



SISTERS OF THE ROAD

Sisters Voice • Summer 2021



SISTERS OF THE ROAD



40+ YEARS OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE, NONVIOLENCE, DINING WITH DIGNITY, GENTLE PERSONALISM AND ANTI-OPPRESSION

Since 1979, Sisters of the Road has worked to address the needs of the communities of Portland’s Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood—particularly members of the community who are currently unhoused. We built relationships and listened to understand peoples’ needs and in response opened a nonprofit cafe with the founding goals of:

- ▶ Providing a safe, welcoming place for everyone—especially women and children.
- ▶ Offering nourishing meals at little cost and/or in exchange for labor.
- ▶ Offering job training and employment experience.

For forty years, these goals have shaped our work and continue to anchor our pursuit to fulfill our mission—one relationship at a time.

STAFF:

Lauren Armony
 Andrea Baeza Breinbauer
 Molly Brown
 Shorty Dado
 Sydney Eckhardt
 Pepe Espinoza
 Colin Fisher
 Rodney Graves
 Isaac King
 Melissa Lang
 Scott Langen
 Rhys McCaughran

Lana Silsbe
 Felicia Stivahtis
 Mel Tan
 Migyoung Won

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Doug Bloem
 Ed Edmo
 Matt Chorpenning
 Gus Kroll
 Art Rios Sr.

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MISSION: Sisters of the Road exists to build authentic relationships and alleviate the hunger of isolation in an atmosphere of nonviolence and gentle personalism that nurtures the whole individual, while seeking systemic solutions that reach the roots of homelessness and poverty to end them forever.

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SISTERS OF THE ROAD CAFE

[133 NW Sixth Ave.](#)
[Portland, OR 97209](#)

SISTERS ADMIN OFFICE

[618 NW Davis St.](#)
[Portland, OR 97209](#)

sistersoftheroad.org  

WHO WE ARE

Sisters of the Road is a nonprofit cafe in Portland's Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood working to create systemic change that will end poverty and homelessness by providing nourishing meals in a safe, dignified space.

We work to build community one relationship at a time, with nonviolence and gentle personalism, believing everyone has a piece of the truth and that we are all more than the sum of our current situation or past experiences.

We interrupt violence and oppression in all forms and our Cafe is a Safer Space where everyone is welcome.

At Sisters we believe that care and dignity are at the heart of food justice. While we still offer folks hot, fresh meals, pandemic restrictions have forced temporary changes to our programs.

What's different during COVID-19 Regulations

During the global COVID-19 pandemic we have suspended the cafe's barter work program to help prevent the spread of the virus. We are hoping to open our doors and re-introduce barter work opportunities in the near future, which means finding new ways to collaborate and contribute alongside each other during changing regulations. As we have been unable to offer work exchange meals have been served free out of Sisters new to-go window, and staff have been continuing to build community and friendship outside our cafe doors on NW 6th and Davis. In addition, we have been assisting our neighbors with accessing other resources, providing survival gear like tents and fresh clean clothes as well as hygiene supplies.

Blue Meal Coupons are currently on hold while all meals are free, however, they will be in use again when we are able to open up our indoor cafe space safely.

If you would like more information about how to support Sisters of the Road during these unique times, please visit our website at sistersoftheroad.org, call us at 503-222-5694 or email us at info@sistersoftheroad.org



LOVE AND LESSONS FROM THE PAST YEAR

By Dara Snyder, Interim Executive Director

This last year has been a humbling time to act as Interim Executive Director at Sisters of the Road. The COVID-19 era has been an unprecedented time of exacerbated isolation, our familiar ways of being in relationship (facial expressions, friendly and consensual hugs) rendered unsafe. It has been a time of undeniable interdependence, yet deteriorating social bonds, steep learning curves, and a clear need to live in respectful relationships with all beings. This is all happening in a broader social

context of widening inequality and interracial, intergenerational mass movements demanding racial justice.

Coming into this role at this moment of historic social upheaval, it's been difficult to stabilize into our new leadership model as we continue our transition out of a collective model into a collaborative hierarchy, and as we continue aligning our structure and processes with our philosophies. We couldn't have known how such a process would unfold and it has only

been impeded during my time here as we have had to find new ways to do our anti-oppressive practices and build community during a time of physical distancing and sheltering in place.

Our transition has impacted clarity on roles and decision making processes, which in turn has affected our ability to keep up behind-the-scenes work such as trainings, committee work, and ensuring staff are familiar with our policies and updating them to reflect our new structure. Stabilizing and preparing for the future has and will continue to require us to be centered in our philosophies, values, and history—as difficult as that might be at a time like this.

