Our City Our Home

A look back at the people, power that passed Prop C
Family shelter, reimaged and reinvented
Haight CAMP, a respite for unhoused residents through the pandemic
Putting Prop C to work with critical drug treatment services
Everyone deserves mental health care
In August of 2018, I became homeless with my daughter, who was 8 years old at the time. After staying a few weeks somewhere unsafe for us, I found myself at the emergency family shelter at the First Friendship Institutional Baptist Church near Alamo Square. I was so unprepared for what I encountered at First Friendship: mats on the floor, no showers and no privacy. Having breakfast and dinner served to us was the highlight of this horrible living situation. But for me, the hardest part was having to be out of the shelter by 7 a.m., even on weekends. One Friday, my daughter was extremely sick and ended up leaving the shelter in the night by ambulance. When we arrived back later that night, we barely had enough time to sleep before we had to get back up to figure out where to go that day. That was hard. We had no place to be when my daughter needed rest to heal from being sick.

At the same time we were going through this, I applied for a peer organizer position here at the Coalition on Homelessness. I was hired during the big push for Proposition C. I had no campaign experience, but I was enthusiastic about Prop. C because I knew that if it passed, it would help homeless people. Experiencing homelessness and then becoming an advocate for homeless folks has been life-changing.

By the time Prop. C passed in 2018, I had long since transitioned from First Friendship to a private room in a family shelter, which was a vast improvement over First Friendship. We had our own room, which was extremely small with no private bathroom. But it provided us with privacy until something better came along. I didn’t have to worry that if my daughter got sick we would have to get up and leave.

Every opportunity that I have had since then, I have advocated for families still stuck at the First Friendship shelter long after I had left.

Then, COVID-19 happened. Because of the risks posed by the pandemic, the congregate First Friendship shelter was shut down, and an opportunity arose for families to have a private space to eat, bathe and sleep. A place where if your child is sick, they are able to stay and rest. This is what the Oasis family shelter offers to homeless families.

I had an opportunity to speak with Supervisor Dean Preston shortly after he was elected about my experience in First Friendship. He then took the time to go to the shelter himself and see the conditions in which families are living.

Back in 2020, I was experiencing homelessness with my two young children, and trying to find a way out. After speaking with a few intake workers, CalWORKS staff and housing workers, my family was finally placed in the Oasis hotel through the Coordinated Entry system.

I arrived in the middle of November 2020, and once I got my key with excitement and nerves, I entered my room. To my surprise, it looked really nice. The room was huge! It might have had something to do with us being placed in the corner room, or maybe we had gotten lucky, but either way I was very blessed and pleased. My kids were just as in love with the place as I was: it was peace of mind, it was a hot shower every night, it was space. Shoot, it was our new home. The room had lots of closet space, more than enough room for all of our clothes, and the bathroom was spacious, with a working shower and tub (great for relaxing bubble baths)! There were lots of tables and chairs, and room for other items and a place to sit other than on the bed. The beds were very comfortable and there were only two, so I of course shared my bed with my 9-year-old daughter and my oldest son. My 14-year-old got the second bed alone!

The other great thing about living at the hotel was that we got meals three times a day. Breakfast might include a breakfast burrito, pancakes (to re-heat), oatmeal that you can make yourself, or cereal and milk. Lunch was hot food: chicken with veggies and bread, tacos or fried fish. Dinner sometimes included a roast with potatoes, hamburgers and fries, or pizza—some days, it was hit-or-miss, taste-wise, so I learned to get seasoning and hot sauce just in case! But some days it was so bad, I would have to pay out of pocket for some tasty fast food.

Another awesome bonus was that we went from getting $40 per month for washing our clothes to the shelter providing laundry services. We would put our clothes in a huge bag, set it out by our door on a Monday morning, and our clothes would be back by Wednesday morning with all clothes not only washed, but folded—even socks and underwear!

Once the shelter found a good case worker, I was able to meet with him or her once a week to talk about all of my needs such as housing-, job- and school-related items to get me on track while staying at the shelter. I also was a part of the weekly meeting to discuss other needs, such as how my stay was at the shelter, if my neighbors were being cool or if there was anything wrong in my room. Since this was a shelter-in-place hotel, I was able to get room service, but only once a week on Fridays. A housekeeper would vacuum, take trash out, change the sheets, make our beds, and clean the bathroom. She was always an awesome job. She also always looked how clean I kept my room—this might also have something to do with my OCD!

