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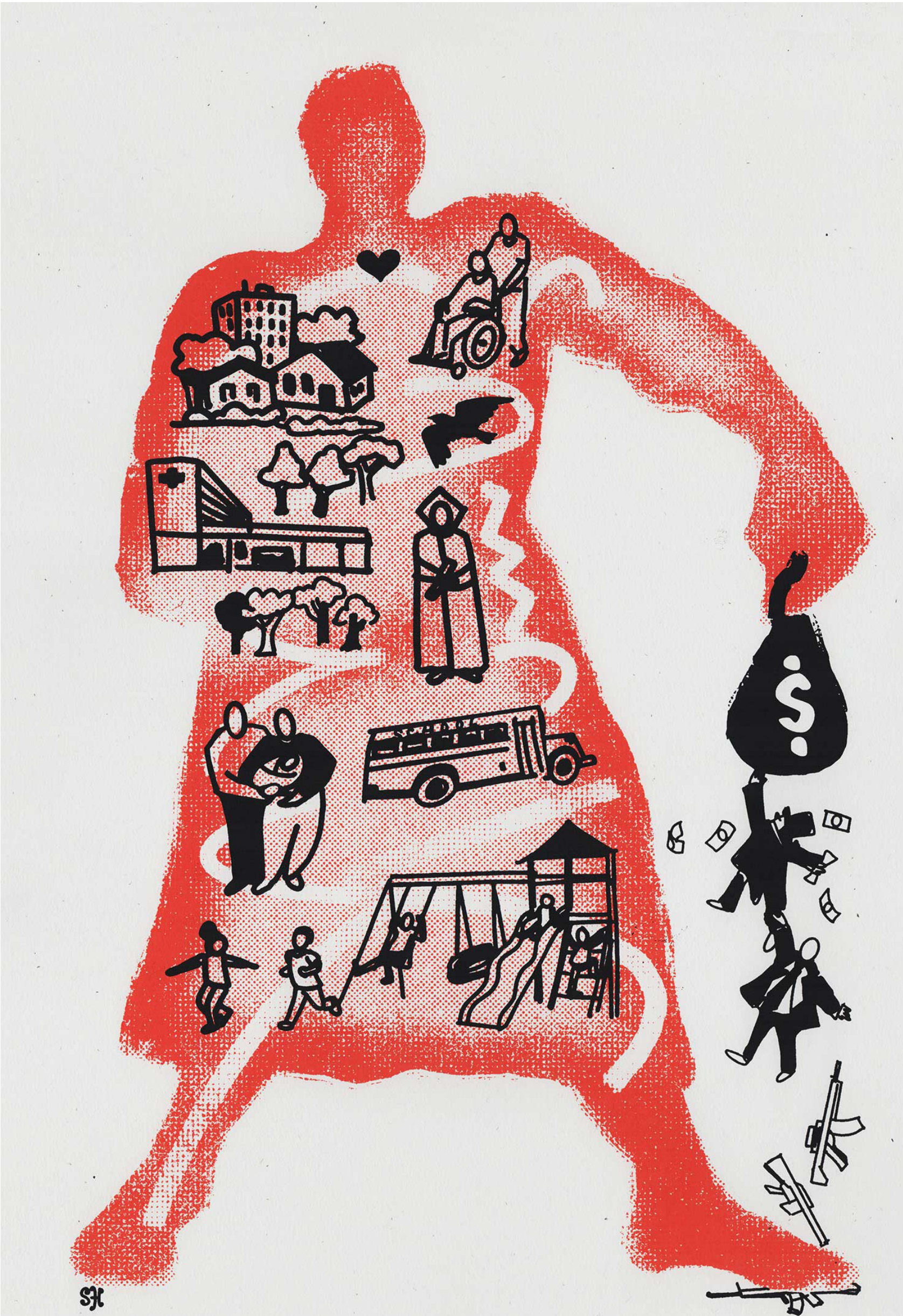
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STREET



WE DEDICATE THIS ISSUE TO **BRIAN EDWARDS** WHO WAS AND WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF OUR FAMILY. HE FOUGHT TIRELESSLY AND BITTERLY FOR JUSTICE FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE AND DRUG USERS IN SAN FRANCISCO.

REST IN POWER.

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LISTEN to **STREET SPEAK**: Episode 10 asks—What is the overdose crisis? A harm reduction worker explores the stigma people who use drugs face and tells us why we should **ALL** carry Narcan! Listen at streetsheet.org/street-speak-podcast/

Do Not SPEAK FOR US

Toshio Meronek, housing activist and journalist, and Miya Sommers, Coordinator with Nikkei Resisters

On October 19, real estate developers and some Japantown residents slid a knife into plans for permanent, supportive housing for homeless people. Instead of converting the failed 131-room tourist Buchanan Hotel into long-term housing for people who need it, the City is backing off thanks to a misinformation campaign spread in part by other Japanese Americans.

According to a statement that has been shared by many Japantown nonprofits, San Francisco’s Japantown is under attack by low-income San Franciscans. In a petition also promoted in the LA-based Japanese American newspaper Rafu Shimpo, they claim that potentially creating permanent housing for elders and disabled people who are homeless would lead to “irreparable harm on the SF Japantown neighborhood.”

