



Three women from Bhutan are growing vegetables in SE Portland, thanks to a partnership with Mercy Corps Northwest.

Juan-Carlos Delgado for Mercy Corps

MERCY CORPS

Our Work Begins At Home



Pabitra Dhimal (left) and Koushila Koirala pull weeds in the empty lot they've transformed into a productive garden.

Juan-Carlos Delgado for Mercy Corps

From Bhutan to Portland | Planting the Seeds of A New Life

By Andy Parker

Crouched close to the loamy soil, the two women work as one, their ebony hair shining brilliantly in the midday sun as their four hands move seamlessly across the tidy garden plot rows.

Fifteen, 20, then 30 minutes whisk by and never once do they rise from their work, their motions as effortless as the flights of the half-dozen butterflies riding the warm afternoon breezes across the garden. The women are plucking the little leaves of the mustard plant, one at a time, leaf by leaf, then quickly tying them into small bundles and tossing them toward a plastic tub, their fingers back picking greens before the bundles come to rest.

It's a mesmerizing, well-practiced rhythm, one of the few remaining signature patterns in lives torn apart by the politics and intolerance of their homeland — the mystical Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan where, since 1990, the Bhutanese majority has forced more than 100,000 citizens of Nepali descent into refugee camps in Nepal.

A Difficult Journey

Watching Koushila Koirala and Pabitra Dhimal, their easy conversation and laughter rolling across the Sellwood-Moreland residential lot they've transformed into a sprawling organic garden, you'd never suspect the journey their families have endured. In recent years, the respected Bhutanese landowners were demonized as despised intruders from Nepal and herded into refugee camps.

It was a bitter chain of violent, sometimes inhumane events that forced the women and their extended families to join the more than 100,000 people who were expelled from Bhutan. They ended up living in refugee camps established by the United Nations in Nepal. Each camp was crowded with thousands of tiny bamboo huts. There was no running water, electricity or employment. Educational

opportunities were severely limited. Camp residents had no rights and, worst of all, no hope.

Finally, after refugees had lived for more than 15 years in these "temporary" camps, a worldwide resettlement effort was launched. Tens of thousands of refugees sought new homes around the world. Among them were about 60,000 Bhutanese people who came to U.S. cities, including Portland.

But if coming to the U.S. offered hope, it was distant. While younger Bhutanese children learned to speak and write English, many parents did not — and therefore were unable to find jobs.

Helping New Neighbors

That's where Mercy Corps Northwest saw an opportunity. Like its parent organization, Mercy Corps, its mission is to help people help themselves.

Working with the Bhutanese families settling in Portland, Mercy Corps Northwest is pursuing its local mission of helping low-income groups in Oregon and Washington permanently integrate into local communities while working toward long-term economic self-sufficiency. In the same way, Mercy Corps works around the world to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression among populations trapped by conflict and lack of opportunity.

Koirala and Dhimal come from a country that's still largely rural and agricultural. So they were a perfect fit for Mercy Corps Northwest's New American Agriculture Program (NAAP). It is designed to partner longstanding residents of local communities with refugee and immigrant populations to help the latter build small farm enterprises that boost both their skills and their incomes.

By facilitating their access to private farmland and unused urban land, the program works to create direct pathways into the local economy, helping immigrants and refugees connect with farmers markets, restaurants, community-supported agriculture (CSA) and grocery stores.

Loans, Lessons – And A New Way to Work

Participants like Koirala and Dhimal, as well as their farming partner, Kali Dhungel, receive intensive training in agribusiness and risk management. They also can access grants, through a Mercy Corps Northwest program designed to build assets. It not only offers matching grants, but teaches the kind of basic financial literacy that helps people in long-underserved communities to understand the benefit of building a solid credit record.

Much like Mercy Corps Northwest's Women's Business Center, the agriculture program offers a life-altering economic education to immigrant and refugee women whose cultural norms often prohibit them from working outside the home.

It's an opportunity that Koirala and Dhimal appreciate on a personal level. "Without Mercy Corps," said Koirala (as interpreted by her daughter, Rekha), "we would never be able to sell our crops. We are so grateful to them."

During the summer of 2009 — their first year working the residential garden plot — local residents reached out and embraced their efforts. Nine families signed on, at a cost of \$20 a week, to receive weekly baskets of food fresh from the garden. This summer, Koirala and Dhimal hope to add more customers, while continuing to sell their produce at farmers markets.

From Brambles to Bounty

Tom Jardine may be the Portland resident most crucial to their first step toward economic stability. After retiring from the U.S. Army, Jardine started renovating old houses in Portland. When he spotted one of Mercy Corps Northwest's NAAP gardens near Reed College, Jardine called and offered the use of a vacant lot adjoining his latest renovation project in Sellwood-Moreland.



Mercy Corps Northwest invites you to visit our offices.

Jeff Amram for Mercy Corps

Around the World and Here in the Northwest

Sometimes the best thing about starting a project is ending it. For Mercy Corps, closing a country program overseas is a celebration of the growth and self-sufficiency that means our involvement is no longer necessary.