While over my year+ as Interim Executive Director I have not been able to fully address all of our ever-evolving challenges, but I have supported staff and community members to each recognize their unique contributions, find ways to channel their gifts and passions towards our mission, affirmed that everyone holds a piece of the truth, and modeled staying at the table through difficult and complicated conversations. As my time winds down in this role I will also continue working to find ways that we as an organization can more strategically harness our strengths and direct our collective power toward justice and liberation—internally through policy and practice and externally by mapping how we can complement other resources and initiatives in the community.

Each day I am reminded that it is our community, staff, and volunteers who share their stories and are the heart of Sisters—and make us who we are. Despite the range of challenges we have been facing, I have seen our staff rise to the occasion and continue to serve up hospitality while also advocating for the systemic changes that our

local, state and federal governments have been unwilling to meaningfully engage with. I have seen our community embody our values and philosophies in countless ways, including the care and love shown for each other and shared commitment to systemic change. We have remained much more than a soup kitchen thanks to the support of our community, who lights the way on the path ahead. Even though some faces come and go, what remains constant is our dedication to making the world that we know is possible into a reality: a world where everyone is treated with dignity and is able to thrive. A world where Sisters can just be a regular old cafe because radical solutions have ended houselessness and poverty forever. A world aligned with the vision of our late co-founder, Genny Nelson, who understood the fulfillment of our mission is entirely possible. Thank you for sharing our vision and for joining us on this long and winding road to justice.



Systemic Change Organizer Lauren Armony and Interim Executive Director Dara Snyder meet outside of Sisters.



WE HAD TO ADJUST TO THE TIMES

COVID conversations between Kitchen Staff, Rodney Graves and Editor, Melissa Lang

COVID-19 has shaken all aspects of Sisters of the Road. Rodney Graves has been a member of the Kitchen staff for five years and has seen many waves of change but nothing like the impacts of COVID. Below are parts of two interviews with him that were edited for the page. For a full version of the interview visit our website: sistersoftheroad.org

I remember when COVID hit and the biggest question at the time was are we going to shut down? A lot of the restaurants were figuring out their role, but we are an essential service. So, I remember the constant question, “are we gonna shut down? Are we going to shut down?” Finally we made the call that we would remain open as so many spaces were closing their doors to folks. But we knew we had to change everything. At first we let folks only come into the Personalist Center, grab a meal and make

their coffee, especially as some heavy winter hit Portland. But that didn’t really work because folks wanted to stay and we couldn’t control the numbers or conflicts.

So then we started serving out the door with a plexiglass barrier, but that didn’t really work either because we had some violence occur. So then we had a to-go window built into the building by Sisters’ volunteer, Troy. The to-go window was a whole new adjustment for us, just like all the new COVID rules set by the city, the state and the county—which are still difficult to manage as they aren’t all the same and are always evolving.

So we stayed open and we had to adjust to times like they are now. The hardest part about it was telling community members that they couldn’t

come in. For a lot of community members, Sisters is a healing place they can rely on. They could come inside and take a breather from the streets and their tent. So it hurts us and them to tell folks they can't come in and rest. Different staff members were like, 'this sucks we can't deal with this,' but we had to.

The free meals to go has affected community members quite a bit too because they are used to bartering and contributing alongside us, which is what Sisters is all about. I think COVID-19 hit community members hardest because they were already struggling with their mental health and sometimes addiction and all the sudden they had no place to go to relax and get off the streets and stay warm or cool when the weather was bad. We had a rough winter this year and people were out there in tents with no respite from the streets. Some people go to a shelter, but not everyone can. I was in the shelter for a year and that was an adjustment for me, luckily I got my own place, but for community members how can I tell them to check out the shelter when the rules are really hard for folks struggling with mental health issues or addiction.

Now we are trying to figure out when we can open our doors and how we are going to function like we used to. Do we transition with opening up at full capacity or incrementally?

And how are we going to tell people they have to leave since the demand seems larger. All of that is going to take a minute. So many new boundaries in a place that was never meant to have any. With so many new staff since COVID hit, I am worried about how we are going to deal with a conflict inside the cafe. Yeah we are trained in de-escalation but the newer folks are used to those dynamics outside not inside. It's a different vibe in the closed space.

