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STREET SHEET

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Detail from Clarion Alley Murals. Photo ©2016 Jess Clarke

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

BY EASY COOL

Are you going to be mine
Or otherwise try to be right
Just for the night
When I hold you tight
To come inside your heartland soul
So let's go on the right road
To heaven above
With all of your love
When you give it,
To live it up, up, up, up
So if you decide to love
All day and night
While I hold you so tight
That would be all right
With me to you
If you think it so good
Then make up your mind,
To be mine forever
And don't let it bother you for an inch
When it could be a mile
That makes up your mind

I HAD A DREAM

BY EASY COOL

To make it come true,
When I wake up,
To feel good
It was a matter of time
When I made her be mine
To live and give all her love to me,
To make me happy for the day
To stop and say
That I wanted to lover her in my dream
But now I'm here
To have you near
So you could hear me
To say to you
That I really love you,
Can you love me too
And let's go back to bed
So I don't beg you
To love me in my dreams
That's why I want to be with you
So that you could accept me
Every time we're there
Anywhere to make my dreams come true

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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.

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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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280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER SWEEPS? MONITORS FOR HOMELESS OPERATIONS PROPOSED

By TJ JOHNSTON

Human rights monitors should observe homeless encampment clearances to ensure that residents who are being connected to services keep their belongings and City workers follow their own policies, according to a new report.

On June 16, the Latino Task Force released a study based on more than 100 surveys with unhoused San Franciscans in the city’s Mission District. Almost two-thirds of those who responded said they are often displaced in encampment sweeps, but are rarely offered a suitable alternative place to stay. Furthermore, the task force says that residents are traumatized by what it calls the “institutional abuse” of these operations.

The City should focus less on eliminating tents on sidewalks and dispersing encampment dwellers from public view, and instead emphasize better identifying residents’ needs and placing them into housing, according to the report.

The task force, which is composed of members of over 40 community-based organizations, said the City should hire independent monitors to watch sweeps in progress and report any improper seizures of property to City oversight panels.

Latino Task Force Manager Ivan Corado-Vega told media at a press conference that the group is pushing the mayor and the Board of Supervisors to fund the monitor positions in next year’s City budget.

During sweeps, San Francisco Public Works staff often toss items homeless people use to survive, such as tents and medications, onto dump trucks—despite the department’s “bag and tag” policy of

taking possessions to storage so that they can reclaim them later. Task force member Jorge Zepada of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation relayed that experience in a statement from a formerly unhoused resident who chose to identify himself only as Ramón.

“During my unhoused years, I suffered the actions of the City sweeps,” according to Ramón. “Many times, my tent, backpack and medications were taken and trashed by San Francisco Public Works crews. I have to take daily medications to stabilize my life, and when the City crews try to take my stuff, I have a hard time [getting] all of my services back, including my medication to stabilize my health.”

“The actions from the City were cruel and unnecessary,” he added.

Housing is a human right. And it is unconstitutional to punish an individual for being homeless and lacking this most basic human right. We believe firmly that a city’s success in housing its residents, particularly its most vulnerable, must be the measure that defines the health of that city.

— Latino Task Force Report

But the pattern is all too common, said Kelley Cutler, a member of the Local Homeless Coordinating Board, an advisory council that has long criticized the tactics of workers conducting the sweeps. Cutler said that adding monitors’ eyes on the streets could check against potential misbehavior.

“Reports of the City doing sweeps and stealing people’s belongings is not unusual,” she said. “It’s the typical experience for most people who are forced to live on the street. The City should welcome a human rights monitor to assure San Franciscans are treated with dignity and respect and that their basic human rights are protected.”

In recent years, Public Works and the Police Department have come under fire for their roles in sweeps, as well as other participating agencies in the City’s Healthy Streets Operating Center. Media accounts have already shown how Public Works flouts its own “bag and tag” rules. Police officers usually supervise these operations; Homeless Outreach Team members are also on hand, but by the time they can find shelter placements or other services, the camp is swept away, forcing the residents to relocate.