Kathy Fry, Mercy Corps' Regional Program Director for Latin America, the Balkans and the Caucasus, was leaving for Bosnia and Herzegovina in April to wrap up 17 years of Mercy Corps work in the war-ravaged region.

"I had recently taken over our Balkan portfolio, but I had never been there," noted Fry, who also oversees Mercy Corps programs in Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, Kosovo and Georgia. A small group of Mercy Corps donors and board members — all women — would be accompanying her to see some of the results of our Bosnia and Herzegovina projects and to visit Srebrenica, the site of the worst mass murder in Europe since World War II.

Needing a crash course on what to expect on the ground, Fry turned to Mercy Corps colleagues who had worked in the region.

"They told me to enjoy what is there now, knowing that Bosnia is safe and commerce is functioning," said Fry.

Rebuilding Lives — And Trust

Bosnia and Herzegovina offers an illuminating example of how Mercy Corps helps communities become stronger and more self-sufficient. Our work there helped revitalize an economy that was damaged and disrupted by war. In 2000, we founded the country's first cross-border microfinance institution, Partner Microcredit, which not only encouraged economic development, but helped previously warring ethnic groups begin to trust their neighbors again.

Sasha Muench, Director of Social Innovations at Mercy Corps, started Partner's lending in the Serb part of Bosnia. "Mercy Corps focused on bridging the divide between ethnicities by finding productive ways for people to work together and improve their lives," said Muench.

Today Partner is an independent bank rated by Forbes magazine as one of the best microfinance organizations in the world. In addition, Mercy Corps' legacy includes building trans-boundary trade, roads and water systems now shared by former adversaries and rebuilding hospitals and schools destroyed in the war.

"What stands out for me in the Balkans," commented Fry, "is this breadth of work and that it will

BY THE NUMBERS

10.6%

Oregon's unemployment rate as of April 2010¹

133,200

Estimated number of Portland metro area residents who were looking for work in March 2010²

\$34,226

Average annual pay in Oregon (compared to \$44,458 nationally)³

90,672

Number of small business employers in Oregon, accounting for 57.2 percent of private-sector employment⁴

\$120,225

Average value of women-owned businesses in Oregon (compared to the national average of \$144,969)⁵

60.1%

Percentage of Oregon renters who are asset poor (without savings to support themselves at the poverty level for three months without income)⁶

22%

Percentage of middle-class Oregonians (making \$44,801-\$68,800) who are asset poor⁷

18.6%

Percentage of unbanked Oregon households (without checking, savings, or money market accounts)⁸

3.9%

Percentage of Oregon minorities who own their own business⁹

66.5%

Percentage of graduates from four-year colleges in Oregon with student loan debt¹⁰

19.7%

Percentage of Oregon's non-elderly population without health insurance, which can be a buffer against financial insecurity¹¹

Bhutan

Continued from Page 1

A year later, Jardine is amazed at how the three Bhutanese woman have transformed a blackberry-engulfed lot into a lush, highly productive garden. Instead of an impenetrable thicket of brambles, he now sees potatoes, onions, eggplant, sweet peppers, cucumbers, beans, tomatoes, squash, parsley, carrots – and more.

“I was aware of what Mercy Corps was doing with urban farming,” said Jardine, “so I called them up and said they could use my lot. It’s phenomenal what those women accomplished. This year, I offered them the side and back yards of another house I’m working on, and they planted pretty much every square inch. It’s amazing how hard they work.”

During his 25 years in the Army, Jardine did his share of world traveling and saw his share of loosely organized nonprofit organizations. “I’ve seen the waste and fraud and abuse,” he said. “But I like what they’re doing at Mercy Corps. I like supporting them.”

Education and Hope

The women are hardly getting rich off their garden plot. But it does bring in regular income and the hope of economic stability and self-sufficiency. It’s a journey they know is just beginning. And after spending



Pabitra Dhimial (left) and David Beller, director of our New American Agriculture Program, consult on their plan for the growing season as Kumari Koirala looks on. Juan-Carlos Delgado for Mercy Corps

18 years in refugee camps, they’ve learned to be patient. They feel blessed by the support of local residents and Mercy Corps Northwest.

To be sure, there will always be a sense of loss for the lives they once lived in southern Bhutan, a region of sweeping plains and sub-tropical forests. But Koirala says whatever she feels she’s lost by leaving her homeland is topped by what she’s gained here in Portland. “I’m so happy here, because all my kids are growing up and getting good educations. That means everything to me.”

“Now, we have hope,” added

her daughter, Rekha. “Now I have so much opportunity for advancement and education. Everything is different now.”

If you would like to receive a weekly box of fresh, organic vegetables from the women's garden plot this year, please contact Rekha Koirala at 503-839-7845 or kalikc42@yahoo.com. The vegetable boxes, which cost \$400 for 16 weeks, will be available each Wednesday from June 23 to October 13.

Andy Parker is a Portland freelance writer.