Staff was always helpful, they did three check-ins per day—morning, noon and night—to make sure you were safe and alive and to make sure you didn’t need anything. When you did, they were really great about helping.

Oasis was unlike any other shelter that I have been at. It was by far the best one, hands down. It felt like a right-place, right-time situation for me. It was not overbearing for me at all. I loved this place. I was one of few residents that really saw this opportunity as more than just a shelter, but instead as a way to really use what I had and to make something out of my time while I was there.

Since then I have been able to find stable housing in Pittsburg, CA. I really appreciate the second chance. This was really life-changing for me, and I know it will be for a lot of other families like mine.
In the midst of COVID-19, a community-led encampment in the Haight Ashbury offered an oasis for formerly homeless community members. Thanks to Proposition C, Campbell did a 100% safe place to stay, daily meals and important services—and most importantly, a say in how the operation was run.

When the pandemic struck in March 2020, Mayor London Breed issued a shelter-in-place order. But that order didn’t apply to those who had no shelter. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) told cities they shouldn’t move encampments and that tents offered a small amount of protection from COVID-spread. The city scrambled to open up shelter-in-place hotels, but it quickly became clear that they wouldn’t open enough hotel rooms for all of San Francisco’s unhoused homeless folks. What about those who weren’t offered a hotel room?

Those of us with the Homeless Youth Alliance (HYA) in the Haight Ashbury pondered whether that was truly what our community would want. So we developed a simple survey, giving people four options to rate from first to last choice: a “hotel room,” a “legal campsite,” “emergency shelter” and to “just keep doing what you’re doing.” HYA polled 50 participants. The idea to include legal campsites as an option was driven by curiosity, as we knew that other cities have employed encampments before. The city didn’t even discuss this option. HYA and community advocates created a plan to turn an empty parking lot at 7300 Sanyan St into a community-led sanctioned encampment called Community Action Made 4 People (CAMP). CAMP had space for 40 tents, and when the city allowed HYA to move forward with the encampment in May 2020, there was already a waitlist of local folks who wanted spots. The attraction was clear: bathrooms, showers, access to personal space and personalization during a deadly pandemic, and no more daily visits from local police. The residents of CAMP would also receive three meals, supplied by the Salvation Army. The City encouraged CAMP residents to stay sheltered inside the fenced walls, and wanted to provide meals and bathrooms to discourage folks from leaving, to minimize the risk of spreading COVID—but people were ultimately free to come and go as they pleased at all hours of the day.

Houseless people welcomed the opportunity to shelter somewhere safe. “I am grateful for this place,” said Lester, 37. “It feels like a cocoon where I’m getting some healing and nurturing. As you allow us to be more humanized, we respond to the opportunity. I am a veteran, and when I’m out on the street I can’t sleep because it’s so loud and potential danger keeps me from relaxing. Being able to lay down and sleep and get rest is really healing for me.”

CAMP was allowed to operate for a full year, until June 2021, and it always had a waitlist. CAMP wound down operations after COVID vaccinations became available, and because the parking lot it was on was slated for construction of affordable housing. HYA also wanted to ensure residents had real exits (not back to the street) so we made the decision to close the site and advocate for every single resident to have the most successful placement possible.

CAMP was more than an emergency solution and a pandemic response. It was a successful model for future sanctioned encampments in San Francisco. It was a beautiful and transformative project for the community and home to its residents.

In total, 84 people passed through CAMP. More than half moved into stable housing exits or other emergency shelters, including hotel rooms, navigation centers and safe sleep sites across the city. Another quarter chose to leave town.

There were several key ingredients to CAMP’s success. First and foremost, CAMP was operated by a service provider with trusted relationships and experience serving homeless folks in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood. Said one camper in its exit interview: “I can’t say enough about how different HYA is from other agencies. That memory I had of coming here and having no judgment is something that is what this agency is about.” Let us see the clients participate in a different way than a lot of other agencies makes us feel involved and that we have a voice in what happens to this organization. We feel like this is our safe space to be, and we all respect each other here. Respect is not something you get a lot on the street.”

Second, the services offered to CAMP residents provided the necessary support and infrastructure for people to work on personal goals. Some campers were connected to job training programs, and others to therapy and drug treatment services. All campers had a space to themselves where they could get a good night’s sleep, take a shower, get new clothes, eat healthy meals, and come and go without worry that their belongings would be taken.