Despite its claims, the anti-homeless campaign will not preserve Japanese American culture in the city. And if the campaign is successful, more elders and people with disabilities will be on the streets of Japantown.

We are Japanese Americans who are long-time residents of indigenous Ohlone-Lisjan and Ramaytush land (a.k.a. the Bay Area). We need other Japanese Americans and allies to understand that this dangerous, anti-homeless misinformation campaign that began in August will increase suffering for the majority of San Franciscans. Ultimately, it’s a campaign that will make the rich richer, as it cynically misuses the recent attention around racist, anti-Asian violence, and also rewrites the history of continues on page 3...

WHY WE NEED SAFER CONSUMPTION SITES

Seth Katz

Safer Consumption Sites (also referred to as Safer Injection Facilities, Overdose Prevention Programs, Supervised Consumption Services) have been a hot topic nationwide, but especially here in San Francisco. There are over 25,000 people who inject drugs in San Francisco alone and the overdose crisis has only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many see the rising overdose statistics as a result of fentanyl, despite it being prevalent on the West Coast since around 2014. Those working in drug policy, harm reduction and general substance use tend to recognize that overdose rates rising during quarantine has more to do with resources (including housing, mental health, harm reduction and hygiene) being ripped away from our communities rather than the drug supply itself.

More lives have been lost to overdose than to COVID-19 both last and this year, according to data from the San Francisco Department of Public Health. San Francisco nonprofits, grassroots organizations and community members gather to push for more to be done. Safer Consumption Sites (SCS) work by having naloxone, oxygen and medical staff available to minimize overdose risks. SCS also provides a safe and clean place, without stigma or the pressure to rush. In addition to issues of safety regarding overdose death prevention, SCS offer several other benefits to

people who use drugs and to our communities such as reducing public and visible drug use; reducing risk for abscesses, endocarditis and bacterial infections; reducing risk of infection diseases including Hepatitis C and HIV; reducing improperly discarded syringes; decreasing surrounded criminal activity; improving linkage to other services and resources; encouraging marginalized communities to accessible healthcare; and, of course, one of the most swaying benefits to the City and County: saving millions of dollars in medical expenses.

There are over 120 SCS operating worldwide successfully. Evidence has shown SCS have consistently been effective at reaching their goals including reducing death and harm, reducing public drug use and connecting clients to further services. Also, it has been shown that these sites do not lead to increased crime or injection drug use, but rather the opposite. Most importantly, to this day there have been no instances of overdose deaths in any SCS worldwide. In spite of overwhelming evidence, critics grasp onto myths that people who use drugs won’t use the services provided, that the money is better spent on punitive approaches, or that SCS will cause an increase in neighborhood loitering and crime.

It has been a long and arduous fight for SCS in San Francisco. The first city-wide symposium on SCS was the Alliance for Saving Lives in 2007 at The Women’s Building. The policy fight for SCS began as AB 362 introduced by Susan Talamantes Eggman, before more or less becoming Senate Bill 57 (often referred to as Scott Wiener’s Overdose Prevention Program). The postponement of SB 57 pushed this demand for a call for a public health state of emergency, which brings

us to today.

Demonstrations and policy demands have been championed by the Safer Inside Coalition, a collection of local nonprofits comprising HealthRight360, The Gubbio Project, San Francisco AIDS Foundation, GLIDE Memorial Church and St. James Infirmary. Advocacy work done so far has included demonstrations across the city on Overdose Awareness Day, mobilization at City Hall (including a hunger strike by Gary McCoy as well as a die-in), teach-ins, film screenings and public comment to supervisors. Supervisor Matt Haney has provided tremendous support. His office drafted the resolution calling for a public health state of emergency. The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to support it and urged the mayor to as well. Ideally, declaring a public health state of emergency will push this movement forward by demonstrating strong local support for public health measures rather than criminalization.

There are many ways to get involved and show support in this movement. Organizations and coalitions such as Safer Inside Coalition, San Francisco AIDS Foundation’s HIV Advocacy Network and Yes to SCS California offer updates, petitions and further resources. Being active in community meetings and general conversations is another helpful way to have your voice heard. Anytime issues come up around HIV and Hepatitis C, homelessness, harm reduction, hygiene and/or mental health, bring up and tie in the discussion in your public comment to SCSs and normalize those intersections. Finally, the simplest way to get involved is to empower and educate yourself around harm reduction and harm reduction culture. ■

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COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition’s work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: they bring their agendas to us.

STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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To Japanese Americans who oppose using empty hotels as permanent housing for homeless people: Don't rewrite our history to increase profits for the real estate industry.

continued from page 2... racist redevelopment policies of the 1960s—policies that not only threatened to level Japantown to the ground, but also bleached the Fillmore of many Black residents, and all but demolished the area called Manilatown, where Filipinx people were evicted to make way for today's Financial District and big banks.

If it accomplishes its goal, the anti-homeless campaign will benefit landlords and real estate developers most of all. If leaders in Japantown are truly concerned about the loss of Japanese American culture or small businesses, they are choosing the wrong target, and erasing the fact that there are Japanese American and/or hafu or hapa (half-Japanese) homeless people living here right now.

