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STREET SHEET



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STREET SHEET is currently recruiting vendors to sell the newspaper around San Francisco.

Vendors pick up the papers for free at our office in the Tenderloin and sell them for \$2 apiece at locations across the City. You get to keep all the money you make from sales! Sign up to earn extra income while also helping elevate the voices of the homeless writers who make this paper so unique, and promoting the vision of a San Francisco where every human being has a home.

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THE BIGGEST SURVEY OF HOMELESS CALIFORNIANS IN DECADES SHOWS WHY SO MANY ARE ON THE STREETS

MARISA KENDALL,
CALMATTERS

Losing income is the No. 1 reason Californians end up homeless—and the vast majority of them say a subsidy of as little as \$300 a month could have kept them off the streets.

That’s according to a new study out of UC San Francisco that provides the most comprehensive look yet at California’s homeless crisis.

In the six months prior to becoming homeless, the Californians surveyed were making a median income of just \$960 a month. The median rent for a two-bedroom apartment in California is nearly three times that, according to Zillow. And though survey participants listed a myriad of reasons why they lost their homes, more people cited a loss of, or reduction in, income than anything else.

The study’s authors say the findings highlight the idea that money, more than addiction, mental health, poor decisions or other factors, is the main cause of—and potential solution to—homelessness.

“I think it’s really important to note how desperately poor people are, and how much it is their poverty and the high housing costs that are leading to this crisis,” said Margot Kushel, a physician who directs the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, which conducted the study.

Already the study—which the authors say is the most representative homelessness survey conducted in the U.S. since the mid-1990s—has drawn attention from high places.

The initial idea for the survey came from California Health and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly, Kushel said. Ghaly’s office has been involved along the way, though the state didn’t fund the research.

“As we drive toward addressing the health and housing needs of Californian’s experiencing homelessness, this study reinforces the importance of comprehensive and integrated supports,” Ghaly said in a news release. “California is taking bold steps to address unmet needs for physical and behavioral health services, to create a range of housing options that are safe and stable, and to meet people where they are at. We are grateful for the voices of those who participated in this study, as they will help guide our approach.”

The survey comes as local

governments press Gov. Gavin Newsom to distribute ongoing funding to fight homelessness, arguing the one-time grants he has doled out so far don’t allow them to make lasting progress. Newsom has resisted that kind of multi-year commitment, although his administration has allocated nearly \$21 billion toward homelessness and housing since he took office.

The UCSF team surveyed 3,198 unhoused adults throughout California between October 2021 and November 2022, and conducted in-depth interviews with 365 of those participants.

WHAT DRIVES CALIFORNIA’S HOMELESS CRISIS?

When asked why they left their last home, respondents cited conflict between roommates, not wanting to impose on the person or people they were living with, domestic violence, illness and breakups.

A loss of or reduction in income was the most common response, with 12% of people saying that’s what caused their homelessness. Just 4% blamed their own substance use or drinking.

All of those varied factors that led people to lose their homes often have underlying roots in economic instability, said Jennifer Wolch, a professor emerita at UC Berkeley specializing in homelessness.

The study’s authors say the findings highlight the idea that money, more than addiction, mental health, poor decisions or other factors, is the main cause of—and potential solution to—homelessness.

“This lack of income and severe instability and housing precarity, it has spillover effects on people’s relationships, their use of alcohol and other kinds of problematic substances,” she said. “It impinges on their health status.”

The story told by one survey participant, identified as Carlos, shows how someone can gradually descend into homelessness. He had to stop working after falling off a ladder and injuring

his spine, but wasn’t eligible for workers’ compensation because he had been paid in cash. Unable to afford his rent, he moved out of his apartment and rented a room in a new place. He soon left due to conflicts with his roommates. He then briefly lived with his sister’s family, until they faced COVID-related job loss and he moved out to avoid becoming a burden. He lived in his truck until it was towed due to unpaid parking tickets. Now, he lives

HELP KEEP STREET SHEET IN PRINT!



coalition.networkforgood.com

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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Street Sheet is published and distributed on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. We recognize and honor the ongoing presence and stewardship of the original people of this land. We recognize that homelessness can not truly be ended until this land is returned to its original stewards.

ORGANIZE WITH US

HOUSING JUSTICE WORKING GROUP TUESDAYS @ NOON

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone! Email mcarrera@cohsf.org to get involved!

HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP WEDNESDAYS @12:30

The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join! Email lpierce@cohsf.org

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!



NEW STUDY FINDS LOSING INCOME IS THE NO. 1 REASON CALIFORNIANS END UP HOMELESS

in an encampment in a park.

Most of the homeless Californians surveyed said a relatively small amount of cash would have saved them from the street. Seventy percent said a monthly rental subsidy of \$300-\$500 would have kept them from becoming homeless, while 82% believed a one-time payment of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 would have worked.

Jennifer Loving, CEO of Santa Clara County nonprofit Destination: Home, hopes the study’s findings will help debunk what she says is a common myth that people are homeless because of their individual failings, rather than because rents are outpacing wages. She’d like to see California’s leaders take notice.

“Hopefully it will inform a statewide strategy,” she said, “because we need a statewide strategy to be able to manage how we are addressing homelessness.”

ANOTHER CALIFORNIA HOMELESS MYTH

Another myth the study attempts to dispel is that most homeless people flock to California cities because of warm weather, liberal policies and generous services. In reality, 90% of the people surveyed said they were last housed in California, and 75% live in the same county as where they lost their housing.

That’s important to remember, Wolch said, because it’s easy to disregard unhoused people who we think “aren’t from here” and haven’t paid taxes here.

“People who are homeless are your neighbors,” she said. “People who are homeless live in the same city that you do and they possibly have lived there longer than you have.”

The survey painted a bleak picture of the traumas and tragedies that made survey participants more vulnerable to ending up on the street. People reported growing up in depressed communities with few job opportunities, where they experienced exploitation and discrimination. Nearly three-quarters said they had experienced physical violence during their lives, and one-quarter had experienced sexual violence.

One in three people surveyed attempted suicide at some point.

Mental health and addiction also were a common undercurrent in the lives of many of the unhoused people surveyed, which is to be expected in a population that has suffered so much trauma, according to the researchers. Two-thirds of people reported experiencing mental health symptoms – including depression, anxiety or hallucinations – in the past 30 days. Homelessness and all it entails, including lack of sleep, violence and difficulty accessing medication, exacerbated their symptoms, many people said.

About one-third of people reported using drugs three or more times a week – mostly methamphetamines. And 1 in 5 people who reported regular drug or heavy alcohol use said they wanted addiction treatment but couldn’t get it.

JAIL TO HOMELESSNESS PIPELINE

The study also emphasizes the relationship between incarceration and homelessness, said Alex Visotzky, senior California Policy Fellow for the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

More than three-quarters of people surveyed had been incarcerated at some point during their life. And in the six months before becoming homeless, 43% were in jail or prison, or were on probation or parole. The vast majority of those who had been incarcerated received no help signing up for housing, healthcare or benefits upon release.

“That drove home for me this point: Incarceration, homelessness and then subsequent criminalization are fueling a really vicious cycle for marginalized people, especially Black and Latino Californians, that’s both causing and prolonging homelessness,” Visotzky said.

“I think it’s really important to note how desperately poor people are, and how much it is their poverty and the high housing costs that are leading to this crisis,” said Margot Kushel, a physician who directs the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, which conducted the study.

‘We don’t have enough housing for poor folks’

To solve the homelessness crisis, the main problem California needs to address is the lack of housing that’s affordable for extremely low-income residents, according to the researchers. The state has just 24 affordable and available homes for every 100 extremely low-income households, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Among the solutions the researchers proposed: expanding vouchers that use federal, state and local dollars to subsidize people’s rent. They also suggested piloting shared housing programs where multiple households live together and split costs, while also providing funds to help people remain with or move in with family or friends.

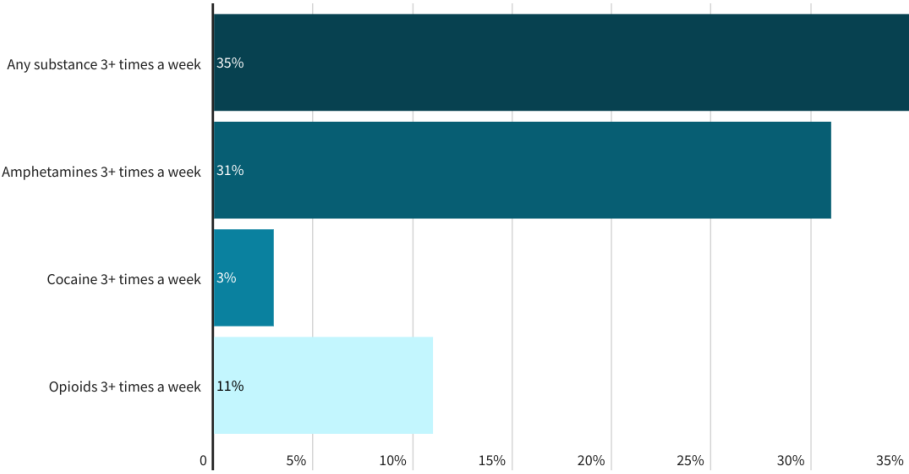
Kushel hopes the study helps drive public support for these ideas, which in turn will spur politicians to act.

