The Kids Are Alright

By Taji K. Chesimet
NECN Staff Writer

Worrying about our youth is a national past-time. Every generation has its particular fixation about what’s plaguing the young, from the innocent-sounding worries about close-dancing a generation ago to the much more sobering real concerns of our nation’s ongoing plague of school shootings. But it’s hard to not get the feeling that the tables have turned. Teens these days seem to be resigned to the fact that it’s their duty to clean up the messes that we have left them.

Whether it’s climate change or gun violence, gentrification, income inequality, kids these days appear to take little for granted other than the fact that change is coming, or already here. Perhaps it’s for this reason that many of the youth we talked to while putting this issue together also have no problem seeing themselves as part of the solution to these “adult” problems. They are, after all, the ones with the most skin in the game. They are the ones who will pay for and hopefully remedy the mistakes that we have thrust upon them.

This current generation isn’t inheriting a predictable world. In this geography of change, where our neighborhoods, cities and cultural narratives are in flux and growing out of reach for many, it will be up to the youth to draw their own maps to navigate it. With any luck, this means they will redraw old, divisive lines, or maybe erase them altogether.

The question is, will we let them? Inside, you’ll find the voices of youth from around Northeast, in their own words, talking about the issues that matter to them. You may or may not agree with everything they have to say, but hopefully you’ll listen. We all need to.

Renewing Gentrification

By Taji K. Chesimet

I fell under a spell for the past six years of living in this city, blind to what was occurring under my feet. I walked to school every day during junior high – same path, same neighbors, same life. One day, I noticed a peculiar sign hung from the gate outside a blue house on my route: “Intent to Demolish.” Months passed as the sign became nothing more than a familiar object to me, until out of nowhere, the house was gone. Then, for the next two years, I watched as two beautiful, but alien houses were erected – more manufactured than the clothes on my back. It never occurred to me that my part of the city, the landscape of my childhood, would fall victim to gentrification.

I was born at Legacy Meridian on December 12th, 2001. Sixteen years later, I have involuntary lived in eight different homes, from the coasts of Astoria to the more recently contentious lands of North Portland. From apartments, to a bed & breakfast, to a cookie-cutter house, my willingness to leave behind a history, a footprint, even a life, and migrating to a foreign home is now second nature.

When tackling displacement through the lens of Portland, a city often considered a liberal safe haven, we must recognize the steady foot of racist tendencies and practices. In writing this story it became too suffocating to internalize my experience as I knew it could not be singular. The issue is past its infancy but still plagued us with its effects. Through-out this process, I have moved into a more developed understanding of how gentrification is an issue expanding past just race; welcoming new avenues of privilege, gender, and opportunity.

On Thursday afternoon, I sat down with Royal Harris, a second-generation Portlander, at Elevated Coffee, a black-owned business on MLK. We started the conversation by talking about his roots in Portland. When posed with the question of defining gentrification, he stated that we must look at gentrification as a tool; in order to remove the pathos from the dialogue.

“When looked at in a purely economic or business space, it is the ability to see opportunity in a neglected environment and change it around for the better. If Black people could afford these neighborhoods, there would be no claim or uproar about the aestheticic or the changes. Portland has become a national city. Part of the growing pain is the highlighting of disparities and inequities.”

From that interview, I sat down with a young man by the name of Jaime Delara, a senior at Roosevelt High School, and a Portland musician who shares their experiences with gentrification.

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YOUTH PROFILE:  
**Ei-Shah Pirtle-Wright**

By Mircea Webby, EIC, Staff Writer


As a result of the systemic and violent dismantling of their cultures. This is known as intergenerational or historic trauma that indigenous people experience, and it leads to a lack of trust and an inability to build resilience for the future.

Understanding this bigger picture gave her the context she needed to continue working in her community. ‘As indigenous people we’re all connected through a web, to each other, to the land, to our community. We can’t be isolated,’ she says. ‘We have to work together to create a positive future for our youth."

To ensure she was part of this bigger picture, Ei-Shah decided to leave her job in the health field and move back to Portland to join the Native American Family and Youth Center (NAFC). While working at the Center, she began volunteering with Rise Up Red Star on the Siletz Reservation to provide culturally appropriate services and support to young people in her community.