HEFTY SUCCESS | Fat Fancy Clothing Store Caters to Big Women and Men

By Amber Revoir

A Mercy Corps Northwest intern sat down with Annie Maribona, co-owner with Carlee Smith of the downtown Portland boutique Fat Fancy, to learn the secrets of their success. As it turns out, a little boost went a long way.

MCNW: How did you find us? And which of our programs did you use?

AM: MCNW was recommended to us by a friend. It has been hugely helpful. We enrolled in the matched savings account program and have attended several of the classes offered. We don’t know where we would be without Mercy Corps Northwest – thank you!

MCNW: How did you start Fat Fancy?

AM: I had the dream to start Fat Fancy for quite some time. I started it out of necessity. I needed [a store like] Fat Fancy, so I knew there must be other people out there who needed one, too. I started it the only way I could at the time – at home.

The first sale was in my studio apartment. I moved my furniture out, set up clothing racks, turned my walk-in closet into a dressing room, and advertised primarily via the Internet. The first sale was a huge success. People came from as far as 300 miles away to shop, and it was a great time.

From there, I set up shop in a friend’s basement in NE Portland. My business partner Carlee Smith came on the scene shortly after. Together we are a great team. Fat Fancy held monthly sales to raise money to open a permanent retail space.

The community has been so supportive of us, attending fundraisers and helping us win a small business grant from Intuit. We have been featured in local, national, and international press and garnered support from underground plus-size celebrities. We opened a dreamy retail storefront in downtown Portland



Fashion mavens Annie and Carlee are all about style – writ large. Anu Samarajiva for Mercy Corps Northwest

in December of 2009 — come check us out!

MCNW: What’s the most challenging thing about owning a business?

AM: Time, energy and stress management. There is so much to do, it’s hard not to feel overwhelmed. I have had to learn that I can’t do everything myself, and it’s actually better to let someone else do things you don’t specialize in.

When I have the courage to ask for help, I am greatly surprised to find people are more than willing to offer it. It’s important to have supportive people around you, to stay focused on goals, and to remember to be excited about your business.

Also, it’s very important to take time out for yourself, to stay grounded.

MCNW: What is the most fun thing about being a business owner?

AM: For me, it’s when customers find outfits that make them look and feel like a dream. Also, I love turning people on to size acceptance and body positivity, which is basically the idea that every body is beautiful.

Visit Fat Fancy at 1013 SW Morrison in downtown Portland.

Amber Revoir is an MBA graduate of Willamette University's Atkinson Graduate School and was a summer intern with Mercy Corps Northwest in 2009.

Volunteer Spotlight Bill Horton



By Benjamin Collier

Our community work would not be possible without the hard work of people like Bill Horton, a Mercy Corps Northwest volunteer for the past year. Horton’s expertise as a small business consultant has made him a valuable member of our team — and a great asset to our clients and the community.

Horton is a small business consultant with BizFix. He came to us with a background in customer service and sales training, skills that

matched well with our business education programs. He had changed jobs “on the decade,” even earning his stripes as a small business owner through prior ownership of Port City Pasta Co., a Lake Oswego Italian deli and catering company.

A Natural Fit

When a friend told Horton about Mercy Corps Northwest, the light bulbs blinked bright. “I thought, ‘That’s what I do!’” he recounted. Because he liked helping small businesses get started and grow, Horton wanted to find out how he could help.

Before long, Horton was offering tips to supplement our Business Foundations class, helping teach the class and even expanding the curriculum. By sharing insights from his own business experiences, Horton

gained credibility and rapport with Mercy Corps Northwest clients. They saw him as one who had walked in their shoes. “When you have actually done what they want to do, they have a level of trust and confidence in what you’re saying,” he noted.

Knowing When to Pause

Horton has the real-world wisdom that can help students avoid expensive mistakes. A successful student, for instance, is not necessarily the one with the flashiest plan. Sometimes, not starting a business is a better idea than starting it.

“I can help figure out when the idea is just not ready or the timing isn’t right,” he commented. “If the student can hit the pause button, that’s a success, too — they don’t go into debt, and they’re not exposed to a lot of other

Northwest

Continued from Page 1

continue without us as the Bosnians shape their own positive future. That’s our ultimate goal everywhere we work.”

Bringing It Home

Fry lives right here in the Northwest. Her Southeast Portland home is where she starts and ends her frequent travels to Latin America and other points on the map. The powerful experiences of Fry and other Mercy Corps team members overseas inspire their renewed commitment to communities in need at home. “Every time I return from a trip,” she reflected, “I have a refreshed awareness and vigilance for what’s going on with people in my own neighborhood.”

It’s a sense of relatedness that’s important to the agency as a whole. “Our mission translates across borders and across continents,” said Neal Keny-Guyer, Mercy Corps’ CEO. “We see it as a seamless web that connects people in need — whether in Darfur or here in Oregon.”

