Meet the moms who are fighting hard for family shelter and housing.

On a sunny Tuesday morning, over sixty community advocates, families, and mothers gathered onto the steps of City Hall. While the information they hoped to provide the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor was a detailed outline of budget requests from the Homeless Emergency Service Providers Associations (HESPA), the demands that these families wanted was simple: Safe, dignified housing for their families. The group, which chanted their demands in English, Spanish, and Cantonese, included families living in shelters, SROs, cars, and doubled up in other people's living rooms.

Irma Nuñez, Jacquelynn Evans, and Leontine “Tina” Collins are three of these mothers fighting for housing. Two of them—Nuñez and Evans—are peer organizers at the Coalition on Homelessness, working to organize and build power amongst homeless and formerly homeless families. Collins is a longtime volunteer of the Coalition and has worked with the Coalition’s Housing Justice Workgroup for the past five years. Most recently, she joined the Coalition’s Homeless Speakers Bureau, a group of people who have experienced homelessness who share these experiences and educate the public. All of them have experienced housing instability and understand the difficulty of being homeless and a mom.

On the day of the action, which was also the group’s celebration of Mother’s Day, mothers, some with their kids in strollers or in their arms, stormed the Mayor’s Office to demand affordable housing, housing subsidies, and shelter for their families.

People usually don’t think of families when they think of homelessness, but families represent over half of all homeless people in the United States. The families that day demanded to be seen and heard, not just by City officials, but also by the public. This issue features some of the powerful mothers who are fighting everyday to ensure that every family in San Francisco has a place that they can call home.
Early this year, San Francisco’s Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (DSH) implemented a program known as ‘coordinated entry’ for homeless family shelter, which prioritizes families trying to get stable shelter based on where they are staying at time of requesting shelter. A coordinated entry program, per federal law, should be low-barrier, fair access, inclusive, housing-first, and full coverage, but advocates and providers for the homeless, such as Homeless Emergency Service Providers Association (HESPA), say that San Francisco’s coordinated entry program is failing to meet these basic program guidelines.

During the lead up to Coordinated Entry, most homeless families said there was little consistent, up-to-date information about next steps for housing post-discharge. One participant said that the disorganization made the whole thing seem “hopeless,” adding that, “sometimes you have to fill out the same form over and over. It seems like they are throwing your forms in the garbage.”

This is the premise for Coordinated Entry — that and a system to ration scarce services.

When this rationing system is used on shelter, many problems present. For one, the system has a set of preferences which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone.

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and decided to stay in the park with my husband so that we could spend the holiday as a family. To accommodate my child, we gathered a ridiculous amount of cardboard, a tarp, subzero sleeping bags and built a shelter at Stow Lake with the cardboard beneath us. There was more cardboard along the sides to protect ourselves against the wind. We slept there for three nights. It wasn’t much, but at least we could be together as a family.

Ten minutes before my alarm went off for my son’s school, we were awakened by a park ranger and told to tear down our shelter. While he stood there, we complied, leaving the area and hoping he would be satisfied and leave, but that was not the case. The moment he saw my son, he called the cops without asking any questions about our situation. There was no drug paraphernalia. We had food, warm clothing, and had provided wind and waterproof shelter as best as we could, but he took notice of none of that. I tried to take my son to school, but was told I could not. I wasn’t even permitted to take him to the restroom. We were made to wait for the arrival of CPS. Knowing what would transpire when CPS arrived, we put up a front for our son and acted as if everything was going to be okay.

The worker arrived, and it was time to try to explain to my son that he was going to be going to be taken away from us temporarily. It wasn’t our choice and there was nothing we could do to stop it. Terror and tears filled his eyes and he tried to run, but the ranger had hold of him. He clung to me, crying and screaming, NO! The ranger attempted to drag him from me, kicking and screaming, but I told him that I would put my son in the car in an attempt on my part to minimize the trauma. As I placed him in the back seat and buckled his seatbelt, I looked him in the eye and made a promise that this would not be a long separation and that I would do whatever I had to make it so.