Thousands of luxury condo units sit empty, while construction continues on new condos that will be affordable to almost no one. Mayor London Breed continues to sweep homeless encampments, moving people with nowhere to go around the city, causing havoc and tragedy, rather than solving the problem of wealth-hoarding in a city that is also home to more billionaires per capita than any other. Breed's anti-homeless policies make it impossible for people to gain stability, as tents and other belongings are taken away during a pandemic with no end in sight.

Not all Japanese Americans believe that poor people are the problem. Some of us actually understand that the real estate industry is the true predator and villain in this story. However, board members and some staff of Japantown nonprofits don't agree, and they're making it seem like there is only one voice in Japantown. The statements they've made co-opt the very real concern of anti-Asian violence, and the haunted histories of Japanese American World War II incarceration and redevelopment, egregiously using these issues to stop supportive, permanent homeless housing in the neighborhood. They also erase Japanese Americans who are currently or formerly homeless—like Japanese American World War II incarceration survivors, who often left the camps after the war with nowhere to go, having been evicted from their homes by landlords and local sheriffs departments at the onset of internment. As descendants of incarceration survivors, we refuse to see our community's trauma used to harm other communities.

Another actual threat to the community are the investors in Beverly Hills who own the Japan Center mall. In 2006, two Southern California-based companies purchased much of the mall. They signed a 15-year agreement, brokered by the city, stating that they would not attempt to convert the space into condos during that time. However, that agreement expires this year and has not yet been renewed. Even before COVID-19, Japan Center's owners were slowly bleeding the place empty. The owners are not interested in preserving community: Langdon Street Capital "seeks to acquire, manage, develop and finance value-add urban infill real estate through syndication of equity and joint venture partnerships," and its partner 3D Investments "prides itself on providing attractive investment options for investors from all over the globe." Langdon and 3D have refused to negotiate rents with small businesses, resulting in the nearly-dead mall that Japan Center is today. In 2007, Japan Center owners began working with architects to draw up plans for condos to replace the mall.

Because of the mall owner's unwillingness to provide more than six months rent forgiveness for small businesses, we saw a number of these community shops shut down. So who is truly a threat to the culture of Japantown?

During the early days of the pandemic, the city only partially followed guidance from medical professionals who advised how to contain the spread of the virus and its stronger variants. The city set up contracts with companies like Urban Alchemy to turn empty parking lots into campsites, and hotels into temporary housing, promising to offer permanent housing to all. The resources spent on these public-private partnerships has resulted in placing few houseless people in permanent homes. Our community cannot rely on corporations like Urban Alchemy or the owners of Japan Center either. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, San Francisco's rents have stayed unaffordable--never dipping below \$3,000. And since July, rents have actually gone up, despite a boom in building over the past decade. Corporate landlords are just getting bigger since the pandemic began, buying up buildings as quickly as they can while corporate media outlets run stories that push the false message that "mom-and-pop" landlords are victims of the pandemic. Sheriffs continue to evict San Franciscans in spite of the "eviction moratorium" that is set to end November 30.

We've seen time and again that real estate is a predatory industry quick to betray local communities—including Japanese Americans. Join the groups who are working to stop landlord consolidation and evictions, such as the Coalition on Homelessness, Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, Gay Shame, Housing Rights Committee, and Western Regional Advocacy Project. Likewise, 4DalyCity is battling the plan to turn over public school land to developers who promise to build a few "affordable" housing units while building hundreds of luxury condos; in Los Angeles this past February, a real estate developer called Pacifica Companies began a wave

of evictions at senior care facilities that served Japanese and Japanese American elders. Organizers (through a coalition called Save Our Seniors) are battling Pacifica now to stop more evictions.

The state has budgeted \$300 million to purchase buildings for permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness, and a few Japanese Americans are out here trying to send back the cash. The SF Homelessness and Supportive Housing department identified a few hotels such as Japantown's Buchanan Hotel as solutions. The Buchanan was a failing tourist hotel owned by a British corporation, the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), and previously the Arizona-based Best Western Hotels & Resorts. At the beginning of the pandemic, IHG leased the building to the City as a shelter-in-place (SIP) hotel for homeless people to curb COVID-19's spread. IHG has no plans to reopen the Buchanan, and it could easily be renovated into a space that would mean hundreds of supportive housing units, and living-wage jobs for people who work there. We desperately need the rooms, because the city has already started shuttering SIP hotels, acting like the pandemic is over. We also can't depend on tourism returning and providing living wages for people here, and until our unhoused neighbors have access to a permanent roof to sleep under, we aren't interested in recreating the "Disneyfied" Japantowns designed by mid-1900s urban planners to appeal to

tourists. Corporate real estate investors like 3D and Langdon are buying up available housing units and leaving them empty, while some of these same landlords are getting ready to mass-evict tenants. If anti-homeless campaign leaders are interested in stopping violence, helping small businesses, and preserving local Japanese American culture, then they should demand that the city help homeless and low-income San Franciscans—Japanese American or not—by purchasing as many empty buildings as possible to give people somewhere to stabilize their lives. For example, the owners of the Majestic Hotel, a couple of blocks east of the Buchanan, are also ready to sell to the City. Before redevelopment, the block where The Buchanan Hotel now stands was residential housing. Back then, the city used "eminent domain" policies to take over Japanese American (and Black and Filipinx) homes. Today the City could use eminent domain to take back land from rich tax-evaders and use it to shelter San Francisco's most vulnerable residents.

