

StreetSmarts

**EMPOWERING THE HARD-CORE UNEMPLOYED WITH GUARANTEED JOBS
AND IMMEDIATE INCOME AS THEY WORK TOWARD SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

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Contact:

Carolyn Blair, Publisher
Frank Kaiser, Editor
Call 305.371.4242

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NEW MAGAZINE EMPOWERS HOMELESS WITH GUARANTEED JOBS AND INCOME

MIAMI—Armed with a new nonprofit monthly magazine called StreetSmarts, scores of unemployed, poor and homeless men and women today are fanning out across South Florida on their way to self-sufficiency.

If you haven't yet seen someone hawking StreetSmarts, you will. Now in its second issue, the magazine's cover pictures a stark drawing of a homeless man and contains articles ranging from the best South Florida bagel joints to fiction and poetry to an exposé of practices at Miami's Homeless Assistance Center and a first-hand look at a woman's view of homelessness.

The selling of it appeals to South Florida's poor and homeless because it provides them with a business of their own. Each is his or her own boss of a retail magazine distribution company that provides the entrepreneur with independence, dignity, flexibility and immediate payment.

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STREETSMARTS COALITION INCORPORATED

A Social Entrepreneurship Combining Publishing, Job Training, and Meaningful Employment Empowering South Florida's Unemployed, Poor, and Homeless
780 N. E. 69th St. Miami Florida 33138 voice 305 754 8833 fax 305 757 2448 streetsmarts@kaisercom.com <http://www.kaisercom.com/streetsmarts/>

A NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION

For some, selling the magazine is the first time in their lives they've earned money on their own and felt the dignity of being their own boss. Seventy cents of the dollar cover price goes directly into the vendor's pocket. "I made 83 bucks yesterday," said Deanna, a recent welfare recipient and now enthusiastic vendor selling StreetSmarts just outside Miami's Bayside Market. You know it's Deanna because her name and photo are prominently displayed on a StreetSmarts' badge.

If the experience of 50 other US homeless publications holds true, many of those South Floridians selling StreetSmarts today eventually will become self-sufficient members of the community. According to Timothy Harris, chairman of the 60-member North American Street Newspaper Association, "A well-run street newspaper can be a very healing project that builds bridges between the haves and the have-nots while offering opportunity to those who need it most."

Helping the have-nots help themselves is the mission of this new South Florida not-for-profit monthly magazine. Its founders say that the magazine provides the poor with a legitimate means of income, job training, and an authentic voice in the community as they work toward self-sufficiency and full-time employment.

After just the first issue, StreetSmarts' publisher Carolyn Blair estimated that each of their 93 vendors earned approximately \$500 on average. Of 20,000 copies printed, 11,240 were distributed by vendors. Blair claims that at least three vendors earned enough for security deposit and rent, another two enough to return home, and four moved on to full-time, living-wage employment.

"Selling StreetSmarts empowers those having a tough time integrating into the community," said Blair, from her office at Miami's old Camillus House clinic. "The magazine creates dignified work founded on the combined experience of more than 100 similar successful publications published around the world."

According to the various South Florida homeless coalitions, there are at least 13,000 homeless persons here, maybe a quarter of them families. Add 23,000 now coming off welfare who can't

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find work, and StreetSmarts should have no shortage of vendors.

Editor was homeless

StreetSmarts' editorial content is eclectic, but with a social foundation. As editor Frank Kaiser emphasized, "StreetSmarts is not a publication *for* the poor and homeless but, rather, a general-interest magazine sold by the unemployed and homeless to earn a legitimate, decent and dignified living." Kaiser knows a thing or two about homelessness. Twenty years ago he was broke and homeless on the streets of Honolulu. Both Kaiser and Blair are long-time recovering alcoholics and addicts.

The two have solid foundations in the community. They own Kaiser Communications Inc. advertising agency in Miami and together have started or renewed three other Florida publications. Both have a rich history of synergy.

Those who fork out the \$1 donation for the latest issue will find an eclectic read including news on saving money, "reinventing yourself," a colorful spread on "Cheap Eats" at South Florida's best bagel spots written by Johnson & Wales graduate Thomas Crosley, and an informative piece on how to use the Internet and e-mail from your local library. There's poetry and stories by homeless unemployed and persons and, acting as "The Voice of the Voiceless," StreetSmarts has several articles on the failures of Miami's Homeless Assistance Center and what can be done about it. There's also a photo essay on the closing of Ft. Lauderdale's Tent City.