That was December 1, 2015. As they drove him away, I collapsed to the ground and broke down. Two days later in court, the judge said that if I went into another drug program, he would be returned to me immediately. Without ever receiving any evidence of recent drug activity, I was required to go to a drug program simply to be off the streets.

December 9th, I entered the Women’s HOPE, a residential treatment program for women with children run by Healthright 360. During that time, I was separated from both my husband and my child. My child was placed back into my care on December 21st.

I spent three months there before going to Ashbury House, another residential treatment program, where I stayed for one year. CPS stayed involved with me from December 2015 till January 2017. My case was closed three months prior to me leaving Ashbury House despite the fact that where we would go once my time was up at Ashbury House was still a mystery. But I was no longer CPS’s problem. They’d successfully pushed me onto someone else, who openly admitted that they did not—and would not—find housing for their graduates. At the same time, I’d been working with Homeless Prenatal Program and was waiting until I had one month left at Ashbury House before I could get onto the waitlist for a 3-6 month stabilization room for me and my family at Compass Family Services.

At Compass, it was explained to me that I could not be placed on the waitlist until I was literally homeless. Despite being legally acknowledged as being homeless, when you are still staying at a treatment facility, that’s not enough. I had to actually be outside before I could even be placed on this list. After I left Ashbury House, we were forced to stay at an emergency family shelter called First Friendship. First Friendship happens to be closest to my son’s school. I wasn’t told how long we would have to stay at the emergency shelter before the mental health and medical verifications we provided for priority access to the 3-6 month stabilization room would be accepted. It wasn’t until we’d been staying at First Friendship for three weeks that we were informed that the paperwork we’d provided wasn’t good enough for processing. There was a specific form that we need our healthcare providers to fill out. We’ve since done that and are still awaiting the reply from Compass.

Compass has also informed me that the families who are sleeping in tents or vehicles are given first priority. Second priority are the emergency shelters like First Friendship and so on. The six to eight month wait for a stabilization room being so exorbitantly long as it is, families who hear this are actually doing this and sleeping outside, which endangers their children, not just from CPS, but also thieves, murderers, rapists, and other dangers from the streets. They only move a maximum of four families a week into the 3-6 month stabilization room.

Did you know that if you decide to stay at a hotel or on a friend’s couch and you tell Compass you are doing so, you are temporarily removed from your spot on the list? This is one of the things that me and my family does to get some respite from sleeping in the emergency family shelter. At the beginning of the month, when my husband and I receive our SSDI government checks, we rent a cheap hotel room until our money runs out after a week or so. It’s an escape from the horri-
My name is Irma. I am the mother of three children. I came from Mexico more than ten years ago with the hope of unifying my family for my son. Like many women in Latin America, our husbands come to this country in order to provide us with a better life. But it is very difficult for our children to understand that their parents did not abandon them, they went out to support them, to try to give them a better life. Better in the economic sense because emotionally, that does not happen. It is very difficult to raise a child alone, educate them, and get ahead. So after many years of waiting for him to come back, we came to live here, in the United States. My son at that time was 9 years old. I brought him with my best intentions, but I never thought he would have to go through so many barriers: First, the language, as he did not speak any English, and then, the culture, which is very different from what we knew. I do not say that the culture is bad, just different.

In the beginning when he started his new life, he never thought that he was different from the others, that he would not have the same opportunities as the others. But when he became a teenager, he realized that he could not travel freely in this country, that he could not apply for benefits, that he could not work. These, among many other things, undermined his mental health and his happiness. But one day, something amazing happened for him and for many young people in his situation: a window of opportunity and the hope of living like any other young man of his age. It was an application for DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an executive order that provides undocumented students with the opportunity to apply for things like a social security number and a work permit. This not only changed my life, but my whole family. He now has the opportunity to travel, to work, and to feel more part of this country. I just hope they do not take away from them this great opportunity that they have given these young women to demonstrate how great they can become!