“I hope that it really focuses our efforts on housing, which is the only way out of homelessness,” Kushel said. “It’s almost so obvious it’s hard to speak about. We don’t have enough housing for poor folks.” ■

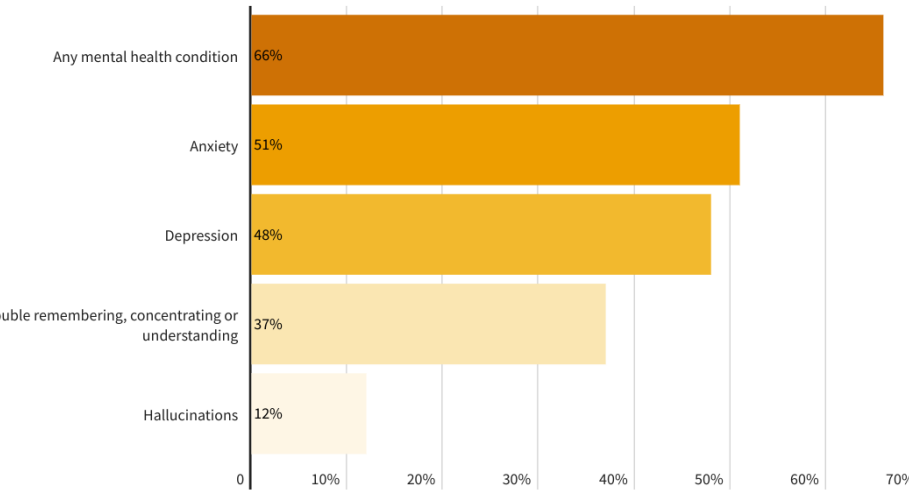
This story was originally published in CalMatters. CalMatters.org is anonprofit, nonpartisan media venture explaining California policies and politics.

Addiction, mental health conditions are common

1 in 5 of those who reported regular drug or heavy alcohol use said they wanted addiction treatment but couldn't get it.








Though 66% of people reported experiencing mental health symptoms, only 18% said they had received counseling or medications in the past 30 days.



Incarceration is a common factor

The stats point to a need for better support for people getting out of jail and prison, according to the researchers

-  **79%** of people **had been incarcerated** at some point during their life
-  **14%** **entered homelessness** directly after being released from jail or prison
-  **20%** **spent time in jail** in the six months prior to becoming homeless (9% were on probation, 10% spent time in prison and 4% were on parole)
-  **17%** of people leaving jail and 14% of people leaving prison **received help finding housing**
-  **30%** of people had been jailed **during their current episode of homelessness**

“YOU ARE KILLING US”: LIVES LOST TO INVOLUNTARY DISPLACEMENT, AKA SWEEPS

ROBBIE POWELSON

Joel died on or around April 20, 2022 in a gutter in San Rafael.

I received the news, like most everyone from our encampment in Sausalito, around noon while about a quarter of our camp attended a court ordered settlement conference with the City of Sausalito.

Joel was 24 years old, with a big goofy grin. The last time I saw him, he was catching a pigeon in the center of the city-operated camp in Sausalito.

Joel had a child who lived up north.

About two months prior, he had left his campsite to visit them. While he was away, the City of Sausalito stole his tent and belongings. When he returned, they refused to allow him back in the camp under orders of the City. City officials were not allowing anyone to return as they sought to eradicate the camp by attrition.

Joel had been in and out of drug treatment, going between addiction and recovery. He had numerous overdoses at the camp, from which people at the camp would revive him. People looked out for him.

When he left, he had no one to look after for him. So on 4/20, when he took too much in celebration of that notorious holiday, there was no one around to catch him as he slipped into the gutter—no one to call the ambulance or administer Narcan. He stopped breathing there, dead at 24, in San Rafael where had moved involuntarily.