What does that connection look like from the perspective of people living in the Northwest? In 1998, the agency founded Mercy Corps Northwest with the express purpose of translating its mission — to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities — to its own home turf. With decades of experience strengthening and rebuilding lives in some of the world’s toughest, most conflict-ridden and economically damaged places, Mercy Corps has learned valuable lessons about how to help people achieve self-sufficiency and a brighter future. Mercy Corps Northwest is how we share what we know with our neighbors right here at home.

From Prisoners to Entrepreneurs

Mercy Corps Northwest provides a comprehensive range of business development services to low-income, underserved, start-up and existing small businesses throughout Oregon and Washington, with a focus on metropolitan Portland.

Mercy Corps Northwest’s work in our community focuses on economic development and addresses the root causes of discrepancies in wealth, health and social cohesion. A community’s health often can be traced to intergenerational economic fractures that must be addressed on multiple levels. People tell us that they need a range of options, including education, community integration and asset building strategies. With the great demand for our business education classes, our reentry work with people who have been incarcerated and our new asset development strategies to help renters invest in their neighborhoods, our client numbers will likely exceed 2,800 this year. Historically, 64% of our clients are women and 38% are members of minority groups.

Our work in the Northwest mirrors Mercy Corps’ programs around the world. Here as well as there, we’re helping people build communities that offer social and economic benefits for all. We are helping people build communities that enable everyone to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. The Mercy Corps Northwest team invites you to learn more about Mercy Corps Northwest by reading this special supplement, visiting our website (mercycorp-snw.org) or visiting us at our headquarters (43 SW Naito Parkway, Portland, OR 97204).

problems.” What he likes best is giving clients and students the tools to make informed decisions, “whatever that decision is going to be.”

As Mercy Corps Northwest delivers needed business tools to our community, volunteers such as Bill Horton share credit for the successful enterprises our neighbors are able to build.

Benjamin Collier is a University of Vermont graduate and a Mercy Corps Northwest volunteer, providing support for the loan and reentry programs.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics: Oregon Economy at a Glance, data extracted June 4, 2010

² WorkSource Oregon Employment Department: Quick Economic Indicators, April 2010

³ Center for Enterprise Development: 2009 Oregon Assets & Opportunity Scorecard

⁴ Small Business Administration: 2009 Oregon Small Business Profile

⁵ Center for Enterprise Development: 2009 Oregon Assets & Opportunity Scorecard

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid

Seven Star Brings Health Care to All

By Susan Rich

Fiona McLaughlin and Aisha Madrone had a dream: provide affordable, high-quality, alternative healthcare to the Portland community — at a price that everyone can afford. Like most dreams-come-true, this one had a few twists and turns along the way.

Three years ago McLaughlin and Madrone launched Seven Star Acupuncture and Apothecary, a clinic focused on Chinese herbal medicine. Their services include private and group acupuncture treatments as well as licensed massage therapy, chiropractic care and an onsite herbal dispensary.

“We wanted to provide acupuncture that literally everyone can afford,” said McLaughlin. “People need regular health care to prevent future illness.”

The partners signed a lease on a 2,000-square-foot space at 436 SE 12th Ave. Construction began, then stalled for lack of money. “The renovation cost more than we expected,” McLaughlin said. Banks, sliding into deep freeze mode, refused to loan money.

Then a friend suggested Mercy Corps Northwest. McLaughlin and Madrone applied for, and received, a \$13,000 loan.

A Proper Grand Opening

“That loan was pivotal to our first few months of startup,” McLaughlin said. It enabled them to finish construction and have a proper grand opening.

The next step was to sign up for an Individual Development Account, or IDA. These matched savings accounts enable small business owners to save, build assets and enter the financial mainstream. Since 2001, MCNW has helped more than 400 people buy assets for their start-ups or current small businesses using matching grants.

Once the account is established and the business owner

deposits \$1,000, MCNW matches this amount with \$3,000. For McLaughlin and Madrone, that was an additional \$4,000 they were able to invest in their business.

While the account was growing, McLaughlin, who handles the administrative side, attended MCNW’s mandatory business and training classes (\$150 fee, with scholarships available). There she learned how to write a business plan.

“I thought a business plan was silly at first,” she admitted, “but if you map it all out, then you can see if your idea will even work. Now I love it.”

McLaughlin praised the instructors for their steady support and excellent training. Starting a business is hard to do without guidance, she said. “If you don’t have experience, you won’t know what to do next — you’re drowning. They teach you how to think about it financially... and you get to see other people go through the process.”



Aisha Madrone, co-founder of Seven Star Acupuncture.
Juan-Carlos Delgado for Mercy Corps

Ancient Healing for Modern Ailments

Chinese medicine, an ancient healing art, can be used to treat all ailments. For example, acupuncture, and its attendant herbal remedies, can ease digestion problems, chronic body pain and menopause symptoms. It is equally effective on adults and children.

“When a child is sick, and the parent doesn’t have a lot of resources, it’s scary,” Madrone said. Acupuncture can bring down a fever and quickly ease a cough or stomach ache — at an affordable price.