Third, the surrounding community of housed neighbors embraced CAMP, making personal connections and supporting campers by procuring helpful gear like canopies to protect them from sun and rain. Neighbors cooked monthly “feasts,” which they shared with campers in an outdoor and socially distanced setting, getting to know one another.

Fourth, HYA said it was critical for CAMP to retain intake control and ensure a cohesive community. Where other camp sites around the city accepted people caught up in City sweeps, HYA ensured that the community grew organically, with campers having a role in setting CAMP rules and guidelines.

The Haight Ashbury lacks a navigation center of its own, in spite of decades of people sleeping on its sidewalks and in doorways. CAMP showed the community that services and a safe place to sleep were desperately needed and desired. While CAMP had to shutter to make room for a new eight-story building of affordable housing, the new building is scheduled to have approximately 40 rooms for formerly homeless youth as well as a drop-in space for Haight Ashbury homeless youth, all of which will be made possible because of Proposition C. CAMP is surely a preview for what to come at that site in a few years’ time.

More quotes from HYA CAMP residents:

“I love having the ability to use the bathrooms and the showers and having a safe setting so I can go take care of things outside of here like food stamps, legal issues, and other things that need to get taken care of. The staff helps us and reminds us of appointments and organizing all of the things I need to do. If I didn’t have help I wouldn’t be able to accomplish a lot of the things I need to get done. It makes the biggest difference. If I was still out on the street I wouldn’t have gotten any of that done.” – Lou, 35, resident

From the first report “Watching how each resident personalizes their space is amazing. Upon moving in, people get settled and begin to decompress from the stress and trauma of the street, we see how swift people’s demeanor and spirit unravels—proving the power and health benefits of personal space, safety and hygiene facilities. These are human rights, not just chances we take in response to a pandemic.” — Mary Howe

“We set out to create a refuge for people experiencing homelessness that embodied HYA’s ethics and practices and that was deeply rooted in Harm Reduction and social justice principles. We started from the place of asking and listening to what people needed and wanted, honoring their autonomy and their expertise in their own lives.” – Eliza Wheeler CAMP’s Project Director
WE KEPT OUR EYES TRAINED ON HOME

In 2018, the Coalition on Homelessness worked hard to craft and then pass Proposition C, “Our City Our Home,” to make significant systemic changes to address homelessness. The measure, which taxes the most profitable San Francisco corporations with annual incomes over $50 million an average of one-half percent, garnered around $500 million for homelessness every year. At least half of the funding must go to housing, and at least a quarter must go to mental health and substance use treatment. At most, 10% can go to shelter, and at most 15% to prevent homelessness.

The measure will help stop an intergenerational cycle of severe poverty and homelessness and ensure San Franciscans have the opportunity to flourish. It works to prevent people from entering homelessness in the first place, and when homelessness is unpreventable, the measure works to ensure it’s brief. We heavily invested in the housing piece because we believe it is impossible to address unemployment, health and behavioral issues without stable housing.

With a tremendous people-powered effort we passed this legislation moving us toward a San Francisco in which every person has safe and permanent housing. But the story of Prop. C started long before that election and reflects years of collective work to finally get here.

The history of Proposition C goes back decades and spans years of struggle, failure, victories, learning, building, crying until there were no tears left to shed. But along the way, we never let ourselves get lost. We kept our eyes trained on home, and we won a landslide victory.

Social change can only be realized when the right conditions are in place: conditions that grow over time through the hard work of community organizing. Homelessness is where various forms of oppression meet: Racism, homophobia, ableism and sexism are all drivers of the homeless crisis. Homeless people are the living reflection of severe economic injustice. Their faces are maps of suffering, of the real life results of unfettered capitalism and collective neglect through inaction. Their early deaths are a quiet reminder of our failure as a progressive city. Homeless people have been used as political scapegoats and wedges for the past three decades. In just about every mayoral campaign since Dianne Feinstein’s, they have been vilified. Voter initiatives called for their jailing for asking for alms, or for sitting or resting during daytime hours, while another called for ripping away their tents in exchange for an offer of one night in shelter. In each of these campaigns, homeless people were treated like pawns in a chess game that sought more power for downtown interests. Other voter initiatives were designed to fail, like “Care Not Cash” or the sales tax initiative that forced the poorest people to pay the most, which were really meant to bring name recognition to an up-and-coming politician such as Gavin Newsom or Mark Farrell rather than truly address the crisis.