Ei-Shah became a volunteer for Rise Up Red Star and is now a full-time employee with the organization. She is working to create a positive future for Portland’s Native American youth.

When she first arrived back in Portland, Ei-Shah was nervous about her new environment. She knew that she would have to work hard to establish trust with the community and build relationships with the youth.

Ei-Shah continued to work at Rise Up Red Star and was later hired as the Interim Program Director. She now leads a team of volunteers and community members to provide culturally appropriate services and support to Native American youth in Portland.

Ei-Shah’s passion for helping Native American youth is evident in her work. She continues to inspire others to work towards creating a positive future for Portland’s Native American youth.

YOUTH VOICE:  
**Josiah OneStar**

19 years old, graduate of Jefferson H.S.

By Moselle Dake, 14, Irvington, starts 10th Grade in Fall 2019

As a result of the intergenerational trauma that Native American youth experience, it is difficult for them to make positive changes in their lives. However, Josiah OneStar, 19, is working to change this.

Josiah is a Teen Counselor at Neighborhood House, a non-profit organization that provides services to Native American youth in Portland.

Josiah was inspired to become a teacher after watching his own teacher, a Native American woman, make a positive difference in his life. This teacher showed him the value of education and encouraged him to pursue his dreams.

Josiah is now working to inspire other Native American youth to pursue education and make positive changes in their lives. He is working to create a positive future for Portland’s Native American youth.

Josiah is the founder of the Youth and Family Center (NAYA), a non-profit organization that provides services to Native American youth in Portland.

Josiah is passionate about helping Native American youth and is working hard to inspire others to make positive changes in their lives. He is a shining example of what can be achieved with education and support.
Teaching Outside the Box: Alliance High School

Story and photos by Muscha Welsby, NECN Staff Writer

The first sign that this isn’t your average urban high school is the curriculum. There’s a class called Manhood, another called Skateboard Manufacturing. There’s Mindfulness, Leadership, a class on Rockstar. There’s even a class on starting a food cart business. Walking the halls of the building, you realize there’s something else that’s missing: no crowded classrooms, no shouting, none of the usual chaos of a school environment. In its place is a certain ease that’s closer to that of family than an educational facility, with a noticeable familiarity between students and teachers.

This is Alliance High School at Mek, located at the eastern edge of the Concordia neighborhood in the building that used to house an elementary school of the same name (a second Alliance campus is at Benson High but has programming that’s distinct from Mek). In its own way, Alliance, an alternative high school focused on career technical education, is challenging a lot of assumptions we have about the best way to educate Portland’s youth. And they’re doing it with precisely those students who have had the hardest time succeeding in the standard public school system.

Almost all of the students at Alliance have dropped out or been pushed out of other high schools. Most come to Alliance with very poor grades and spotty attendance. There is a higher than average rate of students who experience homelessness, who are parents, or who have been impacted by drugs or gangs.

Many suffer from various forms of PTSD or anxiety. 100% of the students receive free breakfast and lunch. They are what the school system likes to call “at-risk” youth. But their principal, Lorna Foxx Buffalo Horse, prefers to think of them more simply as students who “learn outside the box.” To her, it means a fundamentally different approach to education. “We’re trying to understand for ourselves how to get in the habit of being capable as kids and have their own thoughts on how to do things.”

In a dimly lit classroom along the main hall of the school, a small cohort of students sit scattered among the tables as their teacher, Andre Washington, leads a discussion about the differences between sympathy and empathy. He then engages them with a video depicting a racially charged incident in a barber shop, and the patrons’ various responses to it. The idea behind the video is to test whether someone would speak up when a stranger acts out in public. At the end, the question left to the class is, “Who would you do that?"

This is Manhood class, and the point of an exercise like this is to have the students, all young men, put themselves in uncomfortable situations and challenge them to consider how they would act. There is, of course, no right answer.

“There’s no blueprint. Their student body is, by definition, unresponsive to a cookie cutter approach to education. They all have unique needs and backgrounds, so the curriculum has to provide both a general education and a personalized touch that’s customized for the specific needs of a student. On top of that, alternative schools around the region are also constantly battling for funding, and the students they serve, as well as the constant fight that all schools face to maintain adequate funding.