Saying that permanent supportive housing will destroy the community rewrites the history of Japanese American activism and tenant organizing, twisting it to push a pro-real estate industry message. In the 1960s, the SF Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) was run by a notoriously cruel leader, Justin Herman, who called the land "too valuable to permit poor people to park on it." Backed by groups like SPUR, Herman urged politicians to move the city's population "closer to standard white Anglo-Saxon Protestant characteristics." They succeeded in displacing hundreds of Japanese Americans, not to mention destroying Black community in the nearby Fillmore District, and almost completely leveling the Filipinx neighborhood once known as Manilatown. The City promised anyone displaced financial help to relocate, but failed to deliver. It took grassroots tenant groups like the Committee Against Nihonmachi Evictions (CANE) to save Japantown from total demolition by the SFRA and a Japan-based investment company, Kintetsu Enterprises. CANE stepped in where the City failed, managing to rehouse some of the Japanese American residents who were made homeless through the city's racist policies.

In the 1980s, Japanese Americans became the only ethnic group to receive significant universal financial reparations from the US government, after a 30-year campaign resulted in \$20,000 in reparations for incarcerated. Those who say they want to preserve Japantown's culture need to start with the people first, and we could learn a lot from the work CANE did in the 1970s, as well as movements like Save Our Seniors in LA, and the J-Town Action and Solidarity Network. LA, San Francisco, Seattle organizers repped West Coast Japantowns on a September panel on displacement, and released its own statement demanding "the immediate commandeering of unoccupied hotel units and their conversion into free housing for all who lack housing." There's also the work of indigenous Lisjan-Ohlone people who are currently working on projects like the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, to rematriate some of the Bay Area that was taken from native tribes that were killed and enslaved by European settlers during their brutal colonization of the West Coast.

Stable housing is a basic need, and permanent housing could be a form of reparations for people who are currently unhoused, and who have suffered and continue to suffer because San Francisco's government, and the real estate industry that funds local political campaigns, is very intentionally causing more suffering. We hope that other Japanese Americans will join us and already existing movements to end the silence around this. Speak out with us and our homeless friends, family, and neighbors. ■

BELONG

REST IN POWER, B



Photo by Leslie Dreyer: November 2019 - Stolen Belonging Project and COH were tabling and speaking at the Music City block party. The gesture is Brian's response to Mayor Breed's ongoing denial of city sweeps. "The city isn't stealing everyone's stuff and sweeping folks when it's freezing outside. They're just doing their job." Gimme a fuckin' break.

AN ACROSTIC TO BRIAN

BRIAN
REMAINED
IMAGINATIVE
AND
NEIGHBORLY

ESPECIALLY TO
DYKES
WHILE
ALWAYS
RANTING,
DRINKING,
SWEARING...

FROM THE DYKES WHO LOVE BRIAN FAN CLUB

A Haiku for Brian

By Olivia Glowacki

Damn, Brian
That's what we all say
Miss you everyday

A Limerick for Brian

(Cuz He Was Irish)
By Olivia Glowacki

He left us way too soon,
After the big monsoon,
And while we wept,
On he slept
As the cow jumped over the moon



Most of the chaos that characterized most of the last year has subsided, thank God...I feel like I finally have at least the illusion of control of my life again. If there's chaos or drama these days, it's usually coming from my month old puppy.

—Brian Edwards, October 29th

I can't believe that this amazing, sarcastic, hilarious, fiercely dedicated human is no longer with us. I fucking love you Brian Edwards. Only you could make my blood boil and make me laugh at the same time. We couldn't have done the Stolen Belonging project without you. Seriously, you threw down so hard. Always did. We will continue to fight to stop the sweeps and city theft, and for unhoused folks to get the housing, respect and dignity they deserve in your honor.

Down with the corrupt politicians and city workers treating people like trash and stealing all their possessions. Up with a boldly militant and creative fight for housing as a human right!

Love and gratitude that I got to be in the struggle with you,
Leslie



This one is from him and Michael Rouppe distributing masks out at the camps during the fires in

Brian was a wonderful person to know and will be greatly missed.

—Michael Rouppe

Submitted by Roadkill



BRIAN EDWARDS

passed on November 4. Brian Edwards
solidarity with folks on the streets.

ssness on human rights issues, was a
e as needed with Faithful Fools, Glide
wn in service to ensuring folks on the
et.

ense of humor, sharp analysis and a
His biggest quality, however, was his
eve. His heart was so epic, it always
friends and to give a hand to really
eet.

omeless community and was always
e to keep up with the ever-changing
organizations and unhoused people
Shelter Monitoring Committee going
o testing and vaccines, connected
numerous sweeps, and most recently,
elf-referral to shelter including from
ng Board.

parents, his cat Jeff, his dog Dahmer
dored him.