Year after year, more and more people entered homelessness, while their health deteriorated rapidly, and decades were shaved off their lives. These backw ard-push ing forces meant it took decades of work, together with key partners in San Francisco, to create the conditions for lasting change that Proposition C represents. It took decades of leadership work, developing strong alliances with other community organizations and labor unions, protesting, developing policy, engaging in tireless media work and pushing for legislation.

We pushed back effectively against the dehumanization of a population and their use as political wedges by hateful forces, while we continued to put out messages of hope and possibility.

About a decade ago, the Occupy movement set up tents in public squares, and many homeless people joined the struggle. But long after housed movement members took down their tents, homeless people kept theirs up. They offered a modicum of privacy and dignity, and also lent a visibility to the homeless crisis that did not exist previously. Mass displacement meant everyday San Franciscans were relating to homeless people for the first time in decades. They saw themselves—precarious and threatened—in the faces of homeless people.

A court ruling on a marijuana dispensary case opened up the opportunity to pass Prop. C with a simple majority of voters, rather than two-thirds. While we knew we would be sued if we didn’t reach two-thirds, it was still worth trying, because the likelihood of success in the courtroom was high. We also needed to make sure there were not a lot of competing measures on the ballot—this had hurt us in the past. We were able to persuade our allies into getting behind our measure instead of offering competing revenue measures. Lastly, a Trump tax giveaway dropped the federal corporate taxes by 40 percent and gave us the opportunity to capture that revenue and use it to bring thousands of San Franciscans inside homes. This was our moment. Learning from the past losses of politically driven measures, we crafted a measure that was big and bold, with an income source that draws only from those who could truly afford to pay.

Meanwhile, the call for a radical change was growing.

Over the course of 10 months, we gathered data, solicited input, held presentations, conducted a poll and hired lawyers to draft a measure. We went through dozens of drafts, soliciting and including input from hundreds of policymakers, elected officials, homeless people, front-line service providers, business leaders, City department heads and every major mayoral candidate. We made sure we had a strong implementation plan and knew exactly what could be achieved and how.

We had inclusive meetings that all stakeholders were invited to attend and honed the language until we were collectively satisfied with the results. We had jumped our first hurdle.

We had some basic requirements: The initiative needed to be big and take a massive bite out of homelessness. We wanted to not just address the needs of those who were already homeless, we also wanted to ensure we kept precariously housed San Franciscans in their homes. We wanted children and young people to have the housing they need to prevent a homelessness. After careful consid measure “Our City, Our Home,” coi housing activist and director at the The name was chosen to embrace i inclusiveness, as well as the princi human right.

In May 2018, we invited three ama Jacquelineyne Evans, a community leader, Christin Evans, a small bu Haight Merchants Association; an DISH, a supportive housing organi Our Home” to the Department of E of the measure was approved we were nervous and recognized our 1,000 signatures was a huge under the beginning of July we recruited gathered. It turned out that we did gather a whopping (and potent signatures, which catapulted us ov balle!

We were riding high on a wave of few weeks of the campaign. Begin to expand the campaign. Organiza been at odds all came on board; inc Community Housing Organizer B. Toklas Democratic Clubs, and the Neighborhoods. We gathered ballo of San Franciscans and a host of 5450,000 from a variety of donors, tech workers, unions, community y started a strong field campaign e calls. We had successful Chinese ai teams and our campaigns were w outlets. The campaign spoke to the equity that San Franciscans are cti endorsements of Reps. Nancy Pelosi Dianne Feinstein. Support just kep

One month before the vote, Mayor against the measure, alongside 3a then-Assemblymember David Chu announced, the Our City, Our I CEO Marc Benioff crossed paths in, Twitter exchange between the bill Christin Evans. After heated discu out in favor of Prop. C.