I love cooking for my community. I just wanna make sure they have a good home cooked meal and I like helping them feel happy to say to them, 'hey I know what you're going through,

I have been there.' With so many community members it's like their family has given up on them and at Sisters we aren't going to give up on you. They know they can come to Sisters and talk about stuff and we will treat them with dignity and share our stories with them. It helps them out, sometimes I wish I could help more but I can at least give you a decent meal, share a conversation and treat you like you are human.

About the recipe (on page 7): I-tal food is clean food that rastafarians cook in Jamaica. It's all vegetable based and is a play on the word vital. I have a lot of friends from Jamaica and Africa and it's kinda cool to see all the vegetables that go into rastafarian foods. I feel a connection to rasta culture and reggae. It connects me to Africa even though I am African American. I wanna take my three sons to Africa someday but it's really expensive. Rastafarian culture and reggae helps even myself out when I wanna go somewhere deeper inside where I can dial myself in and ignore society's oppressions.



Kitchen staff Rodney Graves makes his Sisters famous I-tal Stir fry!



RODNEY'S I-TAL STIR FRY

By Rodney Graves, Kitchen Staff

I-tal is a rastafarian cooking method that honors vitality and clean eating

See Rodney's article on pg 5 for more!

INGREDIENTS:

Makes 4 servings

- ▶ 2 packages of Extra Firm Tofu
- ▶ 1 Red and 1 Yellow Bell Pepper
- ▶ 2 cups halved Baby Carrots
- ▶ 2 cups of White Rice
- ▶ 1 cup of smooth Peanut Butter
- ▶ 1/3 cup of Barbecue Sauce
- ▶ 1 tablespoon of Vegetable Oil
- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Sesame Oil
- ▶ 1/2 cup of Coconut Milk
- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Soy Sauce

INGREDIENTS FOR SEASONING BLEND

- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Garlic Powder
- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Chili Powder
- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Dill
- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Paprika
- ▶ 1 teaspoon of Cayenne Pepper (optional)
- ▶ 2 teaspoon of Salt

DIRECTIONS:

1. Two or three hours before cooking, press tofu: Remove tofu from packaging and wrap each block in a clean towel and place each in a large plate with a lip to hold excess water. Weigh down with another flat surface and weight. Press for an hour and repeat once after draining water.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees then cook rice: rinse and drain rice to remove excess starch, add along with four cups of water to a pot and bring to a boil. Once boiling add a pinch of salt. Reduce to a simmer by putting heat on low and cover the pot with a tight lid. Cook for 18 minutes or until water is absorbed (but don't peak before!). Turn off heat and let rest while covered for another ten minutes then fluff and set aside.
3. Mix seasons for seasoning blend together, set half of the seasoning aside for tofu/veggies and half for the peanut sauce.
4. Mix peanut sauce: blend peanut butter, barbeque sauce, sesame oil, mix in 1/2 of seasoning blend and add coconut milk. If too thick add a dash of lukewarm water to thin. Salt to taste. This sauce should be made to taste throughout, if you want more tang add a bit of BBQ sauce, if you want that peanut flavor to come through add a bit more peanut butter and a dash of lukewarm water. Set aside.
5. While tofu is being pressed and rice is being cooked, chop red and yellow bell peppers into one inch pieces, being sure to remove white pulp and seeds. Halve baby carrots and mix all veggies in a bowl with a drizzle of vegetable oil and several pinches of the seasoning blend from the tofu portion set aside. Roast in the oven for 15 minutes until al dente.
6. Cut tofu into one inch squares and season with the remaining seasoning blend and a splash of soy sauce. Put roasted veggies into a wok or large pan on medium heat, add seasoned tofu. Stir occasionally and splash with a little soy sauce for umami flavoring. Cook until hot throughout.
7. Plate veggies and tofu on top of warm rice and spoon peanut sauce over meal to taste and serve with your favorite salad.

Love in time of corona



Artwork by Lizeth Nino

Sisters thrives because of the work that we do together, side by side, in solidarity. →

[DONATE TO SISTERS](#)



Sisters' Systemic Change team from L to R: Colin Fisher, Lauren Armony, Andr ea Baeza Breinbauer and Pepe Espinoza

HOLDING SPACE FOR COMMUNITY

By the Systemic Change Team

It's been a year of COVID restrictions, a year of having no community members in the cafe or opportunities for barter work, a year of six feet of separation, of watching people we care for living outside struggle even more to access basic hygiene services and face further discrimination at the hands of the government. As Sister's Systemic Change team, we reflected on what this last year has looked like for both us and community members we're in relationship with. We are grappling with being a barter work cafe and organizing hub that cannot offer indoor space for either of those programs safely. We've had to reduce hours and close from time to time over the past year as we try to answer these questions, finding ourselves back where Sisters began—problem solving with the community one meeting at a time.