Joel’s story happens all across the world. Involuntary displacement of people who don’t have housing is a leading contributor to overdose deaths.

A recent study at University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus showed long-term health effects of involuntary displacement of people experiencing homelessness who inject

drugs, using data from 23 U.S. cities. The model suggests encampment sweeps, bans and move-along orders could contribute from 15 to 25% of deaths among the unsheltered population over 10 years.

Other dangers shown in other studies show that former encampment residents experienced a 28% rise in arrests and a 35% increase in risk of physical assault after an encampment sweep.

Everyone wept in the middle of the settlement meeting. “You are fucking killing us,” someone accused the City leaders in attendance. The meeting adjourned early.

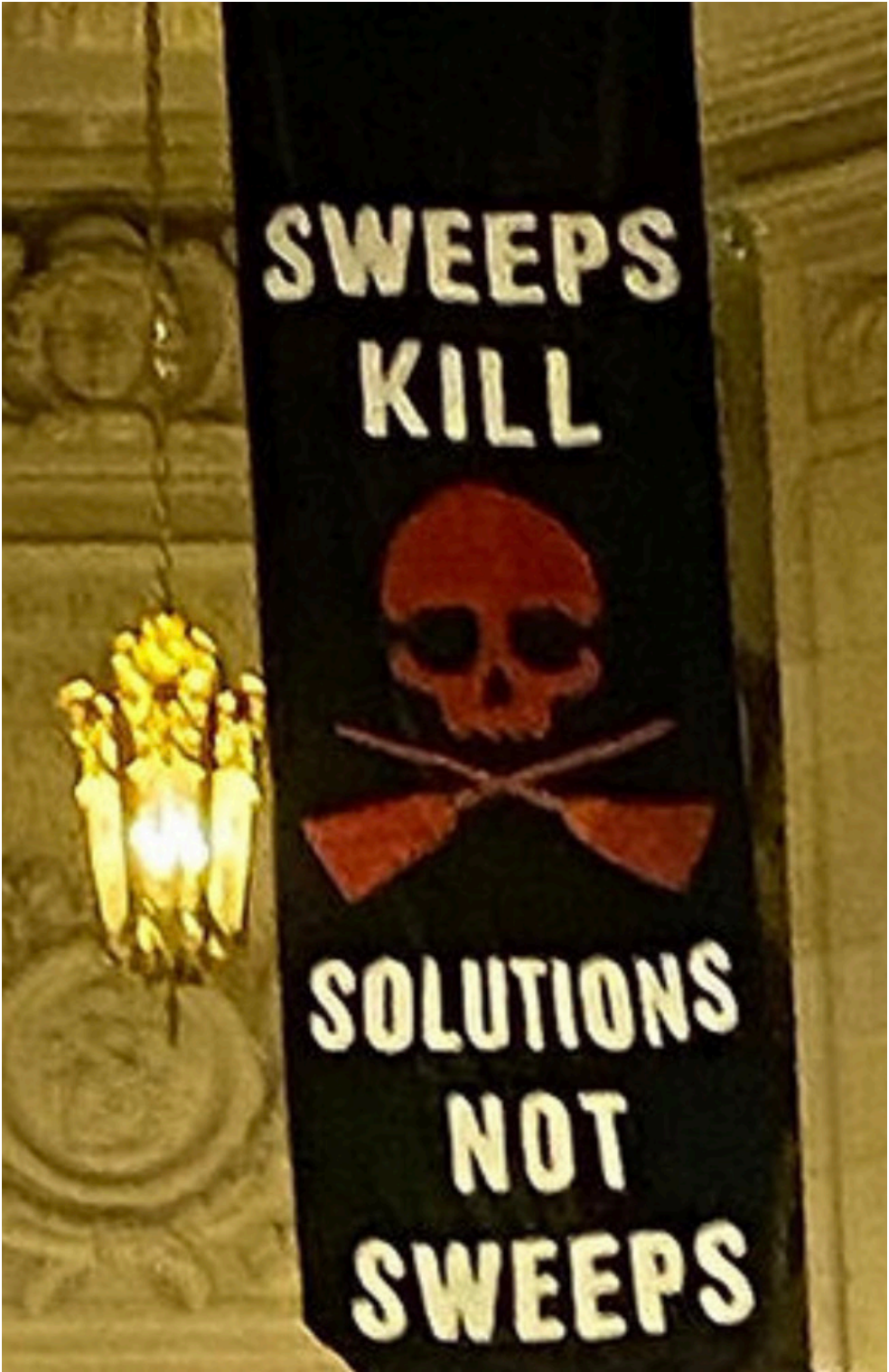
We were in the settlement meeting for a series of restraining orders our folks at the camp won against the City of Sausalito that had been issued shortly

after Joel had been evicted. Those restraining orders stopped the eviction of people from our camp—and poor Joel was just unlucky that we hadn’t figured out how to do these mini-restraining orders sooner.