According to the task force, 74.7% of residents report losing personal items in sweeps without a “bag and tag,” 44.3% say they’ve had medications taken away and 57.6% say they were arrested, threatened with arrest or issued a citation.

The task force further recommends that monitors be allowed to video and photograph operations and document any violations with the consent of any unhoused folk involved. Documentation would be sent to the agencies involved, as well as the Human Rights Commission, the Local Homeless



Coordinating Board and other relevant City commissions.

Since 2018, the Stolen Belonging multimedia project has been collecting video accounts of homeless people recalling property confiscation and abuse by City workers, as well as watching sweeps in progress.

“Our Stolen Belonging team has witnessed sweeps, and gotten them on camera. Still SFPD and DPW still take stuff and or trash belongings any way,” the project said. “Our hope is that having more monitors recording what is actually happening at sweeps would help hold the City accountable and eventually would change their unspoken policies of illegally confiscating and stealing their possessions, along with other abuses.”

Krystale Erickson, an unhoused woman, told the project that Public Works staff engage in brazen theft. One worker ripped her purse from her hands in full view of attending police officers. She lost her ID, medication and phone, as well as her grandmother’s wedding ring.

“They take specific things they know you need,” Erickson said. “Like it will be raining and they’ll come and take the tarps that are covering your stuff and leave all your stuff out in the rain. They make it very personal. It definitely seems like we’ve been kinda left out in the cold and preyed upon by these guys.”

Jennifer Friedenbach, director of the Coalition on Homelessness, which publishes Street Sheet, also hopes that the monitors’ presence would deter the improper seizure of homeless people’s possessions.

“Having the human rights monitors would ensure the illegal confiscation from already happening,” she said. “If the property is taken, then the human rights monitors would be able to assist in the process [of retrieving the property].”

Under its current policy, the City can only take away property that’s unattended or poses a health or safety hazard. Those who have had property confiscated can file a claim with Public Works, and if that doesn’t work, they can sue in small claims court.

Disclosure: TJ Johnston is a member of the Stolen Belonging project, which has been made possible through a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission.



Photo: Robert Gumpert



HOUSEKEYS NOT SW

Raising awareness about displacement in

In recent months, cities and states across the United States have dramatically increased their efforts to sweep and displace homeless encampments and to criminalize people on the streets. A series of posters as part of the nation-wide campaign 'Housekeys Not Sweeps', led by the Western Regional Advocacy Project, is raising awareness and combating criminalization efforts and anti-homeless legislation occurring across the country.