I was at a D-6 Zoom meeting with Honey Mahogany several months back. Brian started talking and said he wasn't going to use the word 'fuck' today. I began a countdown clock in my head. After 20 minutes, Brian broke down and said the word 'fuck.' I put in the chat that he made it 20 entire minutes without saying 'fuck.' SO funny at the time. He was SO AWARE of his idiosyncrasies. Never ashamed to share his truth be it another bottle of wine or HSOC outrage.
- RJ



Photo by Leslie Dreyer:
Brian when he was invited to talk about the impact of Mayor Breed's sweeps before a 2019 Skywatchers performance. A rare shot for a fella who worked so tirelessly behind the scenes to #StopTheSweeps & get folks the housing/services they needed.

“Street people,” huh? I mean, are these classist electeds & ‘housies’ referring to people made of tarmac, or what?
—Brian Edwards at a COH Human Rights Work Group meeting.

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Hi B,

One time last year during one of our last conversations that didn't just consist of I miss you's or fuck you's, you told me about new community initiatives struggling with City permits and idiots. You wrapped it in the most Brian approach I can imagine:

Like, it's such a clusterfuck that you can't help but laugh, and some people are also pissed at my involvement, and that kind of delights me.

This is exactly how your death feels to me. It is such a fucking clusterfuck, but it's difficult to laugh this time. It couldn't be more of a fucked up cluster fucking fuck. FUCK! But even if I think your heart would be breaking knowing about the pain you've left behind, I'd like to think that you can't help but laugh. It's such a fucking clusterfuck, I'm very pissed of your involvement in this, and I hope that makes you kind of delighted. That would be very much like you. Asshole.

I'm pissed off by the loss of you, and I can't find the words to describe it. Devastated comes to mind. If I told you that, your response would probably be a comment about my outrageous accent. You'd be snarky and rude and I would feel more loved than I do with most of my friends on a regular Thursday. For you, the time or title of the day was of less relevance. You would drink with me at 10 a.m. and call me at 5 a.m., and you would tell people your truth regardless of the situation at hand. Now you're dead, and I'm quite certain I will never know a person like you again in my lifetime. You hold that space in me. You always did, but then, you were there, so acknowledging it didn't seem relevant. I knew a person like you, and I thought I still would in a year or a decade. A naïve idea that you would be there, always. I wouldn't not have a person like you in my lifetime, because I'd have you.

And now I don't. Clusterfuck! Now you can't use a simple sentence or roll your eyes to make me laugh or tell me you miss me in your simple and heartwarming ways or explain to me the things I don't understand or crack a joke that, well, I also don't understand. It's the outrageous accent.

Right now, I just feel the love I have for you and your love for me. Somewhere in between the cracks of that, seeps liquids of anger and disbelief. I can't shake the feeling that if just I... maybe I can take it back. Maybe you can come back. Maybe you could be here. Selfishly, I think of the plans I thought I had time to involve you in. I would fly over and tell you about my job, so you would be proud and snarky and make me feel seen and loved. I'd show you the respect you deserved, then and now. I'd hug you and look you in the eye and try to soothe whatever pain would be in your head in that particular moment, like I always thought I could. I totally couldn't, but still... it was in my plans. And I don't think you knew.

There are so many should haves and could haves in my mind constantly knocking me with a tiny hammer. I'm ashamed that I didn't reach out, when I often thought I should. I'm disappointed that you weren't OK, and that you didn't tell me. I'm embarrassed that I would even think that I'm entitled to know. I'm saddened that I believe that you didn't understand your worth and didn't set more boundaries for yourself.

You helped so many people set boundaries for themselves. You helped them stand up for their rights of housing. You helped them demand harm reduction. You let them know that they were OK when they behaved like dumb pieces of shit. You let them off the hook. You let me off the hook. I didn't see you demand anything for yourself. I certainly didn't see you let yourself off the hook.

Thinking of you in this way makes me believe that your love was a lot like your anger: It wasn't one large piece of land, split into smaller bits that you placed with the people you cared for or fought against. Your love, like your anger, was an infinite space in which entire communities and wine and stoops and words and dogs and even certain people and loads of other things I don't even know floated around. When you loved, you loved hard, and I think that made you angry. When you were angry, you were furious, but you got furious because of the things you loved. It seemed that your love and your anger were mixed up with each other in the same old Jameson bottle you had for a soul. And I imagine that mixture created a space of ambivalence within you. Correct me if I'm

wrong. Oh right. You can't.

