth Peer Lead Coordinator. Peer leads practiced speaking to a group of 30-40 people with a microphone, leading several small groups in discussion on brainstorming issues, developing talking points for issues, and role-playing. Participants at the summit for the most part behaved themselves, and gradually throughout the first day bought in more and more to the summit. By the end of the day

groups were working busily in an impressive professional manner to develop their teams for their councilor hearings on Wednesday. This was an inspiring and successful day.

On day 2, peer leads met early to prepare for the day, and participants ate breakfast at Orion. Afterwards, at 9:30, en masse, a group of 30-40 youth and service providers traveled to Seattle City Hall on buses from Convention Center. It was an exciting feeling walking together. Upon arriving, the day's agenda began.



First thing, youth made final preparations in their teams for their meetings, and peer leads stressed last minute logistics. Each group would gather 15 minutes before their meeting, head up to the City Councilors office, sign in, and then sit down together with their city councilor. Service providers stayed silent in the background, not even sitting at the same table as youth and officials. It was stressed throughout the summit that everything about the summit was youth-centered. Even if service providers knew an important issue city councilors should hear about, the decisions and issues of youth were

the center of this event, not those of service providers. At the end of the day peer leads reported back on their meetings. Teams of 4-8 youth met with 7 Seattle City Councilors and the interim director of City of Seattle Human Services. Youth were respectful, officials were respectful, and a lot of growth and learning happened on both sides. The event concluded with each youth being called up to the front to publicly receive a certificate and their stipend.

In closing, the event was a successful, complex and high pressure youth centered event. Peer leaders gained several skills, self-confidence, and experience in their roles. Participants saw peer leaders excelling, and bought in enough to allow them personal growth in self-esteem, self-advocacy, community solidarity, and understanding of local government. Service providers present saw a shining example of youth leadership without tokenism. They gained more experience in what youth leadership is, and can be. Also, providers gained community solidarity, and I believe inspiration from seeing our youth act so engaged, respectful, and impressive. This event's momentum will continue on in various respects with youth, service providers, and city government policies.

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## NW Network Board Votes to Change Bylaws to Reconfigure Itself

Submitted by Gary Hammons

During its meeting on October 11<sup>th</sup> in Seattle the Network Board voted to recommend changes in the bylaws to the membership to reflect the new direction toward State based formats and to change the Board configuration accordingly. The new bylaws will be sent to member agencies to be ratified in mid-December. If approved by the membership, the major change will be the expansion of representation from each of the four states to consist of at least five pairs of adult/young persons and to include all sectors of youth related interests (foster care, juvenile justice, homeless/runaway, school completion, etc). A chair team will be designated for each state and that team will be part of the Executive Committee of NWNYS along with a Chair and Vice Chair elected by all member agencies.

The Board also voted reduce membership dues to reflect the challenging economic times many agencies and organizations are facing. The following dues schedule was approved:

- First year (all new members) \$50
  - Annual budget under \$250,000 now \$75
  - Annual budget \$250,000-\$500,000 now \$100
  - Annual budget above \$500,000 now \$200
  - Individuals/government departments/associations \$50.
- Waiver of dues resulting from financial hardship can be requested but will require approval of the Board Executive Committee and cannot be granted for more than two consecutive years. Agencies that are in a financial position to remit more than the scheduled amount will be encouraged to do so.

Invoices reflecting the new schedule will be mailed to members in the next few weeks. Members are also encouraged to recruit new agencies and organizations to help further the cause of youth development and to provide advocacy across each state.

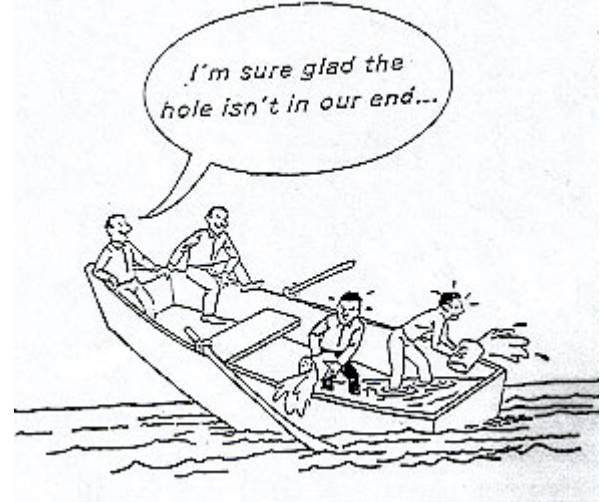
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### Insufferable/Part III: Systems Thinking

By Jerry Fest

**Note:** This is Part III of a multi-part series dedicated to a re-examination of our approach to youth homelessness. If you missed Parts I & II, [click here](#) and you'll be forwarded the first two parts by email.

I really had no idea what I was starting when I wrote "Insufferable" in Issue 21. When I stated that I would be sharing thoughts on reassessing our approach to homeless youth in future *Networkers*, I wasn't thinking of starting a "series." However, the response I received propelled me into expanding my thoughts, and I realized that they wouldn't make much sense without some context ... thus Part II related to *Systems Change Advocacy*. One more "contextual" piece needs to be put in place; the subject of this week's *Networker*. However, it was never my intention to use the *Networker* as a vehicle for an on-going presentation of my personal advocacy views. As complicated issues need lengthy presentation, "Insufferable" will become an opt-in spin-off publication after this week's article. If you wish to continue receiving future installments in this thread, please [click here to subscribe](#) (it's free).



What do we think of when we talk about *systems*? In my experience, most discussion of systems relates to closed systems at best. We talk about the Juvenile Justice System, the Educational System, the Homeless Youth System, and so on, and we try to change those "systems" to resolve youth issues. But these aren't really *systems*. They are *silos* or component parts of a much larger organism which includes, but is not limited to, larger silos such as community and culture, and smaller silos such as family and social networks. You can *manage* a problem by working in a silo, but a silo-approach will never *solve* a problem. That's why, 38 years into my career in the homeless youth field, I still have job security.

To move from problem *management* to problem *solution* requires *Systems Thinking*. "Systems Thinking" represents a specific approach to problem-solving. A short introduction is provided [here](#), and a link to resources is included at the end of this article.

The discussions I'll be having with subscribers of "Insufferable" will involve *Systems Change Advocacy* from a *Systems Thinking* perspective. Many of my points will have obvious connections to familiar issues related to youth homelessness while others may seem tangential at best. However, as my goal is to develop a blueprint for ending youth homelessness as we know it, it will be necessary to examine both the trees *and* the forest.

For links to Systems Thinking resources, click [here](#).

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### As If Homelessness Among The Living Were Not Bad Enough ...

by Jerry Fest

It was my intention to give you all a break from the serious issues that this newsletter deals with on a weekly basis. After all, today is Halloween ... a time for adorably cute children and consumption of mass amounts of sweets, and a time for adults themselves to be children again. It's the only time of year when grown-ups can let their inner persona out in public. But as I searched the web for something light and cheerful, I was shocked ... SHOCKED ... to discover that the tragedy of homelessness exists even among the dead and undead. Unconvinced? Click [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).



Happy Halloween everybody!