The final month before the election on board and sparring with other t Prop. C, international attention tu dollars from Benioff, we hired 21 phone calls to over 99,000 voters, a
I whole new generation of iteration, we decided to name the remedy Krea Gomez, a longtime leader and recently homeless woman who served as the coalition’s director. We submitted “Our City, Our Home,” coined by Krea Gomez, a longtime advocate for homeless people, and is data-driven to ensure equitable treatment, and shelter, but ultimately back on the streets in a cruel response system and what needed to change. The results suggested that the next generation has a safe and decent place to call home. This was an uncompromising measure that directly corrected the imaginings of our allies. Together we can end the plague of apathy. There is a lot to learn from this campaign, and one of the biggest lessons is that in order to succeed we must inspire the hearts and minds of our city’s residents. We entitled the report “Stop the Revolving Door.”

While we were fighting in the courts, we dedicated ourselves to contacting folks who have experienced homelessness who could be on an oversight board that would survey homeless people on how best to use these funds, and to preparing the projects for when funding would be released. We engaged in an in-depth study, working with four different universities and hiring unhoused peers to conduct almost 600 interviews with unhoused community members on their experiences within the homeless response system and what needed to change. The results suggested a deeply flawed system that sent folks in and out of housing, treatment, and shelter, but ultimately back on the streets in a cruel churn. We entitiled the report “Stop the Revolving Door.”

While Prop C didn’t get two-thirds of the vote, we built the political will necessary to bring us to the finish line. The lawsuit only delayed the release of the funds. We won in October 2020, and the funds were finally available. While the City Attorney Herrera went to bat for Prop C in court, it was our legal team that won the lawsuit. When making our case at every level of the courts, our side cited the amisubs briefs of our allies. The City Attorney never used our arguments, but in the end that didn’t matter. Prop C was not only a victory for homeless people, it was a victory for democracy in California. Because of us, special taxes — those taxes that fund specific things — only require a simple majority to pass.

We now face the work of making sure our vision is implemented in a way that is centered on the experiences and needs of homeless people, and is data-driven to ensure best results. Once the court case was won, the funds were available and had accumulated over two years. The Our City, Our Home oversight body was seated, and we went through a process of gathering even more input from over 800 unhoused people and service providers on how best to spend the funds, examining best practices and data. In the first year after the release of the funds there have been two major releases of funds at the Board of Supervisors. Cumulatively they will achieve:

- Over 1,000 adults, families and youth will have rental assistance to afford their own housing
- At least 1,387 units will be purchased with funding for operating costs for adults, families and youth
- There will be 343 additional behavioral health beds, plus over $200 million for acquiring facilities to add an undetermined number of treatment beds
- Eviction prevention legal services and back rent will be available for 7,000 households
- 1,000 new shelter beds will be made available in a variety of settings including organized tent villages, trailers, RV parks, hotel rooms and permanent dignified private room emergency shelter for families

And that’s just the start. In the coming years, the system will be transformed with building capacity to turn around the homeless crisis, especially if leveraged with state and federal investment. For decades we have struggled through a system built on the idea that if you make homelessness undignified and miserable for people, they will simply. Prop C moves us toward a new system that keeps people in their homes and quickly moves people out of homelessness before deep harm sets in. This will take decades to build. The harm done to unhoused people who have been homeless for decades will not be easy to turn around. Building out the system, acquiring buildings, training and hiring staff will take time. But once the system is up and running, we can stop the inflow into homelessness, and have enough turnaround in our system so people don’t have to wait years for housing.

There is a lot to learn from this campaign, and one of the biggest lessons is that in order to succeed we must inspire the hearts and imaginations of our allies. Together we can end the plague of apathy. This was an uncompromising measure that directly corrected some of the severe inequities that concern so many of us who love this city. The measure taxes only the wealthiest corporations and houses the very poorest people. There is a simple beauty in that. A beauty that inspired thousands of San Franciscans to support this campaign.

We can never take back the harm that has been done to the thousands of unhoused San Franciscans by an affluent society that allows its poorest people to suffer so severely. But we can make sure that the next generation has a safe and decent place to call home. Someday we’ll look back from a future in which everyone has a home and share our heads in wonder at how we ever let things get so bad. Our heartfelt thanks to San Francisco and all those wonderful warriors who poured their sweat and tears into lifting us towards justice. Hasta la Victoria!
COME AS YOU ARE: Mental Health Care and Drug Treatment, Prop C Style

Helen Redmond

Make a left from Harrison onto Merlin Street in San Francisco’s South of Market neighborhood and you enter another world. Past two low-slung, industrial buildings and under a noisily freeway is a scene that has come to define San Francisco. Trees line the sidewalks, and a collection of household items tumble out onto the street. There are cardboard boxes, coolers, overflowing garbage bags, containers of food, grills, chairs, and a pile of bicycles. A huge clock is attached to a chain-link fence and on top of it sits a red toy truck. A makeshift clothesline dries shirts and pants in the dusty air. An elderly man sits in a wheelchair. Parked on the street is a black pick-up truck and several large, rusting RVs. Merlin Street is a mini homeless community just one block from luxury condos that cost millions. The streets of San Francisco tell a brutal story of wealth, poverty, and the pursuit of profit over the housing needs of human beings.