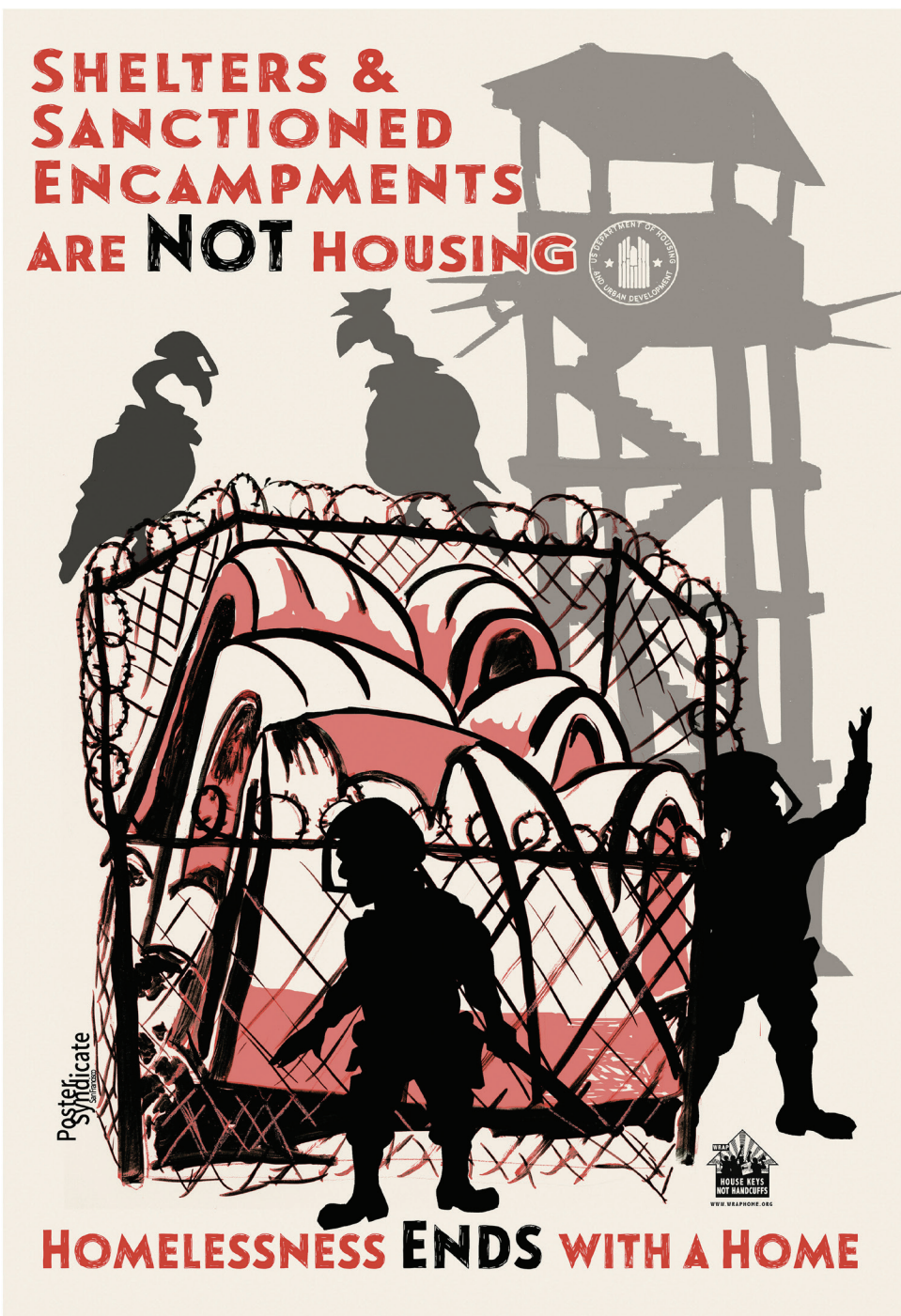
In recent months, cities and states across the United States have dramatically increased their efforts to sweep and displace homeless encampments and to criminalize people on the streets. In Tennessee, new legislation has made camping on public lands a felony with a possible jail sentence of up to six years in prison.

nation-wide campaign 'Housekeys Not Sweeps', led by the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), is raising awareness and combating criminalization efforts and anti-homeless legislation occurring across the country.

"Houseless people often live in communities or 'encampments' for their safety and well-being. Belongings and community are necessary for survival, but private and public agencies have deemed both these things illegal and are aggressively and violently policing, sweeping, harassing, and attacking our houseless neighbors," says Paul Boden, WRAP's executive director. "They are evicted from their encampments and their life preserving belongings are repeatedly stolen."

The campaign notes the effects of the sweeps are many, including

A series of posters as part of the



SWEEPS

BY THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF
STREET PAPERS AND WESTERN REGIONAL
ADVOCACY PROJECT

Out camps, sweeps and the United States

mass incarceration, harm to people's mental and physical health, and additional barriers to receiving housing and economic stability due to convictions and arrest warrants, disqualifying individuals from receiving public housing assistance.

"Cruel and discriminatory police enforcements cause serious harm and are an incredible waste of resources that would be more effectively spent on solutions to homelessness, such as treatment and housing for poor people," Boden goes on. "Clearly our government is not choosing real solutions to homelessness, like human rights, livable incomes, healthcare, jobs, and a reinstatement of federal affordable housing funding."