We didn’t have the knowledge back then—but if we had, we would have likely been able to get a restraining order to allow Joel to get back into the camp. Then he wouldn’t have OD’d—someone would have been able to call the ambulance and administer the Narcan.

The eviction caused him to be in a more dangerous situation. When he died, no one was around to catch him. Because of that, he died. While the drugs caused his body to shut down, the reason no one was around to revive him was because of a state-created danger. ■

Reprinted from Poor News Network/
poormagazine.org



DAVE LOEWENSTEIN

1.) NOTICE



A written notice is the first step in an eviction.

Usually comes with scary, stern language
"You must leave in 3 days"

You do not need to move yet.

2.) UNLAWFUL DETAINER



After the notice has expired, your landlord must go to court and file an "unlawful detainer" to continue with the eviction.

If you receive court documents, call EDC:
(415) 659-9184

3.) SHERIFF'S NOTICE



After a tenant has lost their court case and has not left, the Sheriff will come and physically remove a tenant from their home. They will give a 1 week-notice.

Notice Stage

What does it mean?

- The first stage in an eviction case should be a written notice
- Notices have really stern, scary language
 - "After x amount of days you need to leave"
 - **You don't need to move yet**
 - If you can cure the issue before the notice expires, there can be no eviction
- If you are having issues with your landlord, questions about your rights, please call **Tenant Counselling Organizations** [to the right -->]
- To proceed with an eviction, the landlord has to go to court and file an Unlawful Detainer

Tenant Counselling Organizations:

HOUSING RIGHTS COMMITTEE OF SAN FRANCISCO:
Mission Office M-Th 1-5pm: (415) 703-8644
Westside Office M, W-F 9am-12pm: (415) 947-9085
<http://hrcsf.org/>

SAN FRANCISCO TENANTS UNION:
(415) 282-6622
<https://www.sftu.org/schedule>

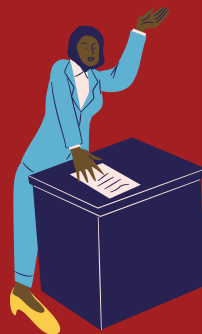
CAUSA JUSTA:: JUST CAUSE
Monday & Friday 1-5pm
(415) 487-9203
<https://cjc.org/>

Mission SRO Collaborative
(415) 282-6209
<https://www.dscs.org/>



Unlawful Detainer

Who can help me in court?



- After a written notice expires, court documents may be served to you in 3 different ways:
 - **Personal service:** a tenant is handed documents
 - **Substitute service:** another responsible adult is handed documents, and mailed to the tenant
 - **Posted on door and mailed**
- A tenant could have as little as 5 days to file a response with the court
- If a tenant doesn't file a response in time, they will lose their case by default



If you are a tenant in San Francisco and have been served with an Unlawful Detainer, contact the Eviction Defense Collaborative (415) 659-9184 or legal@evictiondefense.org



Sheriff's Notice

- After a tenant has lost their court case, the next documents they will likely receive will be a 1 week's Sheriff's notice posted on their door.
 - In San Francisco, the Sheriff comes on Wednesdays.
- Tenants can ask the court to let them stay in their home for an additional week. Eviction Defense Collaborative helps with this application.
 - The court generally requires the tenants to pay one week's rent



If you are being evicted from your home, please call or email our legal assistance line
(415) 659-9184
legal@evictiondefense.org

Limited drop-in hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday
10:00am-11:30am, 1:00pm-2:30pm
976 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94103



THESE RESEARCHERS LIVED THROUGH HOMELESSNESS. NOW, THEY’VE ANALYZED IT.

The latest study of unhoused Californians made headlines, even though its findings are already considered common knowledge among people engaged with the issue. However, what was unusual about the research team investigating homelessness in California is that the team are formerly or currently unhoused residents of the Golden State—and similar groups are emerging around the state.