Thanks to the advocacy of the Coalition on Homelessness which worked to pass Proposition C, a low-threshold drop-in harm reduction mental health center operated by the Harm Reduction Therapy Center (HRTC) will soon open to serve the homeless folks living on Merlin. While HRTC does not have Prop C funding yet, it has managed to secure a site in SOMA. While there will be a competitive process to decide who gets the funding, the hope that Prop C funding will be secured provided the final impetus to open the site, which is a dream come true for HRTC’s founders, Jeanie Little and Patt Denning. People in need of high quality therapy will be able to walk in and feel welcome.

HRTC’s harm reduction services coordinator, James Pollet, provided a tour of the cinder block building. From the outside, it looked like just another abandoned warehouse with a garage door next to an entrance with a locked iron gate. But as I stepped inside, I saw a huge, modern space. I was immediately struck by the amount of light bouncing off the white walls from several skylights. Part café, art house hangout, part living room, and part “maybe get some help because it looks like there are some therapy offices here” vibe, Merlin, as the staff like to call it, was welcoming and intriguing. Pollet, who is also an architect, used his skills to create a beautiful and inviting space, and installed acoustic panels that hang from the ceiling to dampen sound and create intimacy. In the main living room area large, comfortable couches and chairs rest on Persian rugs surrounded by lamps that spill butter-colored light. Around the perimeter are private therapy offices, meeting rooms, a kitchen, computer workstations, and an accessible bathroom. A second-floor mezzanine holds administration and harm reduction supply assembly spaces. Art is everywhere, murals are dreamed-of, and a timeline depicting the history of the harm reduction movement, HRTC, and its staff occupies an entire wall. Although the space is still under construction, it projects a sense of dignity, respect, freedom, and comfort.

“Our job is to let people know that they are loved and that they matter.” Corey Drew, HRTC therapist.

“Merlin is the physical embodiment of HRTC’s vision to provide mental health services to all people who suffer emotionally, physically, and who are stigmatized and excluded because they use drugs,” Pollet said and he showed off the space.

A NEW KIND OF MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

People might believe that therapy is a luxury, that other needs should be met first for people who are homeless and marginalized. That is just wrong. Harm reduction therapy was created for people who have multiple issues, overwhelming life demands, and a strong desire to make their own informed decisions about how to cope with stress and live their lives. HRTC brings together a sophisticated understanding of mental health, total acceptance of drugs and drug use as a way of living and coping, harm reduction, case management, and other necessities – food, harm reduction supplies, massage (from the non-profit Care Through Touch Institute), and love – in a therapy package that can happen sitting on a sidewalk chatting or in a private office having your typical 30-minute session. You can have therapy and work all the other things you need and be actively using drugs, all at the same time.

“Our job is to let people know that they are loved and that they matter.” Corey Drew, HRTC therapist.

This is the heartbeat of harm reduction therapy, to do anything and everything to make sure people know they are loved and valued. From there all else flows.

Readers of Street Sheet might recognize HRTC as the group behind a couple of therapy vans, weekly pop-up drop-in centers, and a mobile kitchen in SF neighborhoods in 2019. While they had to downsize their pop-ups when COVID hit, they’re still there – at Victoria Manolo Draves Park off Folsom, at 15th and Mission, at Armstrong in the Bayview, and walking the TL with Street Medicine – just smaller. Some staff went to work in Shelter in Place hotels and Safe Camps and are still there, too. Readers might also know them as the therapists at Hospitality House and at Homeless Youth Alliance’s Needle Exchange. Every week HRTC’s therapists can be found in 20 different locations.

COMING IN 2022

Prop C has provided the inspiration—and hopefully soon the funding—for HRTC to open its own drop-in mental health center. Once funding is secured, HRTC will open that garage door to everyone who wants harm reduction therapy. When that happens you will find our harm reduction services around the city as well as “at home” at Merlin.