But at a time when a single, standardized test score can be used to determine the entire fate of a school, at Alliance there’s something exceedingly personal, almost intangible, going on. Perhaps Reynolds puts it best when I ask her how you approach educating kids who have been through so much. She smiles warmly, thinks for a minute, then states simply. “We’re teaching them how to be good humans.”

One hundred percent of my job is relationships.”

For one student I talked to, those dividends come in the form of grades and improved prospects. After arriving at Alliance with a 0.5 GPA, he currently holds a 3.5 going into his senior year. “Other schools have a narrower definition of success and look down on failure, but failure is learning,” he tells me at the end of a class. “Here, it’s about purpose and passion versus just textbooks.”

One of the many ways Alliance does this is by pairing students with mentors. For much of what Alliance does, there’s no blueprint. Their principal body is, by definition, unresponsive to a cookie cutter approach to education. They all have unique needs and backgrounds, so the curriculum has to provide both a general education and a personalized touch that’s customized for the specific needs of a student. On top of that, alternative schools around the region are also constantly battling for funding, and the students they serve, as well as the constant fight that all schools face to maintain adequate funding.

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ne word you hear a lot at Alliance is family. Teachers speak about their students as if they were their own kids, and freely tempt them or their families to keep them on track with homework, or to track them down in the case of an absence.

Many students too find the reason they like Alliance so much is because it’s a second family, that they feel genuinely cared for. Alix Reynolds, the Reading and Language Arts teacher, agrees. “One hundred percent of my job is relationships,” she tells me while sitting in her Gender Studies class where she teaches about the history and future of the LGBTQ community in America. She is, she says, part social worker, part teacher and she sees the role as completely intertwined. “These kids have grit,” she says. “Some are home- less, food insecure; they’ve been through more by fourteen than most of us have in a lifetime.” Because of this, then, the relationship with the student is the key. Without that, the learning doesn’t happen.

Alliance’s students are, in many ways, the outliers of the larger school system, a system that has a tendency to disregard those who don’t fit into a traditional box. In schools, those outlier students are often the ones who struggle the most, who may need a little more attention than others, or who often simply need a different way to learn. They are, as one teacher told me, the diamonds in the rough.

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"Here, it's about purpose and passion versus just textbooks"

"It's about learning compassion"
**COMMUNITY**

**YOUTH VOICES:** Lily Corpino  
Junior, Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center  
Humboldt, Neighborhood, North Portland

_You must come back here._  
Your memory is so far away. We had been kicked out of dinner and there was nothing out there it was affordable. So I grew up here. I lived here and I grew up in my safe space, it’s where I know everyone.

Everything around here started shutting down. Local stores started changing owners and dying off and getting new remodeling. Everywhere you look there’s something new. When I came back from going to Reynolds [high school] for a year, I was scared. I couldn’t recognize my neighborhood anymore. There was new apartment complexes all up and down MLK and Killingsworth. I felt like I didn’t know where I was anymore. I was completely lost in my own neighborhood. Everything around here wasn’t there, it’s changed, it’s something else.

There was a family that used to own their apartment complex to now. Are they new? Not in those apartments. But you wonder who those families are and those families are the best ones.

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**Opportunities: Summer 2019**

Join us for our 18th season of the King Farmers Market!  

There’s so much at King Farms Market this season for all ages. We’ve got a vibrant mix of local and visiting musicians, food demonstration booths, and the U-Pick Noodle Lane on September 1! Additionally, SNAP shoppers can receive Double Up Food Bucks, up to $10 per day at King Farmers Market.

**Join AARP Neighborhood walks in the Alberta Arts District (free)**

Discover Vernon neighborhood and explore the Alberta Arts District. Learn the storied history of the area and check out the many art studios, unique shops and eateries in this diverse community.

Bring some extra change for a treat from Salt & Straw. 2.2 miles - 2 hours - 4,645 steps. For more information and other walks, visit https://states.aarp.org/neighborhoodwalks2019/

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**Dishing Up Opportunity**

_by Mocha Webley, NECN Staff Writer_

Get for lunch along Missouri Avenue and it might be served up by a young person going through an innovative internship program through Portland Opportunities and the Columbia River Community College-Civic Arts program and the Portland Opportunities Youth Unity Project (BYYYUP), is making a difference in one business and one student at a time.