These latest community meetings began again in the midst of a closure. Some staff gathered to deep clean the building and sidewalk when a community member shared his frustrations with us. He said he felt deeply unheard, not just by Sisters but by everyone because

he didn't live in a "house." He felt especially hurt that we closed on such short notice, and so often, with little explanation when violence broke out. He expressed that a step forward could be to have a venue, where he and other community members and staff alike could share their feelings and challenges in order to find common ground. Two conversations were held the following week. A whiteboard leaned up against the window, camping and cafe chairs were spaced out on the sidewalk on NW Davis, and a table was packed with coffee and snacks. And people showed up! And they showed up with some hard things to hear. Sisters was never a direct service organization, or solely a food service organization, Sisters is a place where people can eat and commune and work together to end houselessness and poverty and we were struggling to keep that space with the many COVID barriers.

After that, we began holding space for ongoing community conversations. Right when the sun started poking out again, and summer was around the corner, barriers to gathering outside were a little lower.

Together, we dreamt up community agreements, we explored possibilities of making shared outdoor eating space feel safe and welcoming, and a COVID-safe form of the barter work program. They also became a space to share current events. Community members would share their experiences on the street, and we would share news articles and emergent legislation arising at the city and state level, like HB 2367, commonly called the, “Right to Rest Act,” taken from the Homeless Bill of Rights. These gatherings happened weekly at first, and then every other week, and tackled difficult yet necessary questions. We were excited to bring back barter work and felt challenged by the fact that we did not know what barter work compensation would be when meals were free. So community members came up with a list of things they would be interested in being able to exchange barter work cards for. These gatherings were a place to build and heal together after a hard and confusing year for Sisters of the Road.

In tandem with community conversations, the Systemic Change team has relaunched Sisters’ Fresh Change program this past May. We’re excited to be able to provide the opportunity for folks to buy fresh foods from local vendors at Portland Farmers Markets. Fresh Change is an exciting option, but it came up during our community conversations that some people have a harder time eating or digesting vegetables. So now Sisters Systemic Change team is looking into replicating the Fresh Change model with other partnering organizations that would allow folks to access a diversity of services with barter cards, like SCRAP.

Speaking of farm veggies, Systemic Change and Cafe worked together this spring to shift our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) membership to farmers we were excited to support and be in relationship with. Another Spring Farm, and Happiness Family Farm are both Black-owned businesses, and small local farms who are working to increase access to fresh veggies to the broader community.

As a member of the Stop the Sweeps Coalition, our team has been working throughout the pandemic supporting our unhoused neighbors through intense inequities and dangerous health conditions, one of them being sweeps. We have been particularly involved in the well-documented struggles in the Laurelhurst and Sunnyside Communities. This last Spring of 2021 the city warned that they would roll back the COVID protocols that kept the city from massively sweeping. Members of our team have been working in coalition to support folks at risk of or actively being swept, and to support the stand against sweeps. Although our footing has not been the steadiest as we navigated through the pandemic, we’ve done a lot of work this past year: from shifting our CSA partnerships to support BIPOC and local farmers, figuring out what Fresh Change and other programs look like within a pandemic, and fighting the city on its brutal policies—*the Systemic Change Team has been busy.* We’re looking forward to being more grounded, continuing the work, and hopeful that as the pandemic slows we’ll have less barriers to continue doing so together.





Sisters' Interim ED and Board of Directors pictured in this order L to R: Treasurer Doug Bloem, Interim ED Dara Snyder, Secretary Matt Chorpennig, member Gus Kroll, President Art Rios Sr. (not pictured Ed Edmo)

A MESSAGE FROM NEW BOARD PRESIDENT, ART RIOS SR.

Hello all, my name Arthur “Art” Rios Sr., Sisters of the Road’s newly elected Board President. I’ve been a long time community member and volunteer at Sisters since 94’. I have served our community in many ways over the years including on the board at Central City Concern, National Health Care for the Homeless Council’s National Consumers Advisory Board, A Home for Everyone Coordinating Board and engaged with the Homeless Bill of Rights campaign with the Western Regional Advocacy Project.

During the pandemic this past year it’s been a strange time for Sisters. We clearly need voices from our community to keep our legacy going. I hope to bring my lived experiences with leadership and support to the organization

as we move forward out of COVID-19.