I started volunteering at the Coalition on Homelessness almost nine years ago, and I have had the opportunity to learn many things in this community. Something very important is that I was able to know my rights as an immigrant and how to defend myself and fight for them. And now I feel the moral obligation to pass on that knowledge to other families so that, like me, they can become leaders in their own lives and in their community. Thanks to what I learned at the Coalition, I became part of the school leadership that my children attend, and I am encouraging more immigrant mothers like myself to be encouraged to take the plunge and be leaders not only within the school but also in our communities. A great barrier in my path is the different culture, language, education, migratory status or fear of racism that immigrant mothers face in the U.S. I know that I still have a long way to go to get more mothers to join me in the struggle for our rights, but I will continue to stand up for my family and all families like mine!
JACQUELYNN EVANS
FROM HOMELESSNESS TO ADVOCACY

JOSHUA GILL-SUTTON

While she shares stories from her troubled upbringing, and her time living on San Francisco's streets, there isn’t a hint of resentment in the voice of Jacquelynn Evans. Relaying her tales of loss and abuse, Evans speaks calmly, almost objectively. It’s obvious that she has truly made peace with her past, a past riddled with dark chapters and difficult lessons. Through the telling, it becomes clear that she draws strength from the challenges she has overcome, and endeavors to use that strength in the service of others.

Evans, a San Francisco native, lost her mother at the age of 5. She was taken in by her grandmother, whose love and wisdom remains a source of inspiration to this day. Her grandmother passed away when she was only twelve, leaving Evans at the mercy of the foster care system after a brief period as a runaway.

“When they finally caught up with me, I was 13, almost 14. From there, they kept putting me all over the place.” During this time, a young Evans was confronted with harsh realities that, according to her, “No child should have to endure.” She felt like the people who were meant to guide and protect her betrayed her trust.

“They broke that trust, and it made me not trust anybody.” While this was admittedly a difficult reality to accept, it shaped the sense of self-determination that has become a defining aspect of Evans’ character.

“After that I had to find a way to survive. I had to find a way to make money, I had to find a way to stay dry. It wasn’t easy. It was complicated, because nobody taught me any of those things. I had to learn them all by myself. But that’s okay, because it made me the person I am today.”

As a young adult, Evans worked a variety of jobs, sometimes providing in-home care, as well as canvassing for different organizations. While working constantly to earn a steady income, Evans struggled to find a stable living situation. She spent time on the streets, in and out of shelters, on the couches of friends and family, and was even briefly incarcerated. Through it all, she remained doggedly persistent in her pursuit of better opportunities.

“I literally applied to a housing place once a day. I applied for a job two or three times a week.” By force of sheer determination, guided by a self-taught sense of discipline, Evans was able to get herself off of the streets, and into a job she is passionate about.

Today Evans is the mother of two children, 21 months and thirteen years old, and works two jobs: one, as a peer organizer at the Coalition on Homelessness and the other, as a hotel desk clerk. As a peer organizer, she is able to draw from her experiences living on the streets and in shelters to help members of the city’s ever growing homeless population regain stable housing. Her own experiences give her compassion and a deep knowledge of homelessness that those who have not experienced homelessness lack. While Evans is new to the job, she has jumped right into it, advocating for and with homeless families, attending policy meetings with City officials, and organizing rallies and direct actions. Evans uses the skills she developed during her years of homelessness, to be of service to others, who she feels is her ultimate calling.

If there is one lesson that her life story can convey as an inspiration to others, it is this: “Your own power and will is the most important thing. Nothing else matters. If you don’t have the power to keep going, if you don’t have the will to stick it out, nothing else will ever matter.”

When asked if she harbors any bitterness regarding her past tribulations, Evans simply laughs. “I’ve done some bad, I’ve done some good, and I seem to have come out on top of it. I’d much rather stay here where I am than dwell on where I was.” She would rather focus on the confidence she gained from her experiences and to be an inspiring example to people who are struggling as she did. She advises her peers to trust in their own power and says, most importantly, “Don’t ever underestimate yourself.”
HOMELESS WITH A BABY

JULIA D’ANTONIO

Homelessness is hard enough for single adults, while family homelessness has its own set of trials, but these are compounded when women find themselves pregnant and without stable housing.