Call them lived experience boards, lived expertise boards or community advisory boards—bodies with formerly and presently unhoused folk are becoming commonplace in nonprofit organizations and municipal agencies, often advising them on homelessness spending and policy matters. In the case of lived expertise board members at the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, they also engage in social research.

Destination: Home in San Jose and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority are other examples of organizations that consult lived experience board members on a variety of projects.

For the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness, Benioff Initiative board members prepared for two years before collecting data from 3,198 questionnaires and 365 in-depth interviews. Afterwards, lead

researchers analyzed the data.

With funding from the Benioff Initiative and other foundations, the board provided input on survey questions and planned outreach to homeless constituents.

Board co-chair Claudine Sipili applauded the study for digging deeper than the point-in-time homeless counts that most U.S. cities and counties conduct to receive federal funding. But while mostly government employees and nonprofit volunteers perform point-in-time counts on a single night, researchers on this project spent over a year gathering information.

“This is so detailed because it focuses so much on the human aspect of homelessness,” she said. “Then tying that back to system factors and the failures in systems that cause people to fall into homelessness in the first place.”

Sipili added that the significance of the initiative’s study lies in a conscious effort to recruit and include people with experience

of being unhoused. She was also validated by a key finding of the study: 90% of participants were housed in California before entering homelessness, with 75% becoming homeless in the same county where they were housed.

“It helps annihilate one of the biggest misconceptions about homelessness in our state,” she said. “A majority of the people that were experiencing homelessness were

already residents in California before they became homeless, which means people from Ohio or some podunk town in Idaho are not moving to be homeless in our state.”

California isn’t alone in picking the brains of those who have been displaced. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council has engaged with over 40 similar boards in 20 states

outside of California.

Researchers at UCLA and the University of Southern California say the input from formerly unhoused people was a boon in studying permanent supportive

Call them lived experience boards, lived expertise boards or community advisory boards—bodies with formerly and presently unhoused folk are becoming commonplace in nonprofit organizations and municipal agencies, often advising them on homelessness spending and policy matters.

ON MEDITATION AND MEDICATION

There is something to be said for not being afraid to get your hands dirty, for not being afraid to compete, including when things aren’t friendly, for being on the bottom and clawing your way to the top, and, to sum it up, living in the soup. And the soup might be distasteful, its meat could be foul, and its veggies and noodles could be overdone to the point of mushy. But you’re not just trying to eat it; you’re in it, in it up to your neck.

If you lack income as I do, you don’t have the luxury of detaching yourself from the world and going on a meditation retreat. You don’t have the luxury of being excessively kind because people will take it as weakness and will treat you as a doormat. If you live in the modern world, it isn’t always workable to be kind.

When I was 18, I was jailed briefly because of actions taken while psychotic. I was psychotic while jailed.

You can’t be a Zen Buddhist in jail preaching kindness. You are expected to be mean and tough: a deterrent. Everyone there knows it is just an act and everyone knows that most are scared and just don’t want to be raped or beaten. But this farce had better be put up—to do otherwise is bad form.

To assert that Buddhism and kindness are applicable to all situations is simplistic and inaccurate. You use it where you can, and when you can’t use it, you use something else. Buddhism is a toolkit. And like any toolkit, it is applicable to some things, and for others you need other tools. An electrician’s toolkit won’t work for manicures. A manicure toolkit won’t work for intestinal surgery.

At 19, I lived in unusual circumstances. I had a night janitor job, sweeping, mopping and polishing supermarket floors in the East Bay. The job entailed working alone for long hours, with no source of pressure to cause me any kind of intimidation. I could work and meditate while I worked; my body could do the job on autopilot with very little intervention from my thought processes.

When I began the job, I was troubled. I had emotional pain, and I could feel it in my body—it was very physical. I was detoxing from antipsychotics. Additionally, I’d just had some very rough years. Yet I was reading books on Buddhism and on mindfulness. I wanted to cure my psychotic condition through meditation. It almost might have worked.

In fact, it wouldn’t have worked—just almost. My brain wasn’t going for it. I was becoming symptomatic, and I needed to be medicated.