At this business, flexibility is the byword. Walk-ins are welcome. Group and private treatment sessions are available. And a sliding fee scale allows anyone — from college student to service worker to wealthy executive — to receive consistent, quality healthcare. Fees range from \$20 to \$75 per treatment.

“When someone has a windfall, we ask them to pay on the higher part of the scale,” Madrone said. “At other times of the year, maybe someone is lean on the harvest, then they pay on the lower end. We don’t ask for proof of income.”

Today the clinic has six practitioners who treat hundreds of patients every month. As the business grows, the goal remains: Create a space that is open and accessible.

“Every time we see a gap, people we are not serving, we envision how we can reach out to them,” McLaughlin said.

With the start-up challenges met, Madrone is still moved by her experience with Mercy Corps Northwest. “It makes me teary-eyed to think about it,” she said. “We were at our wit’s end. It was the middle of winter. We didn’t know what to do, and they really saved us.”

Susan Rich owns RichWriting, a copywriting and editing service. She is also a volunteer writing instructor with Mercy Corps Northwest.



Stacy Alonso believes in the richness of a bilingual education.
Anna Ottum for Mercy Corps

Aprende con Amigos Takes Flight

By Mackenzie Wolfe

On the corner of Sumner Street and Interstate Avenue sits a modern steel apartment building that houses a colorful preschool. Inside, children play with blocks and learn about the life cycle of caterpillars. But unlike most Portland-area preschoolers, the kids at Aprende con Amigos are getting a double dose of education: the letters of the alphabet and las letras del alfabeto, también.

North Portland had just six preschools, none bilingual, when Stacy Alonso moved here from Texas. She brought valuable experience in bilingual education, having spent five of her Texas years team teaching, in which one teacher speaks only English and the other only Spanish. Alonso was a Teacher of the Year finalist in 2001 and won a grant for bilingual education in 2002. Now, after 10 years of teaching and educational consulting, Alonso was ready to apply her experience and open her own school.

A firm believer in the value of bilingual education, Alonso knew there was a demand in Portland. Escuela Viva, the bilingual preschool her older son attended when her family first arrived here, had a waiting list of more than 100 students.

Eager Parents

So Alonso decided to open her school in a neighborhood where parents were eager for new resources: North Portland. “But

first,” she said, “I needed a space — and money to cover the start-up costs.”

The recession-battered economy made it difficult to get a loan. But Alonso was persistent. And before long, through networking, she was referred to Mercy Corps Northwest. “I couldn’t have gotten along without them,” Alonso commented. “Mercy Corps Northwest was so great to work with, they bent over backwards to meet all of my needs.” She was awarded a loan with the funds to start up the school.

She found a brand-new REACH building — the program offers affordable housing to communities facing challenges — that offered an ideal first floor location. Last July, Aprende con Amigos opened with a summer camp program. Today the school has 23 students; next fall, it will reach its capacity of 40.

Alonso appreciates the abundant space and light that make her school a healthy place to grow and learn. It’s also just a block from the park. “Kids need to be outside every single day,” she emphasized, watching as they pulled on their rain jackets and headed outdoors with teacher Natalie Chernus.

Chernus speaks only Spanish to her students. In the urgency of the day’s events — a mini-fight here, a misunderstanding there — she’s sometimes tempted to lapse into English. “I want to make sure they understand that, for example, it’s not okay to hit others,” she

Please see **Aprende**, Page 4

Heart in Oregon Sticks Fast

By Eric Gold

In 2003, Chris Bucci almost gave up on his adopted home of Oregon. Sitting at a coffee shop in NW Portland, the 33-year-old software tester had been out of work for more than six months. The job market was soft, and he thought he’d have to try his luck somewhere else. Then something inside him rebelled.

“That’s ridiculous,” he remembered telling himself. “Why leave? My heart is in Oregon.” Determined to make his life in Portland work, Bucci doodled the outline of the state of Oregon on a napkin, with a big heart in the middle. Today, you can find stickers and other merchandise with this image in New Seasons Market, Made in Oregon and at Powell’s bookstore — as well as on cars, bikes and lap-

tops all over the city and beyond.

Talk about starting small. Inspired by a bumper sticker he’d recently bought from a street vendor, Bucci decided to turn his rough sketch of a heart-in-a-state into a sticker. He figured he’d sell them on the street for \$2 each. At first, the heart was red. Then he showed his idea to a friend, who told him, “You should make it green, because it’s Oregon.”

Learning to Invite Failure

Bucci found a company to make the stickers, ordered 1,500 and waited impatiently for delivery. When they arrived, his first thought was that the color was all wrong. He had imagined a dark forest green, but these hearts were emerald. He realized he hadn’t specified a shade of green — the first of many lessons about the

sticker business.

“It turned out to be one of the better things that happened,” Bucci said, “because at night, forest green looks black.” The experience taught him the importance of what he calls “inviting failure” — the risk-taking process of developing a business.