While numbers for homeless women experiencing pregnancy are hard to come by, San Francisco estimated 228 homeless families with 630 family members living in the city in its last homeless count in 2015.

In the same period of time, the city-based nonprofit Homeless Prenatal Project reported 520 clients of its Wellness Center giving birth to 522 babies.

Two peer advocates at the Coalition on Homelessness, which publishes Street Sheet, can attest to the challenges women face when homeless and pregnant. Julia D’Antonio and Jacquelynn Evans both delivered children while unhoused.

JULIA D’ANTONIO

D’Antonio said that sheltering herself was important. “When you’re pregnant, it adds a whole new dimension. You’re still protecting yourself, but there’s a whole new layer,” she said. “Eventually you’re going to have to have a place.”

Now 25 and living in a below-market rate apartment on Potrerillos Hill, D’Antonio gave birth to her daughter when she was 19 and almost four years on the streets.

She found that the housing options that were available to her as an individual weren’t as attainable when she was expecting.

In that time span, she stayed in a rental car, a hotel room in Antioch and the Star Community House at Seventh Avenue and Geary Boulevard. In the final stages of her pregnancy, she couch-surfed at a friend’s place in the Haight. By that time, most of her family was already displaced from the city.

Fortunately, D’Antonio had prenatal care at a teen clinic, which was paid for by insurance. However, no one told her about available services until a social worker provided her a list when she was in her seventh month.

“There’s never housing offered over a long term,” she said, recalling her housing search. “I’m just passed from one organization to the next.”

D’Antonio said that intervention would have helped her in her teens or even when she was a transitional-aged youth (TAY), but such outreach was scarce. “I thought being TAY would help, but it didn’t,” she said. “I think youth are ignored or go unnoticed, and we’re scared to be placed in the system.”

JACQUELYNN EVANS

Already the mother of two young children, Jacquelynn Evans, 29, left her friend’s place when she no longer felt safe. She was pregnant with her now one-year-old son, Z’allah, and guidance was in short supply, Evans said.

“My whole journey, people treated me very awkward and judgmental once I asked everybody for help,” she said.

Evans’ pregnancy was complicated by an array of health issues, including diabetes, respiratory problems and anxiety. The effects of homelessness on a child’s development — including low birth weight — has been well documented. When her son was born 34 weeks into her pregnancy, he didn’t have enough fluid in his kidneys, so he spent three weeks in the hospital.

Evans said she was able to move Z’allah past his developmental stage by breastfeeding him.

During her homeless episode, Evans stayed at a camping van that was eventually towed away, several transitional programs, single-resident occupancy hotels and her aunt’s living room. The house mandated a drug dependency court required her to leave the basement and enter the main entrance just to use the bathroom.

Now living in an SRO, Evans has signed up for 55 places so that all three of her children can live with her. Even when she met the requirements for the housing units, Evans said that social workers discouraged one program told her she wasn’t “emergency enough” with elaborating further.

In addition to working at the Coalition, she also works as a desk clerk at an SRO. Evans said that social workers discouraged her from working. “But I knew I couldn’t because I had to provide for my son.”

FAMILY SHELTERS: QUICK FACTS

- ACCORDING TO SAN FRANCISCO’S 2015 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT, THERE ARE 226 HOMELESS FAMILIES LIVING IN SAN FRANCISCO, WITH 630 FAMILY MEMBERS
- ALMOST HALF (46%) OF FAMILIES REPORTED EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- MOST FAMILIES (64%) WERE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS FOR THE FIRST TIME
- THE WAIT TIME FOR A FAMILY IN SAN FRANCISCO TO GET INTO A NON-EMERGENCY FAMILY SHELTER IS 6-8 MONTHS
- EVERY YEAR, 600,000 FAMILIES WITH 1.35 MILLION CHILDREN EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES. THIS MAKES UP 50 PERCENT OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

WHAT YOU CAN DO: CALL THE MAYOR 415-554-6141

Ask that he include in his budget a new, full service family shelter and provide more housing subsidies and affordable housing for families!
WHERE IS THE REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE FOR HOMELESS WOMEN?

