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Pippa Arend (from left), Beth Burns and Joy Cartier help homeless youths tap their potential. "We've got some kids who are rocking," Arend says. // STEVEN GIBBONS

# Good work bears fruit

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS | BY JANET FILIPS

## About p:ear

Current location:  
809 S.W. Alder St.

"Building p:ear":  
\$1.6 million capital  
campaign to buy and  
rehab a permanent  
home in Old Town

Future home:  
338 N.W. Sixth Ave.

Projected move:  
Early 2008

Info: 503-228-6677;  
www.pearmentor.org

## When a nonprofit that helps homeless youths faced homelessness itself, benefactors mobilized

P:ear is a nonprofit organization that works with 15- to 24-year olds who live on the streets or are transitioning from homelessness. Ironically, the 5-year-old agency faced homelessness itself after its rented downtown space was scheduled to be redeveloped in early 2008.

To the rescue: an anonymous philanthropist who bought an ideal building in Old Town and agreed to hold the historic property for p:ear. The arrangement, finalized in late June, gives

p:ear the time it needs to raise \$1.6 million to buy and renovate the building and secure its future. "This has essentially saved p:ear," says co-director Pippa Arend.

P:ear scored a second miracle in a new relationship with SERA Architects, a national leader in sustainable design with offices a block away from p:ear's future home. The firm will donate architectural and interior design services as part of a national pro bono program called The 1% Solution.

Saving p:ear means saving its work with Portland youths who are homeless for many reasons, such as neglect, family addictions or mental, sexual or physical abuse.

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## Education, art and recreation

When they end up on the street, these youths — who often lack parents, not just a home — carry a deep sense of worthlessness, isolation and despair, Arend says. So, in the comfortably worn space at 809 S.W. Alder St., p:ear staff, mentors and volunteers patiently counter the complex problems with the pillars of the program: education, art and recreation — thus the acronym “p:ear.”

For the 35 or 40 youths who typically come to p:ear any given day, it is a place to actively work at growing intellectually and emotionally.

Because, be it a job or an apartment, “you can’t keep anything if you feel you don’t deserve it, or if you don’t have the skills that allow you to make needed daily decisions,” says Arend, sitting at a pair of paint-splattered worktables, surrounded by

shelves of donated craft supplies and glass-fronted bookcases full of books and board games.

Arend, Beth Burns and Joy Cartier taught homeless youths at the Salvation Army Greenhouse Center until the school closed for financial reasons in August 2001.

Despite being laid off, the three teachers felt a burning need to continue serving homeless students and addressing their emotional, social and physical needs, along with the academics. They decided to file for nonprofit status. And the following February, they opened p:ear’s doors with personal sweat, private funding and below-market rent from landlord TMT Development.

As nonprofits often do, p:ear got a quiet running start earlier this year on fundraising for buying the new space at 338 N.W. Sixth Ave. From January to early July, the “building p:ear” capital campaign logged

\$550,000 in pledges and gifts. Supporters include visionary developers Ted Gilbert and Homer Williams; Williams and Pink Martini’s Thomas Lauderdale are the capital campaign’s honorary co-chairmen.

When the campaign hits the \$1 million milestone, the organization will appeal, in a big way, to the public. P:ear is counting on its many local supporters to take it to the \$1.6 million mark.

## Youths find refuge, hope for the future

As the first phase of fundraising rolls on, so does p:ear’s work with youths. The teens come in from the summer heat to study for the GED exam to get the equivalent of a high school diploma. They knit, crochet and use sewing machines to repair clothes and backpacks or create designs. They eat hearty lunches donated by nearby restaurants. They delve into painting, photography,



On First Thursday, p:ear displays student art (examples at left) alongside pieces by professionals, many of whom are mentors and teachers. When students sell pieces from p:ear's onsite gallery, they donate 10 percent of the price back to p:ear.

writing, sculpture and filmmaking — discovering art as an outlet for self-expression.

With support from theaters such as the Portland Center for the Performing Arts and the Gerding Theater at the Armory, p:ear students experience the thrill of live shows in a beautiful setting. An annual campout and monthly summer day trips help them

connect with nature and its peacefulness.

In July, 10 students read Shakespeare as prep for "Shakesp:ear," a three-day camping trip to Southern Oregon that included an outing to see "The Tempest" and "The Taming of the Shrew" at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Before the trip, Jen Boatright, a homeless 19-year-old, raved about the poetry

and beauty of Shakespeare's lines, her new awareness of the plays' continuing influence and the chance to see the plays come to life. "You can put yourself in his time and understand him so much better," she says. "And, we're going rafting, too." ☺