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**Notes on Memorial Day in Oregon**

_by Margaret O’Hartigan, adapted and expanded from her walking guide, “The Dark River”_

In the United States the summer season is traditionally considered to begin with the Memorial Day celebration on May 27. In 1867 Oregon was the first state in the Union to make the first Monday in September an official public holiday. What we now know as Memorial Day began as early as 1861 with the private observance of a day in which Southern soldiers killed in the conflict between the Union and the Confederacy were to be buried with full military honors and burial at governmental expense. The last surviving Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), General John Logan, called for a national observance of Memorial Day in 1868.

Today, while the observance dates have changed, the focus of the observance remains the same: honoring those who served and sacrificed. The Oregon Veterans’ Home and the City of Corvallis both host annual Memorial Day observances where flags are raised and the names of those who gave their lives in service to our country are read aloud.

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**Grasp The Stars**

_by Kirk Caballero, 15_  
Sophomore at Madison High School

Tie your shoes and grasp the stars  
_let’s see you shine; show them who you really are_  
_let your passion and ingenuity set the bar_  
_let 'em see you shine; show them who you really are_

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**YOUTH VOICES:** Kai Tomizawa  
Sophomore, Grant High School

_The thing that’s difficult about acting is that you have to wait for someone to find you and cast you. And you have to learn how to be the right person in a room to choose you else. With filmmaking you can shape your own stories and I can be a generalized character for all those doors and give opportunities to other people. Something in me just won’t leave a mark. Stories play a big role in everyday. Stories are how we empathize with people we’ve never met. They’re how we make sense of the world. It’s the way people try to understand who we are and why we’re here on this earth. It’s the way people understand our purpose. I’m not that good at acting and I also feel guilty because I shouldn’t be doing so much. But it doesn’t fall on one person to change the world. It’s so easy to say, “that doesn’t affect me.” It doesn’t. It can be with stories about people that you don’t know, or of climate change in the world that you’re not always there. We can be stories of animals that are dying or people that are dying but if you think that it doesn’t affect you then you’re not likely to do anything_.

_That’s one of the things I’ve been telling ourselves that this doesn’t affect me or that after I’m gone, no one will care. But the story that we tell is the thing that is everything that we do affects everyone. We’re all part of this interlinking world._

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**Keep Portland Creative SUPPORT THE ALBERTA ABBEY**

In September, the City will decide whether the Abbey can continue operating as an affordable home for the arts in Northeast Portland. Lend your voice and show your support to help preserve affordable arts space in Portland.

Visit www.albertaabbeey.org to join the letter-writing campaign and pledge drive, or stop by for coffee, and let’s chat.

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**“I was so motivated working alongside one of the future homeowners.”**

Oregon Connections Academy senior from the Beaverton area jumped in on interior painting. “I ruined my clothes and clothes but I didn’t care because at the end of the day I was doing something that would make a difference in the future homeowners,” said Palatinus Ul-Netter, an ABBYUP student working at a local grocery store.
Good in the Hood

By Jazkia Phillips

A
s each year passes, I can’t help but to find something new to love about you. The final days of June that you have claimed as yours, you all feel like settling into...in the big way. It’s the type of silence I can only find in a space overpowered by noise. Because you are loud. I’m talking, every lyric effortlessly floating four blocks away and dancing on ears clear as day, loud. The busiest streets with the biggest cars and the boldest drivers have nothing on you, that’s how loud you get. I am enamored by the very deliberate and intentional way you take up space. I love that about you. I’ve known you for eighteen years, you’ve been alive for twenty six, but I have never properly thanked you.

At age six, I didn’t know you that well, but still managed to weave my way through a crowd and land at your stage. Fast forward some years and it would require nothing less than absolute force to get me up there. But I guess that’s how childhood works, right? Insecurity and doubts don’t drag themselves along for the ride until at least ten or eleven.

At sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, all I do is eat and people watch, looking at cute guys and girls, never brave enough to actually say anything. I’m old enough now to where I can see you on my own, without parental supervision. You look as beautiful as ever. Green, red, blue, and black low riders with diamonds in the paint and hoop earrings caught in the sunlight highlight this beauty. Black bodies have been replaced with black lives matter signs, but we all seem to find our way back to you.

You are the hand that holds us all together. Our physical environment has morphed and molded itself into unfamiliar faces and buildings but you have stayed the same. The hood doesn’t always feel like the hood these days but it’s good cause you’re always there, a snapshot in time. So, thank you. Thank you for being the home of many playful days and nights. Thank you for the soft grassy fields that allowed us to take off our shoes and run free. Kickball and tag will never be the same. The many picnics with the generic red and white plaid sheet filled our open evenings with jokes and yummy food. I promise to honor you by remembering the many memories that my childhood holds. Thank you Empty Lots.

Reprinted courtesy of I Love This Place PDX, a CENTER youth project.

COMMUNITY

Farm to Community – Organic Growth

By Ankur Dholakia and Rachita Shah

A nice stroll on a Saturday morning at the Woodlawn’s Farmers Market is more than just fresh produce from local farmers. Neighborhood residents and visitors enjoy live music, a baked goods stand, coffee and other local flavors. It might be just a stroll through a neighborhood event for some, but the founders built this to create a sustainable food culture.

“When choosing vendors, we give preference to vendors who live in the neighborhood and minority-owned small businesses to respect the long-time residents of Woodlawn and reflect the diversity of our neighborhood”, explains Martin Vanepas, one of the founders of the market. Now run by a market manager and dozens of volunteers, the market not only supports local farmers in northeast Portland, it also motivates the growing farm-to-table hyperlocal movement and provides a community gathering experience for everyone.

The WFM received a Grant in 2016 to establish the Interdependent Farmers Program in partnership with Headwaters Farm Incubator, lowering barriers for new farmers who want to learn to sell at a farmers market by providing a tent, tables, scale and training. In the same year, as an extension to locally sourced food, saving on transportation, healthy eating choices, the WFM started workshops on sustainable agriculture and soil and water conservation.

“These farmers are doing a great service to their community by providing delicious and healthy produce”

There is involvement for children too. Starting this July, the Power of Produce (POP) program aims to educate kids in the community about growing vegetables and where food comes from and building those relationships with the local farmers.

In its fifth year now, the market has seen a steady growth with about 15 vendors and around 500 customers per market day.

One of those vendors, ZK Flow-ers, has been with the market since the beginning and has seen their flower company get wedding orders through this market. They are grateful for the loyalty and trust they have received from the customers. A community booth welcomes neighborhood residents to sell anything they grew or made without a vendor fee and the market accepts SNAP food stamp benefits and provides up to $10 in matching tokens per market day.

Shannon FitzMaurice, one of the other founders, says, “The market was created to support the hard work of local farmers. We are lucky enough to be surrounded by lots of small farms in NE Portland. These farmers are doing a great service to their community by providing delicious and healthy produce.”

The market serves Woodlawn, Piedmont and Concordia neighbor- hoods and operates every Saturday 10am-2pm from June 6 - October 28 at the intersection of NE Dekum and Durham.

Big White House. Empty Lots. The Alley.

By Bella Myers

Big White House (Age 3)

One step, two step, three step, four step
Up the creaky wooden steps, you go with your short toddler legs
Taking each step one at a time.
The small red chair that sits on the big white porch, is your place to sit while mom juggles through her jangly keys trying to open the door.
The big white house that you stepped foot in every day for the past three years, actually wasn’t that big.
You did not realize that your space mirrored the space on the other side of the wall.
Your innocent mind did not care.
This was your big white house.

Empty Lots (Age 7)

Dear Empty Lots,
Even though you’ve moved on to be a tall fancy apartment complex, I will remember your everlasting presence in my memories. I understand that you had no choice in the decision to house hundreds of people but thank you for being the home of many playful days and nights. Thank you for the soft grassy fields that allowed us to take off our shoes and run free. Kickball and tag will never be the same. The many picnics with the generic red and white plaid sheet filled our open evenings with jokes and yummy food. I promise to honor you by remembering the many memories that my childhood holds. Thank you Empty Lots.

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