An Idea Takes Shape

There was another problem with the rectangular stickers. Bucci couldn’t give them away — until a friend suggested “It’d be cool if it was cut out in the shape of the state.” That night, Bucci sat down with a pair of scissors. “I butchered the first one,” he laughed. Eventually, he had his Oregon-shaped sticker.

A short while later, he was sitting at a tea house, one of his stickers on the open laptop in front of him. A young woman asked where he had gotten the decal, not noticing that Bucci was at that moment cutting out more stickers.

“From me!” he said, and sold her 20, agreeing to deliver them

a few days later. “Then it occurs to me,” he added, “I have 1,500 of these to cut by hand.”

After selling some on consignment to local stores such as Music Millennium, he ordered more — this time, pre-cut.

Bucci found a day job and kept selling his stickers on the side. Then, at the Small Business Development Center at PCC, he heard about Mercy Corps Northwest. At first, he wasn’t sure if he would qualify for the organization’s help. “I barely considered myself a business,” he said. But the Mercy Corps staff invited him to come in and talk.

It’s OK — We Know

“After that,” Bucci said, “I knew more about my business than I ever thought I would.” He learned the importance of knowing the cost of the goods he bought, how to set sales targets, and about gross profit margins. He remembers telling the Mercy Corps Northwest staff that he didn’t really know what he was talking about when it came to

business technicalities. “It’s OK,” they told him. “We know.”

Mercy Corps Northwest approved a small business loan to help Heart in Oregon grow. “They gave me the ability to invest in my business, so I didn’t have to worry if I could still pay my rent,” he said. “They helped me understand cash flow and how to use it effectively.”

Today, Chris Bucci estimates, some 300,000 stickers identify their Oregon-loving owners. One of his first clients, Music Millennium, became his last to transition from a consignment sales model to the more mainstream net-30 billing system. Businessman Bucci is even working with a public speaking coach to develop a presentation. “It’s on everything they don’t teach you about entrepreneurship,” he quipped.

His top three lessons? 1) Failure is Invited 2) Persistence is Key and 3) Do What You Love. That’s as natural as a green heart from a creative, scrappy, indie-minded Oregonian.

Eric Gold is a Portland freelance writer.



Give a gift to Mercy Corps Northwest. Our clients are members of your community—small businesses that make any neighborhood or town work. They operate dry cleaners, food carts and laundromats. Some run their own stores while others offer products and services online. Many sell at locations like farmers markets, collectives and crafts fairs. We help low-income business owners overcome barriers to credit and help equip them with the skills to establish and operate successful businesses.

Will you help us promote the success and financial independence of low-income entrepreneurs in Oregon?

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone (_____) _____

Email _____

Please mail your check payable to Mercy Corps Northwest with this form today.

\$35 \$75 \$150 \$350 \$_____

Mercy Corps Northwest, 43 SW Naito Pkwy, Portland OR 97204
503-896-5072

Give online at <http://www.mercycorpsnw.org/who-we-are/donate/>

Putting Your Donation to Work:

\$35 buys organic starter seeds for refugee farmers

\$75 pays for a scholarship for an 18-hour business planning class

\$350 covers the cost of a 28-week LIFE business planning and reentry class for an incarcerated woman at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility

\$8,750 funds an entire LIFE class for 28 weeks for 25 women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility



Juan-Carlos Delgado for Mercy Corps

PRISON STATISTICS

1 in 100

The number of American adults behind bars¹, four times as much as the world average².

\$92,300

The amount Oregon spends on incarceration per inmate for an average custody of 39 months³.

6 times

The higher likelihood of incarceration faced by children of incarcerated parents⁴.

\$2.2 million

The savings in Oregon correctional costs if we reduced recidivism by as little as 1%⁵.

50%

The estimated percentage of youths in the juvenile correctional system who have had a parent in the adult correctional system⁶.

Crime Rates Fall to 30-Year Low While Correction Spending Soars

By Jennifer Williamson

Oregonians are safer than they have been in 30 years, according to a recent report released by the FBI, yet state spending on corrections is at an all-time high.

Preliminary crime data for Oregon shows a dramatic decrease in 2009 crime rates. According to Craig Prins, Executive Director of the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, violent crime for 2009 fell in Oregon's four largest cities. Violent crime decreases were largest in Portland (-10%) and Gresham (-23%), while property crime declines were largest in Eugene (-12%) and Salem (-14%).

"Crime spiked in the early- to mid-1990s, but has been going down in Oregon and across the country ever since. We haven't seen crime levels this low in more than 30 years," Prins told legislators at a joint hearing of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees in late May.

Leading indicators for a reduction in crime rates, according to Prins, are the health of the economy, incarceration rates and demographics, especially the percentage of young adults in the state population. Bucking this trend, however, Oregon's unemployment rates increased during 2002-2004 and again in 2008 and 2009, while crime rates continued to decrease.

In 2009 we saw the largest increases in the unemployment rate since data were available in 1976. And yet, preliminary data shows that crime continued to fall. The most reliable indicator, said Prins, appears to be the number of young people ages

15-39. With fewer people that age in Oregon, the crime rate tends to decrease. A decrease in young people in the population is projected to continue for the next 10 years.