"In international human rights law, providing shelter to people who are homeless is the absolute minimum

standard for any country, regardless of resources. There's a cruelty here that I don't think I've seen," says Leilani Farha, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing.

Tens of millions of people have experienced homelessness in America during the past 40 years due to the lack of federal investments in social housing and corporate welfare, the privatization of affordable housing, skyrocketing rents, and the lack of living wage jobs. Currently, more than one million people experience homelessness in the United States, including a high rate of children and families.

Find out more about the campaign by visiting wraphome.org. Text courtesy of the International Network of Street Papers

OPEN THE PARKS FOR OUR SAFETY



SAFE SPACES FOR EVERYONE

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?



MR ROGERS WOULDN'T CALL THE COPS

Poster
Syndicate



THE REAL-WORLD IMPACT OF SOCIAL SECURITY'S CRACKDOWN ON BENEFITS

BY JACK BRAGEN

For three decades, I have relied on Social Security benefits to put a roof over my head, to put food in my belly, and to provide much needed medical care. I have valid, documented reasons that I am entitled to these benefits. However, for over a year, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Social Security Administration sent me harassing communications, threatening to cut me off should I fail to comply with their demands.

Sometimes they asked me to fill out complicated paperwork and mail it back to Social Security prior to deadlines, and in other instances, the demands were to show up for mandatory appointments. They demanded a great deal of information, some of it to be supplied by me and some by the professionals involved in my long-term treatment—people who already have access to my charts. Given the fact that my disability benefits are crucial to my survival, this felt like a life-or-death struggle. I was terrorized.

I discovered in my research that I am not alone. I spoke to a Social Security attorney who told me this is happening to thousands of disabled people in the U.S. In a January 2020 Huffington Post article titled “Trump Administration Quietly Goes After Disability Benefits,” Arthur Delaney reported that this is the result of a policy change wrought by the Trump Administration. Just before he left office, Trump instituted sweeping changes to the way many receive disability benefits. Among these changes, Delaney writes, the government began looking “more closely at whether certain disability insurance recipients still qualify as ‘disabled’ after they’ve already been awarded those benefits. While recipients already have to demonstrate their continuing disability every few years, the proposal would ramp up the examinations, potentially running still-eligible beneficiaries out of the program.”

Delaney’s article completely corroborates my own experience. It began for me in the year 2020. I received a 16-page questionnaire. I filled this out with as much thoroughness as I could muster, and I was fully truthful. I foolishly thought at the time I’d be done and would hear back. What I got was a year’s worth of repeated demands for information, culminating in psychological and physical evaluations conducted in remote locations by practitioners who’d

been hired directly or indirectly by Social Security. The examinations are performed by psychologists and medical doctors tasked with assessing whether someone is “faking” their disabilities. By happenstance, I have seen employment ads for psychologists boasting that doing these interviews is very lucrative.

The appointments were far off the frequented track and conducted by clinics I’d never heard of. Some of these locations seemed so odd that I did research beforehand to make sure I wasn’t being kidnapped by a criminal faction of the government. That’s how badly this process stoked my anxiety. I was receiving letters for appointments that threatened to cut off my Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicare and Medicaid if I didn’t comply with the demands.

To give you an example of the distress, I was at the physical component of the evaluation, and when they took my blood pressure, it was 160 over 100. This is a potentially deadly level of hypertension—normal blood pressure is about 120 over 80.

If you are disabled and independent, it is very hard to comply with the demands of these reviews. The rigor and frequency of their communications implies that they are geared to assess people who do not handle their own affairs and who are getting helped by a third party. Secondly, they seem geared to assess those who are not severely disabled. If we were too disabled and on our own, we would be unable to clear all of these careless hurdles.