Was it love that drove you? Or was it anger? Whatever it was, man, you pushed forward with a gusto made of fire. And whatever it was that you did, it pushed me to fight my fear of inadequacy. Unlike me, you said and did what you thought necessary to make change. Unlike you, I hid behind others who would step up and fight unapologetically. I hid behind you. But you wouldn't let me stay there for long. Thinking back on the outreaches, workshops, hearings, meetings, discussions, more outreaches, and protests... I recall a feeling of you stepping forward into the fire with me still in your shadow. You would take up so much space, you'd yell, you'd laugh, you'd roar and do a fuckton of swearing, all the while I'd be super confused (usually I had no idea what the fuck we were doing (it's the accent)). Then, suddenly, you would grab me, pull me up, throw me into the wildfires and make me say the first thing that came to mind. And however stupidly it came out you were right behind me - like you were right behind everyone - and you would place me back on safe ground and say something soothing like: "That's all?!", and wink or fart or high five or yell some more and remind me that it's not all that serious; that it mattered that I stood up, walked into the fire and fought unapologetically for those who couldn't. A rare lesson that wasn't taught at uni or in a tiny socialist country. Thanks, B.

I took it back with me, the lesson, to the tiny socialist country. And the reality that was you and everything I lived in San Francisco got scooped up and packed away. I came back to another reality. A reality which, in reality, isn't any different today than it was last Thursday. I don't see you. I rarely talk to you. What makes today different from last Thursday is the future in which you are not. And it is the past in all the memories that grief has altered and intensified. You were a lot of things. These thoughts paint a beautiful picture of a righteous warrior and a friend and a love. But you're also an asshole.

So, goodnight, asshole.

—Mirjam Caroline Washuus

I NARROWLY ESCAPED FOSTER CARE WHEN I WAS 15

Eric Curry

I owe an incredible debt to Huckleberry House.

I've always considered myself an open person, but this is not a part of my life I am comfortable talking about. It's taken me several tries to get my thoughts out, but I believe that if my story can shed light on the need for our government to invest in social services, and soften the heart of even just one of our legislators, perhaps my experiences were not in vain.

My relationship with my family has always been complicated. I grew up as the oldest of four in the Outer Mission in San Francisco. My parents were very strict, Conservative, and deeply religious. As punishment my father would hit us with a large stick he used to keep on the window sill, but one day that stick broke while he was hitting my brother and he began to use a black braided belt instead.

The physical punishments became a lot worse once I started high school. I attended George Washington in the Richmond District, which is on the other side of the City from where I lived (and an hour and a half bus ride). Oftentimes after a long day at school and exhausting bus ride home, I didn't want to do anything except take a nap before diving into my homework and repeating it all over again the next day. But that was unacceptable to my father, who demanded that I finish my chores before I start on any homework.

In retrospect things would have been a lot easier had I just listened, but I was a stubborn, outspoken adolescent. My brothers were much more obedient and didn't prioritize school as much as I did, so the bulk of my father's wrath was saved for me.

One day I came home and my father was waiting for me. He had closed off all the doors in the dining room and said I wasn't allowed to leave the room until I had finished doing the laundry for the family. When he reached to grab me, I dove under the dining room table to get away from him. He grabbed my legs to try to pull me out, but

I held onto the center divider with all my strength. Eventually the table broke and he put all his weight on me. As he sat on me, I looked up and watched my mother pick up my little sister and exit the house, leaving me alone with him.

Another time I came home and my father didn't like the pants I was wearing. In a fit of rage, he tore them off of me and then proceeded to rip them to shreds. I never knew what was waiting for me when I got home and it was beginning to affect my grades and mental health.

I was at school one day when I realized that I didn't want to return home. In Health class, I had learned about a place called Huckleberry House, a shelter for runaway and homeless youth. The first of its kind, it was started in 1967 during the Summer of Love right here in San Francisco. While on my lunch break, I met with the school nurse and asked her to help me make an appointment with Huckleberry. I did not return home that afternoon.

Things got better for a little while. Huckleberry connected me with a social worker who made my father sign paperwork promising not to hit us anymore. Eventually he resorted to taking my belongings. He began confiscating my textbooks and schoolwork, and eventually started to take my clothes and shoes too. By this time, my family had a relationship of sorts with the local police department. When I disobeyed, my parents would call the police, and asked them to send certain officers who they knew would take their side. I stayed at Huckleberry House two or three more times.

I'll never forget the day I stopped living at home. I got up early that morning to meet with a childhood friend who had just returned from a summer in China. When I got back home, it was still early so I went back to sleep and put my cell phone on my pillow next to me. While I was asleep, my little brother gave my phone to my mom, who tried to use it as leverage to get me

to do some chore I hadn't completed yet. Eventually someone called the police, and so I decided to sit in the bathroom while I waited for them. Thinking nothing of it, I took a cutting board, cantaloupe, and knife into the bathroom with me; I figured I'd have a snack while waiting for the police to show up. To this day I still shudder when I think about how badly this could have ended up.

When the police arrived, they separated us into different rooms and I went into my bedroom. One cop was particularly nice to me. He told me that he could tell I was a smart kid and that I just needed to use my parents and their resources for a couple more years until I made it to college. He allowed me to pack a bag with some clothes, and looked through it to make sure I didn't pack any contraband items. When it came time for me to leave for Huckleberry House, he motioned for me to lead the way, and so I grabbed my bag and walked toward the front door of the house.

Then in one swift motion, Mr. Nice Cop slammed me against the wall, made me drop my bag, and placed me into handcuffs.

And then just like a common criminal, I was escorted out of the house I grew up in, and placed into the police car waiting out front, for the entire neighborhood to see.