"We don't want this to be a 'pity' purchase," explained Kaiser. We provide good information not found elsewhere." For vendors, there's information that may help some collect \$1,500 each from a recent ACLU settlement with the City of Miami.

\$600 a week

Blair first encountered the "street newspaper" phenomenon in London where hundreds of homeless men and women earn \$300 a week or more selling The Big Issue, a general interest magazine sold by the poor with almost a half million circulation. Later she and Kaiser trekked twice to Chicago to learn how selling that city's street paper, StreetWise, earns vendors as much as \$600 weekly. According to Blair, it's not uncommon for homeless vendors there to

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make \$1,500 to \$2,000 a month. “They don’t stay homeless long,” Blair exclaimed. There are about 400 Chicago vendors working at any given time, the average earning more than \$600 a month.

According to the North American Street Newspaper Association, thousands of homeless and unemployed men and women across the country who have gone through this economically uplifting experience with “street” publications are now housed and self-sufficient.

Panhandling and crime decrease

StreetSmarts’ idea is simple: Those who want to work are taught basic business and life skills and given a marketable product that they sell for 233 percent profit wherever and whenever they wish. After training, the first 10 magazines are given to the vendors free. With a \$10 stake, the vendor buys more magazines at 30¢ each, that amount needed to help pay production and printing costs. The vendor then makes 70¢ for each \$1 copy sold as an independent entrepreneur.

“The idea works,” said Blair, “because most of us want to help people who are helping themselves. Coincidentally, many homeless persons want to be their own boss.”

According to Anthony Oliver, publisher of Chicago’s five-year-old StreetWise, a March 1998 study there found that where street newspapers are sold, panhandling sharply diminishes, crime decreases in neighborhoods served, and at least 43 percent of the vendors move on to full-time gainful employment. “Crime goes down because the publication offers an alternative to panhandling and stealing,” Oliver said. “Also, vendors tend to keep watch on the neighborhoods in which they sell.”

Many of StreetSmarts’ current vendors are from local homeless-helping agencies. Broward’s Helping People in America uses the magazine as an economic arm that takes their clients to higher levels of self-sufficiency in their programs’ continuum of care. Said Sean Cononie of Helping People, “StreetSmarts quickly teaches practical business skills and infuses dignity as nothing else can.”

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Writers, photographers wanted

“This is a community project,” said Kaiser. “Along with professional writers, artists, and photographers, we want homeless and unemployed persons, students—anyone who cares about the poorest of us.”

“We have no funding yet,” explained Blair. “Although we’ve received some money in donations and advertising-space sales, most expenses so far have been paid out-of-pocket.” She expects grass-roots funding once readers see its value. “Name another nonprofit project anywhere that creates both income and dignity for the poorest of our poor,” Blair challenged.

StreetSmarts has an Internet site with detailed information about its operation, advertising costs, and editorial needs at <http://www.kaisercom.com/streetsmarts/>

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Call Frank Kaiser, editor, at 305.754.8833 for free copy of StreetSmarts and/or color or B&W photos of covers in English or Spanish available in flat or electronic art. 4/8/99

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

Broward Homeless Coalition, Laura Carey, Executive Director, 954.522.5790

Camillus House, Peter England, Development Dir. 305.374.1065

Carrfour Corp., Maria Suarez Pellerin, Director 305.371.8300

Catholic Charities, Bruce Netter, 305.758.0024

Dade Human Services Coalition, Daniella Levine, 305.576.5001

Dade Homeless Trust, Hilda Fernandez, 305.375.1490

Helping People in America, Sean Cononie, 954.964.0123

Key West Homeless Coalition, Marion Robinson, 305.294.7882

Nat'l. Coalition /Homeless, Michael Stoops, 202.737.6444

North American Street Newspaper Assn. and director of Seattle's

RealChange newspaper, Tim Harris, chair, 206.441.3247

PEER Center, Creighton Dickerson, 954.938.8189

Salvation Army, Capt. Dan Vincent, 305.637.6701 or Diane Nickum, 954.524.6991x302

StreetWise, Chicago's Street Newspaper, Anthony Oliver, Publisher, 312.554.0060

Tent City, Ft. Lauderdale, Gary Canavarri, 954.761.5726

The Big Issue/LA, Art Kunkin, 310.306.5712 or John Bird (London's TBI) 0171.418.0418

Univ. of Miami, Mickey Rubenstien, Volunteer Services, 305.284.3126

WAGES, George Knox, Board Member, 305.858.5555

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