

Please check which category you are nominating this person for:

X	Advocacy	An individual or organization that has exhibited outstanding advocacy efforts on behalf of people with disabilities in the City of Portland
	Community Inclusiveness	An individual, organization, or program that has made a significant effort to include people with disabilities in the community in the City of Portland
	Lifetime Achievement	An individual that has spent a significant portion of their life working to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of people with disabilities in the City of Portland
	Transportation	An individual or organization that has worked to improve the accessibility of the City of Portland in regard to transportation issues
	Youth Achievement	An individual under the age of 25 either with a disability or who has contributed to the disability community in a way that promotes inclusivity and awareness in the City of Portland

Name of Nominee: BEST (Benefits & Entitlements Specialist Team)

Phone: 503-944-4465

Address: 727 W. Burnside, Portland, OR 97209

Email: mcalvin@centrealcityconcern.org; kpape@centralcityconcern.org

Name of Nominator: George Wall, J.D.

Phone: 503-236-0068

Email of Nominator: gwall@eastpdxlaw.com

In one page or less, please tell us why this individual, organization or program should be honored with the 2009 "Making a Difference" in disability award in the category for which you are nominating them.

Some ideas of things to share could include:

- How has the nominee worked to advocate for the disability community?
- What impact or observable change has occurred due to their efforts?
- An example or story that highlights why the nominee should be honored.

Dear Selection Committee: This was all on 1 page, but I increased the font, so it is now on 2 pages. Teckla

It is my pleasure to nominate the Benefits & Entitlements Specialist Team (BEST) at Central City Concern, formed in 2007 to assist disabled homeless and formerly homeless individuals in expediting acquisition of federal benefits and entitlements (SSI/DI and Medicaid/Medicare). With benefits, these individuals secure long-term stable income that greatly improves access to health care, prospects for permanent housing and chances for permanent self-sufficiency. I have assisted the BEST team in many of their cases and have worked closely with their staff.

Potential clients are referred to CCC's five-member BEST team by six different organizations in Portland serving the homeless population. Since program inception, the BEST team has screened 672 individuals for possible inclusion and has enrolled 258 cases. Of those enrolled, 129 have been awarded benefits, 85 cases are still being worked on. 20. Each case takes an estimated average of 20-25 hours to prepare. BEST staff is known in the community for meticulously thorough research and documentation of cases. BEST contracts with five psychologists to do evaluations and cognitive testing as well as an occupational therapist to assess limitations. Because of well-prepared applications, the BEST team averages a case decision in less than two months after submission to SSA. This is notable considering it may take up to three years from appeal to get a hearing in front of a judge.

The vast majority of BEST clients have long histories of homelessness. Roughly 75% suffer from mental health afflictions that greatly restrict the ability to work. Mental illness also frequently complicates the benefits-seeking process. However BEST staff is diligent in working to keep a client's case moving along. BEST staff stay in regular touch with each individual's case manager (frequently at other agencies), and are known to hit the streets themselves to retrieve a client and get them to a scheduled appointment. In one story, a BEST staffer worked with a client who was staying in an abandoned garage. The client, with many years of homelessness and an extreme bi-polar diagnosis, had missed previous psychiatric evaluations. After the BEST staffer brought the client to the evaluation and the benefits process moved forward, the client's case was approved and the client's situation improved dramatically. This client now continues to take his medications, and is more focused and responsible. He is also about to move into permanent housing.

Another client had been in 27 foster homes as a child and had a long history of physical and sexual abuse. He had a brief stint in the military and was married for a few years before an unsuccessful suicide attempt. This client suffered from extreme depression and although safely housed in transitional housing, he had very poor personal hygiene and was isolating himself socially. After receiving benefits, his health and hygiene improved greatly and he developed a few friendships in his building. He was able to secure permanent housing after receiving his disability benefits.

In addition to the tremendous personal benefits that BEST brings to people, BEST also delivers an economic boost to the Oregon economy. In just 36 cases, BEST has calculated that 17 different providers were able to bill Medicaid \$424,379 retroactively upon approval of a client's Social Security benefits.

The BEST team utilizes a SOAR model developed by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Utilizing a benefits specialist, a records/data coordinator and a physician, the team works with the local Social Security Administration (SSA) office to expedite applications for disability. The physician conducts the disability evaluations required by the Disability Determination Services division of Oregon. BEST Program Manager Mellani Calvin has conducted nine trainings statewide in SOAR protocols in an attempt to involve other agencies in this effort. Mellani has also presented at the Oregon Coalition on Housing and Homelessness annual conference as well as the National Association of Disability Examiners in Salem. She is the facilitator for the Benefits Work Group, an interagency forum that meets monthly to discuss SOAR strategies and collateral benefits. Speakers at the Benefits Work Group have included Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish from the City of Portland, policy makers from Medicaid, and representatives from Housing Authority of Portland and Developmental Disability Services.