The police took me to Huckleberry House, and I wore the pajamas I arrived in for three days before I was able to access any of my clothing. This ended up being my final and longest stay at the shelter. My social worker tried to convince me to return home with my parents, but I adamantly refused; anything was better than living at home. He warned me that there was a good chance I would end up in a group home. He made the appointment and I braced myself for what was going to happen next.

Thankfully my grandmother across the bay in the city of Richmond allowed me to come live with her. And even though it meant I had to wake up at 4:15 every morning to make it to school on time, I was incredibly grateful that I was able to

continue going to Washington High. I knew that getting into college was my best shot at bettering my situation, and two years later I left San Francisco to attend UCLA.

Many times I have wondered, what if I was half Black, instead of half white? What if I had lived in a different city, or even a different neighborhood? What would have happened if I never put my foot down and instead suffered silently in my chaotic home situation? Where would I have gone if Huckleberry House didn't exist?

I am telling my story for a few different reasons:

I am committed to authenticity, transparency, and education in my work.

I want to have some control of the narrative to prevent any manipulation or twisting of my experiences: I was never sexually abused growing up, nor was I ever incarcerated, and although I've slept in some interesting spots, I've always had a roof over my head. I consider myself to be incredibly fortunate.

I have the opportunity to advocate for the homeless LGBTQ and BIPOC youth, many of whom make their way through San Francisco, and many of whom were not offered the opportunities I was.

Finally, I'd like to make a plea to our elected officials for the necessity of social services such as Huckleberry House. It is frightening to see that abortion rights, paid leave, affordable child care and healthcare are not priorities to the people we put in office.

When you invest in billionaires and corporations, stockholders see the returns. But when you invest in the American people, they turn around and re-invest in their families and communities. At a time when we are experiencing the highest level of wealth inequality in history, I hope our elected officials realize this before it's too late. ■

Eric Curry is an author, activist, and small business owner. Follow him on Twitter @ericcurrys and Instagram @ericcurryco

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/sanfranciscofaithministry/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!

WRITING: We are always looking for new writers to help us spread the word on the street! Write about your experience of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

ARTWORK: Help transform ART into ACTION by designing artwork for *STREET SHEET*! We especially love art that uplifts homeless people, celebrates the power of community organizing, or calls out abuses of power! Cover dimensions are generally 10x13 but artwork of all sizes are welcome and appreciated!

POETRY: Our annual poetry issue is every January, but we try to include a poem or two in every issue. We're especially interested in poems that explore issues related to poverty, homelessness, and community power, but all submissions are welcome!

PHOTOGRAPHY: Have a keen eye for beauty? Love capturing powerful moments at events? Have a photo of a Street Sheet vendor you'd like to share? We would love to run your photos in Street Sheet! Note that subjects must have consented to being photographed to be included in this paper.

What are your hopes for 2022?

SUBMISSIONS: You can email your work to qwatts@cohsf.org or submit in person or by mail at the Coalition on Homelessness at 280 Turk Street, San Francisco CA 94102. Paid opportunities may be available to contributors who are experiencing homelessness. Ask the editor to find out more!

THE FOREVER HOME

Jesse Mentken

It is difficult for me to write about the topic of homelessness because it brings up many upsetting emotions and past experiences. But I will write anyway and simply accept the pain that will arise.

I ask myself what can I say about this issue that has not yet been said? What contribution can I make?

I was homeless for 15 plus years. I have personal experiences with the injustices that often cause one to live without housing and I also am aware of the ongoing oppression that happens when you are living on the street. Too many human beings in this society are repeatedly victimized in so many ways. And it is late in the day to end this dehumanizing, alienating dynamic.

However, part of what I have learned about my own efforts towards personal and societal liberation is that those most victimized are also those with the deepest knowledge and insights as to the nature of society.

It is one thing to have been victimized. It is another thing to define one's self as a victim. And the difference is in one's relation to power. A person who believes they are a victim does not have a powerful relationship to the world around them. And this is a problem because one needs to be powerful in order to move forward in one's own personal life and equally important one needs to be in a place of power in relation to the oppressive society.

I see no reason why those currently homeless and those who have been can not be at the leading edge of all human liberation movements.

In my own personal life there are very real issues that must get addressed for me to be doing the leadership work in the world that I know I am capable of. I need better housing and I need to deal with some physical health issues and I also need to heal from major traumas.

And yet I am also very clear that on a soul level absolutely nothing needs to change. My soul has never been homeless and never

will be. My soul was never abused and is untouchable. My soul has never lived in poverty and never will. That is the nature of the soul.

And the world we live in is dedicated to confusing all of us about this. Nobody needs to change anything at all about their life to create their soul. Poverty does not diminish the soul and wealth does not improve it.

I believe this is critically important for the homeless community to understand because the narrative is that we need something from others. And yes we do in a way. Human beings have real material needs in terms of food, shelter, water, health care, and one needs money in order to access vitally necessary goods and services.

With that said, nobody has more soul than I do. Nobody. And nobody will ever have a deeper, wiser, more compassionate, more creative, braver soul than you.