It was a good thing that I took a year off medication. This is despite the relapse I had in 1984. I needed some time to let my developing brain get some exercise while not suppressed with antipsychotics. I was able to teach myself some very basic meditation that I never would have been able to learn while medicated. I was able to push my body to do physical work; medication would have prevented this. Medication isn’t perfect. I couldn’t permanently detox from antipsychotics, but the time I spent off of them made a big difference. On antipsychotics I couldn’t function. I could not work, I could not think, I could not meditate, and I could not write. At that young an age, antipsychotics were a huge impairment.

It took me a year to become ill once again after stopping medication. Since that time, “noncompliance” hasn’t helped me any longer. When I relapsed in 1990 and in 1996, I was worse off, not better off, from stopping medication.

People must not take a simplistic view of psychiatric drugging, relapses, psychiatry and the human brain. There is no simple rule that states, “medication good; noncompliance bad.” Or vice-versa. Medication is needed for many people. Yet if you shut down the brain too much of a young adult with a developing brain, you could be harming that person with your edict that they will take meds.

As a developed adult not too far from 60 with a psychiatric condition, I find myself scrambling to learn better survival skills. This could seem like an unusual thing for someone my age to be doing. Yet, I’m partly choosing this because if I had to live in a group home or institution, it would be beyond miserable; I would have no hope. My situation calls for being able to deal with things. Some of them are on very basic levels.

You can’t reliably be enlightened before you have survival dealt with. You could open your crown chakra. But if a disturbance or a difficulty shuts it down, and you are pulled back into fear, anger or maybe drudgery, you’re not enlightened. You’ve become a person who can be attained so long as everything is good. And that isn’t good for much. In that case, you aren’t qualified to teach. And an insult or an intrusion to the ego-mind don’t qualify as a significant disturbance. Having your car break down and spending a couple days carless is more

housing—part of a growing trend of participatory action research involving both academics and community organizers.

UCSF board member Robynne Rose-Haymer, who acted as a facilitator among researchers and subjects, said that researchers were trained to affirm the experiences of respondents and to watch for signs of trauma, as well as provide snacks, water and other immediate needs.

“We did extensive training with our interview team, not just in being trauma-informed, but in being empathetic listeners and approaching everyone with dignity,” she said, adding that the researchers should also practice self-care.

“They go hard for the people that they serve,” Rose-Haymer said. “They will pour until their cup is empty, helping each and every one of us to be mindful and attentive to our own well-being and make sure that we’re making our doctor’s appointments, eating or drinking enough water, all of the things that we’re distributing to the community are still equally as important for us to be attentive to about ourselves.”

Increased financial assistance—such as rental subsidies or one-time lump sum payments— would help homeless people obtain housing, a majority of study participants told researchers. ■

like it. The car breaking down in a rough area (in your perception), is closer to the mark of something hard to deal with.

I have it easier now that I’m older and don’t take as many risks. And that’s just as well, because I can’t handle as much as I could.

Mastering the body is not always done in yoga. Sometimes mastering the body involves making the body work while it is giving you intense physical pain. This is not an invitation to inflict pain on yourself. Mastering the body can take many forms. Vegetarianism doesn’t make you better. It involves not slaughtering a living being in order to eat. If you feel that’s ethical, more power to you. But you aren’t better because of it.

Mastering fear isn’t always fearlessness. But sometimes it is. Teaching oneself how to shut down fear is great. But there may still be some things that get you afraid. If you can function despite fear, or if fear becomes uncomfortable but doesn’t make you panic, that could be one level of mastering your fear. If you are not afraid to be afraid, that could be a form of mastering fear.

Mastering power? I’m not there yet; I haven’t reached that level. Mastering sensations? Same thing. I like my ice cream, I like my money, and I like listening to music while spacing out and smoking cigarettes or vaping. Meanwhile, I’m dealing with the basic levels. I do not expect enlightenment to show up for a while, if at all. ■

Jack Bragen lives in Martinez, California, is agoraphobic, and writes from home.

JACK BRAGEN

TJ JOHNSTON

HOW STREET PAPERS AND STREET SOCCER GO TOGETHER AT THE 2023 HOMELESS WORLD CUP IN SACRAMENTO

Tony Inglis

With the 2023 Homeless World Cup set to take place in Sacramento, California from July 8 to 15, the International Network of Street Papers is celebrating the crossover between street soccer and street papers. Street papers in seven countries—Argentina, Australia, Greece, Japan, Portugal, South Korea and Switzerland—either have street soccer projects connected to them, or work under the same parent organisation. In some cases, a street paper was borne out of a street soccer team, or vice versa. Let’s learn more.