For example, one of these appointments required me to drive or take public transportation to a morning appointment in downtown Oakland at rush hour during the rainy season, which was very difficult due to my agoraphobia and difficulty to drive long distances. My mom and her husband offered to drive me, yet they, at the time, were in the middle of medical crises themselves. I was able to talk some sense into the individual in charge of my assessments and convince him to move the appointment to a closer location that I could get to. There was no valid reason to ask me to travel to a busy business district in the morning when there are numerous doctors in my immediate area who could do the job.

After years of complying with the

unreasonable demands, harassment and threats from Social Security, I recently received a letter dated December 24 stating that my assessment was done and that I’d continue to receive benefits. This is a huge relief! Now I feel as though I have my life back, and I can deal with the multiple health problems I face, I can get back to writing, and I don’t have to live in terror.

But what happens to those who can’t meet all of the governmental requirements? The disability attorney I spoke to said they couldn’t represent a person who might lose their benefits. Attorneys are paid through collecting a portion of the retroactive payment of new applicants. With the client merely keeping what they’ve got, there is no mechanism for the attorney to get paid.

The rigorous evaluation process, coupled with the lack of accessible representation for people with disabilities, means that many could be facing dire, life-threatening circumstances. I don’t want to think about it.

Jack Bragen is author of “Revising Behaviors that Don’t Work,” “Instructions for Dealing with Schizophrenia,” and “Jack Bragen’s 2021 Fiction Collection,” and lives in Martinez. This piece originally ran in the June edition of Street Spirit, a homeless paper in the East Bay, online at thestreetspirit.org.

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SCAN ME

HOUSING FOR THE PEOPLE: TENNESSEE LAW TO MAKE HOMELESSNESS A FELONY

By VICKY BATCHER

Tennessee is Vicky Batcher's home, and it is a place she is witnessing turn against people who don't have shelter and must make their home on the street, a position she knows all too well from past experience. In the latest in INSP's Housing for the People column, she writes about the jarring experience of seeing the place you live criminalize homeless people – people Vicky has a kinship with – as Tennessee will do with the passing of a new law.

The world is changing. Many American cities are experiencing a crackdown on homelessness. Individuals and families without a safe place to call home are being displaced with no place to go. People are losing their belongings. In Tennessee, it's become extreme. On July 1, 2022, a new law will pass making homelessness a felony "for a person to engage in camping on the shoulder, berm, or right of way of a state or interstate highway, under a bridge or overpass or within an underpass, of a state or interstate highway." A felony for trying to exist, to sleep. We don't have enough shelter space, much less housing, for all the people who are homeless.

For those that don't know, Tennessee is nicknamed the volunteer state. It's a place I call home. We've been through a lot. In 2010, massive floods impacted my community in Nashville, along with many others. People suffered. Still, Tennesseans came together and helped each other. We didn't wait for federal aid and the troops to be called in. We did what we had to do until aid could be dispatched. The TV was filled with images of trailers, cars, and even schools, floating away. Many people's homes were destroyed, yet we still came together. Neighbors helping neighbors because that's what we do in Tennessee. We volunteer to support one another.

Just before we went into lock down in 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak Nashville and our region was devastated by a series of tornadoes. Neighborhoods laid in ruins. Streets were littered with the remnants of what was once a family memory.

In 2021, tornadoes struck again. This time, during the height of the pandemic. Again, people's homes were destroyed. Tennesseans rose above. We carried on. Helping strangers without thought of reward or five minutes of fame. Still, we came together, regardless of the hardship. Again, volunteering for one another.

That's why I am in a state of shock knowing our state has chosen to literally criminalize homelessness on public lands, a law that could potentially punish people with up to six years in prison. Not Tennessee, after all the hardship and loss of housing and witnessing so many

people's lives being destroyed. Honestly, it feels like someone ripping our collective hearts out. How could this be?

I'm housed in affordable housing in Nashville, but there is 2000+ that remain on the streets and call encampments home. There are thousands more around the state and tens of thousands more around the country living with no toilets, no running water, no electricity and no roof over their head. It's unacceptable. It's inhumane.