GIANNI JONES

The care of women’s bodies physically, socially, politically, and emotionally regardless of age, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity or socioeconomic background are essential. Many women’s rights to reproductive health and family planning services are being violated through recent actions by the Trump administration plans to stop funding to programs such as Planned Parenthood. Eradicating women reproductive health services prove to be detrimental to the psyche of society as a whole. Furthermore, creating space to celebrate and protect the bodies of women are important.

It is the right of women across the United States—and across the world—to have access to reproductive health services such as sexually transmitted infection testing, fertility services and pregnancy care, as well as breast and cervical cancer screenings. Health care access represents more than just physical health needs: it also represents healing towards emotional and psychological health for many homeless and low-income women. However, the current actions under the Trump administration threatens these very rights.

During the past month, the Trump administration announced its plan to stop funding a U.N. program providing reproductive health services to women across the globe. In fact, Trump has gone as far as to discontinue former first lady Michelle Obama’s “Let Girls Learn” program. This initiative empowered girls to get the education that they otherwise may not have access to. Obviously, these are inhumane and targeted, violent actions against women and girls by the current administration.

Low-income and homeless women need access to services from organizations such as Planned Parenthood, Women’s Community Clinic, and Women’s Health Justice. Organizations such as these offer gynecology, primary care and counseling services to girls and women, many who would not otherwise have access to healthcare.

The ACCESS Healthline through Women’s Health Justice helps women in California address reproductive health needs. The organization provides confidential referrals and peer counseling on various women’s reproductive issues including pap smears, prenatal care, safer sex and relationships. In turn, such support in linking to referrals and peer counseling on various women’s reproductive issues including pap smears, prenatal care, safer sex and relationships. In turn, such support in linking to resources can lead to increased access to medical care.

In many cases, homeless women are not medically insured and face health issues surrounding unplanned pregnancy and limited menstrual cycle sanitation options. That’s why health clinics that serve homeless and low-income women are so important. They provide much needed accessible reproductive health services. In fact, Planned Parenthood participates annually in a fair put on by Project Homeless Connect, a San Francisco social service organization.

Let’s celebrate the beauty and diversity that each woman’s body represents. Emperor of mothers and mother figures with the way they care for others (though we acknowledge not all mothers are caring).

I’ve been living here in San Francisco going on the last seven years, and I have had my fair share of violence towards me, such as being in my tent asleep while someone burned it down with me inside. The San Francisco Police Department also had a few involvements as well, from Luis Gonzaga Pat and Jessica Williams, two homeless people who were killed in officer-involved shootings, just to name a few. And let’s not forget the innocent individuals who also suffered from street-based violence such as Eddie Tate, Terry Hopkins and Joe Hum.

These individuals were innocent individuals who were homeless and were victims of violent crimes committed against them. My brother who just passed away was stabbed and died from his injuries on April 21, 2017. The person who did it, whose identity is being kept secret, really doesn’t understand who he took from us, and I feel that he really doesn’t give a care about what he did. I also feel that the housed residents of San Francisco don’t give a care either about homeless people either.

I believe it or not, some of us do have families who do worry and care for us. Even though we are not around our immediate families, it doesn’t mean we haven’t built extended families while being out here in the streets. And they mean just as much to us like the families we grew up with. Just recently, I was jumped by two guys for no particular reason.

See, I understand how people view us out here in San Francisco. But when are the housed residents of SF gonna have a heart for us? The violence against the homeless is NOT fair at all. We are human as well. Those innocent individuals became victimized and are no longer here with us, and all we are left with is the hurt, the pain and sorrow of our loved ones not being here with us.

