

# TOLEDO FREE PRESS



Digital Version



## COMMUNITY

### New leaders direct Toledo Streets

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A Toledo newspaper sold by homeless and formerly homeless vendors is working through a busy summer after a leadership change.

Toledo Streets is a “street paper” that was founded in 2009 by Amanda Moore. Moore had been serving as a volunteer with 1Matters, the organization that puts on Tent City, an annual outreach program for Toledo’s homeless. 1Matters has remained a main supporter of the paper.

Last month, Moore, anticipating her upcoming marriage and impending move from Toledo, handed the reins to Jamie Rye and Christy Grob. Rye is taking on the role of editor in chief, while Grob serves as the director of vendor management.

Rye, a Blissfield native who has lived in Toledo for five years, has worked with churches for over a decade, serving in pastoral and congregational care. He said that while he has no formal training in journalism, he has written for several publications, which has helped with his transition into the editorial role.

“Writing has been more of a hobby that has developed into other opportunities,” he said.

Rye added that getting to know Moore and 1Matters founder Ken Leslie through his work brought this opportunity to his door.

“Over the course of the last three or four years, I’ve done a lot of work with 1Matters, worked with Tent City, Food for Thought and LifeLine Toledo, I got to know Ken and Amanda. With Amanda getting married and transitioning out of her role, they were looking for someone to take over. I just ended up being the right guy.”

Rye emphasized that his goal is to continue to keep the paper centered on issues that are of primary importance to Toledo’s homeless.

“Because we work with the homeless population, justice issues are really prominent in what we do as a paper,” he said.

“We try to have vendors be included in the writing of the paper, so we can give them a voice. We’re also giving them a skill that’s sort of long term in entering the job force.”



TOLEDO STREETS ORGANIZERS, Seated, from left: Amanda Moore and Christy Grob. Standing, from left: Jason Copsey, Jamie Rye and Ken Leslie. PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBIN SULLER.

The independently run publication is part of a global network of more than 120 similar street paper programs. They are in the process of becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

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Leslie said that organizations like 1Matters and Toledo Streets depend heavily on community involvement and funding in order to be successful, as well as full-time employees like Rye and Grob.

"We've never really gone out and sought money," Leslie said. "We've pretty much been all volunteers. In order to serve everyone well, we need full-time employees. It's a good opportunity for the community to embrace its greatest needs. We are really blessed to be in this position."

Rye reported said Toledo Streets has 16 active vendors, and is coming off of its most successful month to date. He estimated circulation for May at 3,500 issues.

When the organization secured some additional funding from the City of Toledo last year, it opened the door for Grob to step in to manage and train vendors.

Grob explained the process of hiring vendors, which starts off with a training program, after which a vendor will receive 10 free papers and a temporary badge to get them started. The papers are sold for a suggested \$1 donation, after which the vendor may return and buy a limited amount of papers for 25 cents each. After several successful cycles, the vendor is awarded a full badge and may purchase more papers freely.

In addition to coordinating the vendors, Grob has studied other models of street papers around the country, and helps teach area homeless people additional skills to help them meet their goals.

"I've been talking to Ann Arbor and Chicago to see what they do, to see how they do their training and orientation," she said. "I also help [vendors] with communication, résumés and writing."

Toledo Streets vendors must follow a code of conduct in order to keep their badges, though second chances are allowed.

"It's not just, 'One strike and you're out,'" Grob said. "We start with verbal warnings, then they may get the badge taken away, but they are always allowed to come back. Most of the vendors respect each other and work well together."

One of those vendors, Samuel Fooks, is a 53-year-old former truck driver who moved to Toledo last year. He began selling the paper after meeting Grob through the Cherry Street Mission and Madison Food Service and Community Center. He said that since he's been in Toledo, he has joined Ready for Life, a faith-based rehabilitation program that aims to restore hope and create opportunities for area homeless. Fooks asserted that the program and the newspaper have given him a new lease on life.

"They offer redemption and hope for those who have been displaced by their actions and their choices that they've made, and they can't survive on their own," he said. "As I progress through the phases, it allows me to go out and get work. So far, it's been a real success in my life. I really enjoy it, and I enjoy the people."

Fooks said he has six more months left in the Ready for Life program, and he is working toward the next step in his life.

"Because of my age, I need to have some stability. I'm very, very serious about saving money and making sure I have a secure financial future when I get done with the program."

Fooks cited the solid support from people like Leslie, Grob and Rye as one of his reasons for success in the program, which encourages personal accomplishment and willpower.

"It's up to the individual, just the same as anything else," Fooks said. "It's up to the person, if they have enough perseverance."

Look for Toledo Streets vendors all around Downtown Toledo, including events, festivals and Mud Hens games this summer. For more information on the newspaper, visit [toledostreets.org](http://toledostreets.org). To learn more about 1Matters and Tent City, visit [www.1matters.org](http://www.1matters.org).

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