Genny’s passing was a shock to me and to our community. My plan is to keep the philosophies she guided at the forefront of my work. I do truly miss Genny and remember her saying that “No one has the Monopoly on the Truth.” She will be forever in my heart.

Myself and the rest of us on the board would like to thank you for allowing us to serve and invite you to join us. Being on the board at Sisters is a unique experience as we center radical hospitality and inclusion above all else. Will you help us continue to build towards Sisters’ mission? To inquire about a position on the board please email ED@Sistersoftheroad.org



FULL PLATE PROJECT IS OUR ANNUAL MID-YEAR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Full Plate Project is about fighting scarcity and creating abundance while meeting the needs of our organization and community.

This summer we are looking ahead to a world where COVID is subsiding and we once again can return to truly being led by and serving alongside our neighbors surviving outside. This past year we have had to cut many ways the community guided our principals and day to day activities. Your donations will help us continue to move forward in new ways with love, inclusion and compassion.

Full Plate Project is our annual Mid-Year fundraising campaign when we hope to raise \$150,000. **But time is running out! [Full Plate Project fundraiser](#) ends July 31st!**

There are two easy ways to contribute to the Full Plate Project:

1. Use the pre-addressed envelope in the center of this newsletter to include a check or credit card number.
2. Make an easy, safe, and secure donation online at donate.sistersoftheroad.org/FPP2021
3. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and share/tag posts you like!

We would like to thank the Ed Cauduro Fund for \$60,000 matching funds and all of you for supporting us during this long road ahead!



Activist and Sisters' Roadie, Barbie Weber taking staff on a tour of Hazelnut Grove

A COMMUNITY FIGHT TO KEEP OUR HOMES

By Barbie Weber, Activist and Sisters' Roadie

In February of 2020 I moved into Hazelnut Grove tiny cabin village which is settled on a hillside in North Portland. When I first moved in, there was a big push from the city to move everybody to a village in St John's. After years of fighting with the city the community had pretty much given up on saving the village. But it didn't take long for me to figure out that moving was not the will of the village. So I reached out to the Poor People's Campaign, Sisters of the Road, Overlook neighbors, and other supporters of the village and we launched a campaign to save Hazelnut Grove from displacement and demolition. Hazelnut Grove is a sweet place. A place where unhoused folks have created for themselves stability, community and mutual aid. We are self-governed, which means changes to our area and codes are done in agreement with one another. Why we asked, would the city want to destroy a functioning solution to chronic homelessness and isolation? So, we started a petition that got almost

7,000 signatures, we held a press conference, several interviews with the media, met with city commissioners, and regularly testified at City Council.

At first they were going to remove the security fencing and tiny homes as villagers moved on to other residences, the latter of which was only possible because of the stability Hazelnut Grove offered. We stepped up the pressure and the city relented saying that they wanted us to submit a proposal to become an outside sanctioned shelter. So far we've made it to the second round of the proposal process and simultaneously continue to lobby for a city ordinance to be passed for Hazelnut Grove to be permanent. Life at the Grove continues to go on. We have new villagers, new gardens are being planted, and the property continues to be well maintained. We don't want to be displaced from our safe homes we created ourselves so we will continue to fight to see Hazelnut Grove stay permanently.



Photo Credit: Colin Fisher

THANK YOU

to Sisters' new Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) partners

Happiness Family Farm and **Another Spring Farm**, both Black-owned family farms who you can support by checking out their Instagram pages at [@happinessfamilyfarm](https://www.instagram.com/happinessfamilyfarm) and [@anotherpringfarm](https://www.instagram.com/anotherpringfarm) and their websites at: happinessfamilyfarm.com and anotherpringfarm.com



FRESH CHANGE

JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER!

EXCHANGE YOUR BARTER CREDITS EARNED IN THE CAFE, DOLLAR-FOR-DOLLAR AT PORTLAND FARMERS MARKET!



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DONATE TO SISTERS

Your donation to Sisters of the Road today makes a difference in our community. Sisters thrives because of the work that we do together, side by side, in solidarity.



GENEVIEVE NELSON

MARCH 1ST 1952 - AUGUST 19TH 2020

Thank you Genny.

Thank you for the radical change and love you brought to Portland and especially our little corner here on 6th and Davis. Not a day goes by where a community member, staff person or supporter doesn't express the many ways you made them feel challenged, empowered and *most of all loved.*

sistersoftheroad.org