Correction Spending Up, Service Funding Down – And Nonprofits Fill the Gap

Even as crime rates have dropped, spending on criminal justice budgets has skyrocketed, reducing available funding for other important public safety programs.

According to the PEW Center on the States report "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008" one in 100 Americans are currently behind bars. The PEW report found that corrections spending is devastating state budgets and that Oregon spends a greater percentage of its general fund dollars on corrections than any other state in the country. This has cost billions of dollars for both the construction and operation of corrections facilities. In the 1993-1995 biennium, the Oregon Department of Corrections budget was \$377 million; for 2009-2011, the Department of Corrections budget is estimated at \$1.4 billion. This spending trend is expected to continue even as the state faces an estimated \$577 million shortfall for the 2011-13 biennium.

The upward trend in corrections spending is especially alarming because it has been, and will continue to be, at the expense of programs proven to reduce future crime at a fraction of the cost of building more prisons. Cuts to programs for drug and alcohol treatment, prison-based education, juvenile intervention and other com-

munity-based services have actually reduced the state's ability to maintain public safety.

Federal, state, and local lawmakers are responding to stark budget realities by making difficult funding choices as well as distressing cuts in public safety and corrections budgets, often leaving necessary service needs unmet. Nonprofit organizations are stepping up, with the help of private funding, to ensure these important programs continue and to fill the gap in essential services in our communities.

Prisoner Reentry Services Reduce Recidivism, Increase Safety

One service area that will be potentially devastated by state budget cuts is programming focused on transitioning the formerly incarcerated back into society. Over 95% of all state prisoners will eventually return to the community. Advocates for transition services argue it is in everyone's best interest to create a system that actually prepares people to succeed when they return home. Formerly incarcerated people are often stigmatized and stereotyped, and face a range of laws, policies and practices that undermine their ability to become active and productive members of society.

Many local organizations, including Mercy Corps Northwest, are stepping up to meet the critical need in the community for services to prisoners transitioning back into the community. In 2009, Mercy Corps Northwest along with six other local non-profit organizations, created the Reentry Transition Center (RTC) located at 1818 NE MLK Blvd., with initial funding from the United Way.

Support for the RTC has recently been supplemented by a two-year grant from Multnomah County, using federal funds administered by the Criminal Justice Commission.

The RTC coordinates reentry services for formerly incarcerated people leaving county, state, and federal jails and prisons. The two navigators at the center, who have successfully made the transition from prison to the community themselves, coordinate a range of essential reentry resources in one location, fostering the financial independence and well-being of a highly challenged and potentially isolated population. The coordination of services is intended to help individuals address barriers to reintegrating back into the community, which in the bigger picture, reduces recidivism and increases community safety.

"It is in everyone's best interest that these individual succeed in reentering our community" said Doug Cooper, Mercy Corps Northwest assistant director and project director of the RTC. "When people succeed, they become productive, tax-paying members of the community. They support their families and strengthen the social fabric. If they don't succeed, there are increased costs of crime, law enforcement, judicial and prison costs – not to mention the added cost in misery and suffering."

As government funding for these vital public safety services and programs is reduced, the work of Mercy Corps Northwest and other agencies becomes increasingly vital for the quality of life of everyone in our communities.

Jennifer Williamson is a Portland attorney.

ReFrame ReEntry ((Photovoice Project))

"When we think of borders, we picture edges, margins, dividing lines between countries," said Julie Resnick, an intercultural consultant who, along with photographer and media consultant Joni Kabana, conceived the ReFrame ReEntry project with Mercy Corps Northwest.

"What if one of those countries was a prison? What is it like to cross that border back into the community; from the inside to the outside? This Photovoice project documents personal journeys of transition and reentry post-incarceration."

The methodology called Photovoice enables those who are normally the subjects of documentary photography to become the creators. It often gives voice to marginalized communities and can act as a vehicle of social change. The concept was originated by researchers in China who enabled rural women to influence the policies and programs that affected them.

Resnick and Kabana act as advisors to Mercy Corps Northwest on the Photovoice project. More importantly, they serve as mentors to the women leaving Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the State of Oregon's women's prison.

"I had a feeling that using the camera would delight the women, but it is astonishing to see the therapeutic value that takes place while they photograph the world around them," said Kabana. "They are able to explore their feelings in a way that talking could not express."

Resnick and Kabana offer weekly coaching during the time the women have the cameras. The women share their journal writing (excerpts at right) and return their cameras to Mercy Corps Northwest after 30 days. Then it's time for the next freed woman to see the world in her own way.

See more about this project at mercycorpsnw.org

11/25 ... PURE ADRENALINE

My first day out and I'm running on pure adrenaline. Everything is bright, colorful, and simply overwhelming. I'm not sure what to do with myself. I'm nervous and excited at the same time. At the apartment my friends Tammy and Jodie have boxes of stuff for me. Clothes, slippers, nail polish (I can't wait to paint my toenails) candy, quilting books, and more. It feels strange, all this activity and celebrating. All I really want to do is hide. So far, my favorites are the Pepsi, nail polish and slippers. Devin made me a steak for dinner. It was fantastic. But now I'm starting to feel like I need to get back. Any minute now they are going to tell me it was a mistake and I need to go back to prison.

