



Change Agent

TIMOTHY HARRIS, former homeless youth, journalist, voice for the poor

"POVERTY JUST REALLY PISSES ME OFF," says Timothy Harris, founder and executive director of *Real Change*, Seattle's renowned street newspaper that celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. Poverty found Harris, now 44, when he was 17 and faced homelessness and substance abuse in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He skips over the details, but it's clear this time had a deep impact on him. His path out, via the Air Force and later a degree from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, eventually led to a job as executive director of Boston Jobs With Peace, where his activism included organizing sit-ins with Boston's homeless community. But he felt frustrated with action that lacked real direction. "I wanted to organize for long-term social change while meeting the direct needs of the people I was working with," he says. So he organized a group of homeless people and in 1992 launched Boston newspaper *Spare Change*, written, edited and sold by the

homeless. Two years later, he brought his idea to Seattle and started *Real Change*, an urban-issues biweekly newspaper that today employs nearly 225 homeless vendors, selling an average of 40,000 papers a month.

A decade after its start, *Real Change* is garnering awards (Harris was recently recognized with the Susan Hutchinson Bosch Award from Seattle's Society of Professional Journalists) and acclaim for its recent provocative ad campaign ("Change Perspective"), which depicted well-known local figures in homeless garb. The paper begins weekly publication next month, and Harris hopes this move will lead to an even bigger evolution. "There are so many stereotypes and preconceived notions of what a homeless newspaper is," explains Harris. "What we want is for people to see it as a good paper first and then realize that they are helping the homeless community." *Jaclyn Anderson*