So why is HRTC’s mental health treatment different? We’re different because you don’t have to apply to benefit from our programs. No intakes, no waiting lists, no diagnosis necessary. We welcome people who use drugs with open arms and no conditions at all. You decide what you need, you decide how much and for how long, you tell us what mental health care means for you.

The HRTC mantra is:

Come as you are
Take what you need
Leave when you want

HRTC on Merlin Street is taking a stand for the right to unconditional, truly client-serving, and time-unlimited mental health care for people who have long been denied these services.
INNOVATIVE AND MUCH NEEDED NEW PROGRAM LAUNCHING IN SOMA!

SoMa RISE is an innovative program that will provide low barrier services to people who use drugs in and around the SoMa and Tenderloin areas, with a particular focus on individuals who are marginally housed or are experiencing homelessness, starting this winter. The SoMa RISE Center at 1076 Howard St. will welcome people under the influence of drugs into a safe, indoor setting. We will provide a space for people in crisis to stabilize and get connected to care, services, and housing. HealthRIGHT 360, in partnership with Mayor London Breed and the San Francisco Department of Public Health, will be operating SoMa RISE in a manner that treats all participants with compassion, dignity and respect. SoMa RISE (Recover, Initiate, Support and Engage) was the top recommendation of the Methamphetamine Task Force report two years ago and is in alignment with Mental Health SF. Mental Health SF is a comprehensive plan passed by the SF Board of Supervisors to address mental health and substance use disorder challenges throughout the city. The plan focuses on serving unhoused people with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder and prioritizes getting people off the streets and into care. Opening a drug crisis response center was the number one recommendation of San Francisco’s 2019 Methamphetamine Task Force and SoMa RISE will be part of San Francisco’s system of the care continuum.

This program will be staffed with EMTs, a wellness team including health workers, site support staff, and safety monitors. The program will operate a 24-hour, welcoming, compassionate, trauma-informed, culturally attuned, space that is responsive to participants’ individual needs and focuses on the principles of harm reduction. SoMa RISE will be in a way that ensures that staff creates a human connection with clients and that connection is without judgement. By acting in this manner, it allows clients to participate incrementally in their own recovery at a level they find comfortable. All staff from janitorial workers to EMT’s undergo rigorous training before they start working at SoMa RISE in order to meet these goals. This includes training on radical hospitality, how to practice client centered care, information on trauma informed systems, harm reduction, and anti-stigmatizing language. Alongside providing a safe, comfortable space for clients, our emphasis is on supporting people at increased risk of substance use-related high-risk behaviors and trauma, homelessness, and death due to overdose. Priority will be given to clients’ safety, and all staff will be trained in OD prevention, recognition, response and Narcan administration.

SoMa RISE will also offer options such as hot showers, clean bathrooms, beds, laundry, snacks and hydration drinks. Counselors to support clients with service needs, and transportation to other organizations and service providers.

San Francisco tenants can seek rental support from EDC’s program to prevent eviction in the immediate and buy time as they apply for state funding for rental relief. After the state funding runs out tenants can return to the EDC program for further assistance.

ANNUAL VIGIL

Join us—people of all faiths, or no faith—to remember our neighbors who have died this year while living on the streets and on the margins of San Francisco.

Watch the Vigil live online on 12/16 starting at 5:30 PM (PST) at: facebook.com/sanfranciscocatholicministry/live/

Join the Vigil live in-person, with pandemic protocols, at Civic Center plaza by City Hall starting 5:00 PM on 12/16.

In silence, in prayer, in song we’ll remember them, honor them, mourn our loss, reach out to each other for comfort and hope, and show our solidarity in working for change.

Share this event, spread the word, and join us!
STREET SPEAK

EPISODE 10: What Is the Overdose Crisis and Why Should I Carry Narcan?

The overdose crisis claimed the lives of 700 San Franciscans in 2020—twice the number of COVID-19 deaths during the same period. We speak with Ashley Fairburn, a harm reduction worker at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, about what the overdose crisis is, the disparate impact it has on homeless San Franciscans, and how we can practice harm reduction in our own communities.

Learn more about the overdose crisis and many programs to help keep people who use drugs safe. https://www.sfaf.org/

Support for Street Speak comes from our listeners! Please donate to us online at https://coalition.networkforgood.com