So I challenge the Mayor, all City officials and lawmakers to come together and fight for justice for these families who have to go to sleep every night knowing that their loved one is never coming back to them. And let those who have passed away be put to rest with the justice they deserve.

Please stop sweeping these incidents under the rug like they don’t matter to any-one and catch these people who are taking our loved ones away from us.

I am currently in the process of gathering up funds to help out the family of Terry Hopkins for his burial. If you have any questions on how you can help donate money to the family, please feel free to email Kelley Culter at cutleri@cohsf.org or email me, Shyene Brown, at shybrown1808@gmail.com. All donations and proceeds will go to the family of Terry Hopkins.

Writer’s Corner

People often associate mothers and mother figures with the way they care for others (though we acknowledge not all mothers are caring).

In honor of Mother’s Day, I want to take some time to acknowledge and celebrate the folks in your life that cared for you. List 10 specific moments you felt cared for.

Then, drawing on this list for inspiration, write a poem celebrating one or more folks who showed you love. If you need a place to start, you can use the ghostlines, “I found love...” or “Love lives...”

This writing prompt is brought to you by GHOSTLINES. Ghostlines is a Bay Area collective of poets, artists, and educators comprised of Ariana Weckstein, Gabriel Cortez, Isabella Borgeson, Jade Cho, Natasha Huey. We are committed to using art to cultivate empathy. To disrupt violent systems and thought. To nurture and challenge ourselves and our communities to rise. WWW.GHOSTLINESCOLLECTIVE.TUMBLR.COM

IF YOU’D LIKE TO SHARE YOUR WRITING WITH THE STREET SHEET, YOU CAN E-MAIL STREETSheet@cohsf.org OR MAIL TO STREET SHEET 468 TURK ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102.
REST IN POWER, ROBERT SCALLON

One of our dear vendors, Robert Scallon, passed away on April 27th, 2017 in Golden Gate Park.

“Tired to encounter Rob several times a week as I walked down Larkin to the Street Sheet office on Turk. Rob would be manning his post outside Saigon Sandwich, cheerfully vending the latest issue,” says Scott Nelson, Street Sheet vendor coordinator. “Sometimes his customers would give him a sandwich from the store, and on more than one occasion he offered the sandwich to me. Rob was a really friendly person, always in a good mood, and a true believer in the benefits of cannabis use. We will sincerely miss him at the Street Sheet.”

Rest in peace, Robert. You are already missed. The following is his vendor profile.

I’m on GA [general assistance], and it pays for my rent. But I don’t have any money besides that, so I sell the Street Sheet to make ends meet. To buy dinner and whatever I need. Pocket change, basically. I’ve been selling for about three years now, and it’s been able to feed me.

I was born in Miami. I grew up in Fort Lauderdale. I moved to Chicago when I was 21 and I moved out here in 2009 with my wife. It’s like I moved west across the continent. I love it here in Cali. It’s a great state and there are beautiful people. My wife wanted to come out here to California and I promised her I would take her, so I did, but she passed away two years ago.

I was working, but I got sick when I came out here. I used to sell advertisements for radio stations, and it was a pain in the ass. It was so cut throat, but I did well at it. That was when I was younger, I’m mellow now. I don’t want to be hyped up like that anymore. I got a heart disease, a heart failure actually. I really just cannot work anymore and so I sit here and sell the papers. I love this neighborhood [the Tenderloin]. I love sitting here and meeting all of these people. One of my favorite things about the Tenderloin is that it’s real. People here are real. They’re full of love, you know? I appreciate that. You get some knuckleheads, of course, but people here are genuine, and I really like that.

Saigon Sandwich is my favorite spot in the Tenderloin. It’s where I sell the Street Sheet everyday. I have a lot of regular customers—I had one guy hand me a hundred dollars for a paper! I just sit here and I converse with people in my neighborhood. I’m just a cat out here selling papers.

If I could tell my younger self anything, I would tell him, think before you act, because when you go off and do something, you might screw up real quick.