12/29 ... FIRST FREE SNOW

Today it snowed! It snowed like crazy. It was my first free snow. My friend and I acted like children. We stomped in it, threw it, laid in it and tipped our heads back to eat it as it fell from the sky. I was mesmerized by how it changed the appearance of everything. The last snow I saw was in prison. I think snow is the only thing that won't stick to barbed wire.

The prison was still ugly even covered in white. But this. This was beautiful. Tammy and I took pictures like we wanted to freeze every frame in our hearts. For some reason, I was struck by the sound of our feet crunching in the snow. We were free and for the first time I felt like it. It made me want to touch everything. I wanted to breathe in the moments and just live.



Aprende

Continued from Page 3

said. But the successes keep her motivated to stick to the plan.

Take one recent incident between a three-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy. "One had been tripped," she recalled, "and I asked them to apologize. Even in a tense moment for preschoolers, they looked each other in the eyes and said, Lo siento, amigo – I'm sorry, friend."

The school is on a fast track to success, achieving its founder's goal of 40 students in just one year instead of the three years slated in her business plan.

"I'm extremely objective oriented, and Aprende con Amigos is a place that has many goals," says Alonso. She would "absolutely" return to Mercy Corps Northwest for help. "It was wonderful to work with them and I'd do it again. I'm extremely grateful for what they do."

Aprende con Amigos is like the caterpillar its students recently learned about. The school is already flexing its lovely wings – way ahead of schedule.

Mackenzie Wolfe is a sophomore journalism student at the University of Colorado and a 2009 graduate of Cleveland High School.

The Inner Workings of ROAR

Reentry Organizations and Resources

By Pete Pincetl

Mercy Corps Northwest was a convener of a group of prisoner reentry organizations that formed Reentry Organizations and Resources (ROAR) in 2007. We are a coalition of 47 prisoner reentry nonprofits, faith-based and government agencies working to heighten the education and communication around the merits of successful prisoner reintegration. The members range from government affiliated groups such as Oregon Halfway House and Washington County Reentry Council to nonprofits such as the YWCA and Lifeworks NW, and organizations led by ex-offenders such as PHOENIX Rising Transitions.

Four separate committees make up the moving parts of the ROAR alliance: the Steering Committee, the Advocacy Subcommittee, the Communication Subcommittee and the Education Subcommittee.

The Steering Committee is made up of seven representatives from ROAR alliance member organizations. They are responsible for making all organizational development and sustainability decisions.

Each subcommittee meets monthly, working on projects that disseminate education and communication about prisoner reentry to its respective audience.

The Advocacy Subcommittee targets policymakers to help them make informed decisions on reentry policy. It coordinates a speaker's bureau to present to community and policymaking groups.

The Communication Subcommittee targets the general public to educate individuals and organizations on the merits of successful reintegration. It is developing an overall public relations strategy to ensure our message is heard loud and clear.

The Education Subcommittee targets ROAR members to raise communication in the areas of legislation, funding opportunities, local programs and best practices that affect our work and outcomes. It hosts a workshop series in which members can present their services in specific fields.

Pete Pincetl is a Lewis and Clark graduate and an AmeriCorps-VISTA volunteer working for a year as ROAR's first coordinator.

LIFE in Prison

Mercy Corps Northwest has developed an innovative small business education program at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the state women's prison in Wilsonville, Oregon. Named by the participants themselves, the Lifelong Information for Entrepreneurs (LIFE) program is among the first to harness the possibility of self-employment for prisoners.

The 28-week course is designed to foster a proactive, entrepreneurial mindset by teaching financial planning and interpersonal skills in the context of starting a business following prison release. Program participants attend two course cycles to prepare them for successful reentry. They complete a comprehensive personal reentry plan, business plan and a matched savings account of \$500. The program began in 2006 and has 83 graduates to date.

Mercy Corps Northwest is partnering with health professionals at Multnomah County to

add health and chronic disease self-management training to the LIFE curriculum.

Mercy Corps Northwest acknowledges that a history of incarceration impairs the prospects of ex-offenders in the traditional job market. We leverage the potential of private enterprise to help participants become more self-sufficient and productive while mitigating the growing social and economic costs of imprisonment.

Mercy Corps Northwest chose to focus first on women because of the extended benefit to families, especially the children, of incarcerated women. Early funding for LIFE came from Kaiser Permanente Community Fund with its focus on addressing social determinants of health. Research shows that children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk of incarceration themselves; this risk increases when parents experience multiple periods of incarceration. A relatively small investment (\$350 per student) in women's self-employment and entrepreneurial training has the potential to reduce imprisonment in future generations and prevent the associated costs to social welfare and community justice.