We've thrown out our most vulnerable populations into the streets. There is no place left to go. More so, there are thousands more awaiting their fate. The eviction courts are overwhelmed. It's heartbreaking to see this happening. Through all of this, people will be forced to hide their existence just to avoid arrests.

If we can hold drug dealers accountable for the deaths they cause, why can't we hold politicians to the same standard? It's never been done, but maybe it's time to start. Maybe it's time to really hold politicians accountable for the lack of affordable housing. We have laws protecting our dogs from being left without food and water during inclement weather. Yet, our leaders choose to create laws making life worse for people. At what point do we stand up and say this isn't working? At what point are we going to receive the human rights we deserve?

There's no question we have failed our neighbors, but I'm convinced it's times like these we must continue to come together to help one another. We must all volunteer and use our voices for housing justice in Tennessee, in America and throughout the world. To be honest with you, I feel like shouting fire in a crowded theater right now. "Give our neighbors a safe place to call home!" It's something we all deserve.

Vicky Batcher is a writer and housing advocate. She also sells The Contributor in Nashville, Tennessee. Housing for the People is a column produced by the International Network of Street Papers from people on the frontlines of the housing justice movement in America and beyond. Courtesy of INSP North America / International Network of Street Papers

“Tennessee’s anti-homelessness law feels like someone ripping our collective hearts out.”

Human Rights Workgroup

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Home



“I have been on the streets on and off since I was 18, more on than off so well over 10 years. I started out in Sonoma County where I grew up with my mom. We lived in a home. I choose to come outside and be a rebellious 18-year-old.”

“(Hardest thing), definitely the showers, cleanliness, having to deal with a lot of illnesses and disease, and a lot of scary elements out here. I unfortunately have endured a few of them. Thankfully I’m recovering finally, but the elements out here can take a toll. I wouldn’t say the four walls necessarily are important but cleanliness, showers, toilet, bathroom, a refrigerator, a stove, ... I mean being inside’s great and everything, but we can really make it out here if we try. Having your so-called freedom, that can go two ways. It’s a Catch-22 because you are moved and told where you can and cannot lay. There are certain laws and things that you

have to abide by that are different than people that have homes, that are inside don’t have to worry about: sitting on the ground and getting a ticket because of the “sit and lie law,” or invading a parking space, or having a car that’s broken down, it’s a disadvantage for us at times.”

“When I was younger, I didn’t quite see a community but as I’ve gotten older and spent more time with people in different areas of the city, I learned there’s definitely community. We support one another. It works in a lot of different ways. Each one, teach one. You give, I give. You’re sick one day and you don’t have much and I have a plethora of things, I’m going to make sure that you’re taken care of, and you’re going to reciprocate that when you see another person sick. To us, as a community, it could be a stranger or it could be somebody that I know, that’s what makes a big difference. It helps bring us all together. But you have

to abide by that, you can’t just take, and take, and take. It has to be an equal balance, otherwise it becomes a shit show.”

“It is very uncomfortable to have to use a restroom as a woman on the street. Also, there are predators, male or female, there are some really scary people that prey on women. There are a lot of things I don’t even want to think about so yah, as a woman, it can be very dangerous out here, but having community definitely helps as far as being a woman and being respected. That’s another big thing, respect. A lot of times people lack respect for women who are on the street thinking there’s a woman in a tent and she’s doing speed, or she’s doing a drug, so she’s going to have sex with me. Or she’s a prostitute. I’m going to get her high and ... That’s not what it’s about. Maybe at one time it could’ve been, not for me personally, but it’s not every person that you meet or see.”

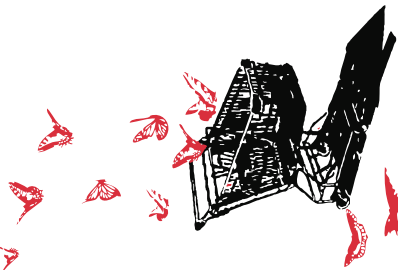
Name: Robin Lee, 35 Date: 8 May 2021 Place: Dore Street Without a home: Off and mostly on since she was 18

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