This truth must be understood and integrated into how one lives their daily lives in order to take on the leadership that we are all capable of. Those who victimized me, and there have been many, were lost themselves. They betrayed their soul by harming me. And many people are so deeply alienated that they do not even see how harmful and stuck they are.

And this is where we come in. There is something sacred about knowing one has been horribly hurt. Once you have been repeatedly abused, betrayed, isolated, scapegoated, incarcerated, drugged, shamed, impoverished, punished and then blamed for how you respond to this ongoing violence you know things about society and you know things about others that are deep, sacred, spiritual insights.

What I am trying to say is that when I go to a social service provider because I need some clothing or food or information about housing that is one thing. I am forced to play a game and to the degree necessary I will play it. But let's be very clear that this has absolutely nothing to do with me as a human being having been repeatedly abused, and that

this is the only reason I am even needing any services in the first place.

It would have been good if I had never been abused as a young person. But I was. It would have been good if others had protected me from the abuse after it started but that did not happen either. It would have been good if after I was sexually, emotionally and physically abused I was given access to healing modalities. But I wasn't given that support.

And so now I am forced to go to service providers to get basic needs met. This is what it is and I owe it to myself to re-engage with this society to get goods and services that all human beings deserve. I am not going to live in squalor with horrible housing and barely enough money to wash my clothes in a society in which many have extraordinary wealth.

But I am also very grounded in the truth that this is nothing but me working with a racist, classist, violent, sexist, earth-destroying machine.

I spend a great deal of my day returning to the truth of who I really am and the actual conditions I confront every hour of my life. I am kind of wonderfully horrified at how deeply I have internalized self-blame, self-criticism, self-punishment, self-harm.

It is wonderful because I am finally ending that internal dynamic. It is horrifying because I now see just how absolutely chronic the internal diminishment of self is for me and, I assume, for most others.

In fact, the system demands that we diminish ourselves in order to fulfill our basic human needs. The soup kitchens and mental health clinics and shelters and social service agencies and psych hospitals demand, demand, demand that we go there acting small and needy and apologetic and full of shame.

I refuse. I go there grounded in my soul as a vital, blessed, brilliant, passionate, creative, yogi-poet-guru-self expecting other human beings to treat me with the respect, compassion and fundamental decency that I should have been receiving from the day I was born.

And this is the same for you. There is not one iota of difference between who I am at my core and who you are at core. The majority of humanity is asleep at the wheel and we get to do all we can to wake them up. And when they are asleep at the wheel, remember the nature of the vehicle they are driving. It is the vehicle of their humanity and by being asleep they betray their own sacred self and betray all other life around them. They drive recklessly and violently and oppressively and cruelly and this needs to stop as soon as possible and it really does not matter what emotions people need to face in order to finally awaken to their fundamental responsibility to themselves and to society and to the planet.

We need nothing to decide to become the badass spiritual radical revolutionary leaders that the planet is crying for. You will never get a job description giving you permission to do this. You will never get hired to do this. You decide to do this because that is your fundamental nature and it is the greatest gift to yourself and your community to live based on who you truly are.

And I promise you the world will notice. The trees will notice and the pigeon flying down the street will notice and the old man sitting on a bus will notice. And once this happens you are finally employed and housed forever because this is your forever work and your forever home. ■

Jesse Mentken

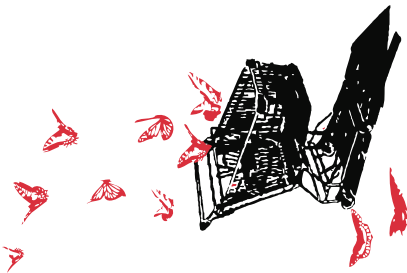
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Angela
A Self-Reflection

You might not fear Angela's words,
but you should never underestimate her silence.

Angela is a rare kind of woman,
who keeps many secrets behind her smile.

She is not a sweet talker,
but she'd rather be judged for being real
than be loved for being fake.

She simply can't stand fake people
and those who only reach out when they need something.

Angela is the kind of person who faces her own problems alone,
but she is always there for her loved ones when they need her.

Anyone who is loved by her is the luckiest person,
and that's why losing her would be your biggest regret.

Angela is like a butterfly - beautiful to see but impossible to catch.

Written by Angela R. Underwood
Shared at Golden Gate Park MM Gathering
7 November 2021



Everyone needs a friend.

Miracle Friends is a phone-based buddy system for our unhoused neighbors.

Volunteer from anywhere in the world, in a way that fits your schedule.

Miracle Friends matches unhoused neighbors with caring volunteers for weekly calls and texts to check-in and say hello. Started in May 2020, Miracle Friends has facilitated 150+ life-changing friendships.

Volunteering is 100% remote; all you need is a phone. Each volunteer is supported by a mentor and training calls. The time commitment is 1-2 hours per week.

Sign up today at miraclefriends.org

Miracle Friends is a project of **Miracle Messages** (miraclemessages.org), an award-winning 501(c)3 nonprofit that helps our unhoused neighbors rebuild their social support systems.



SCAN ME

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!
The San Francisco AIDs Foundation has so much helpful information 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>