The Homeless World Cup returns in July for the first time in four years and 20 years since the first tournament took place. That it will take place in California is apt: The state has been dealing with an ever worsening and complex homelessness crisis.

California has a strong history of homeless advocacy, and the presence of street papers there epitomises this. In the Bay Area, San Francisco’s Street Sheet and Berkeley’s Street Spirit are two of the world’s longest running street papers. And Sacramento, the city that will host this year’s Homeless World Cup, is home to another: Homeward Street Journal.

The Homeless World Cup and the International Network of Street Papers has a long history. Both were established by the same person, Mel Young, and that connection has lived on thanks to the collaboration of street papers and street soccer projects. In seven countries, there are links between street papers and street soccer teams. Some street soccer projects have been borne out of street papers, or vice versa, due to the similar values and mission inherent in both endeavours—namely to give marginalized people, and those experiencing homelessness, poverty and other social disadvantages, a renewed sense of purpose. While others, like CAIS in Portugal, are simply part of the same wider family of social justice organisations.

While not all of them will be represented at the forthcoming tournament, INSP caught up with several projects to talk about the work they do and their impact.

ARGENTINA

The Argentinian street soccer team started as a sports workshop for vendors of the street paper Hecho en Bs. As. in 2003, before becoming its own NGO, Hecho Club Social, a few years later, but both are still working closely together.

“It meant we could share the project with neighbourhood [football] clubs, other NGOs and people in public office working with the Urban League of Football for Social Inclusion,” says Sergio J. Rotman, the project’s director.

The project ran a monthly one-day tournament alongside workshops for participants in work, health, housing, citizenship and gender issues. It has even branched out to other sports, like running and field hockey, and now manages the national LGBTQ+ hockey team where 30 trans women have found a space to play and fight for their rights.

Back on the street soccer front: “[The group] have dreams, maybe the same dreams as Lionel Messi and his teammates had at Qatar 2022,” says Rotman.

One such player is Pedro. “He had

a child at a young age, so needed to work very hard to support her,” explains Rotman. “He used to load and unload trucks, then he dedicated himself to sweeping streets, and later to study to become a physical trainer. He ignored bad influences that might have encouraged him to take easy money, and turned his life around.”

Pedro is now helping coach the current cohort of players ahead of the Sacramento tournament. “Pedro is leading a group of great people looking for new opportunities and enjoying playing soccer,” says Rotman. “This is the real spirit of street soccer.”

AUSTRALIA

George Halkias started the Community Street Soccer Program in 2004 “with a couple of soccer balls behind an inner-city Melbourne public housing estate” alongside the then-editor of The Big Issue Australia, Martin Hughes, and some volunteers. The project was rolled out nationwide to 20 communities in 2007. The project has since worked with more than 10,500 vulnerable people.

“Players come together at weekly training sessions to get fit and make friends, while receiving health education and support,” says Halkias. “Our coaches create a friendly and safe environment for people to connect with their community. For many players, this is a crucial first step to rebuilding their lives. It offers significant purpose in life and a sense of longing.”

Participants have fed back the positive impact of the team, from general improvement in health and fitness, to understanding access to social services and helping reduce alcohol.

Jimmy Maughan is a goalkeeper for the Street Socceroos: “Playing street soccer has really helped me improve my mental health and boosts my self-confidence.”

GREECE

Greece’s Shedia has a never-ending slate of cool projects: a street paper filled with in-depth reporting, a restaurant and bar, an upcycling project which turns old magazines into environmentally friendly works of art, and even a pétanque team.

Shedia’s street soccer team actually came first, with the organisation’s founder Chris Alefantis discovering the street paper network at the first Homeless World Cup he attended and having been a keen reader of The Big Issue Australia before moving to Greece. “I was absolutely sure that one day in Greece, we will also publish a street magazine and six years later in March 2013, Shedia hit the streets of Athens,” he recently said.

Now, Akis Maragkozikis, a social worker and program manager at Shedia, leads the street soccer project. He linked INSP with Alexandros Kaiafas, an ex-player and coach of the team, who currently sells the street paper.

“[It gave me the chance] to reintegrate back in social life and develop relationships with others,” says Kaiafas. “I used football as a social tool to socialise, and learn how to respect other people’s opinions from different backgrounds, and it helped me to overcome prejudices that I used to have. By playing football, I gained back my self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly, I learned to respect myself.

“As a street paper vendor, I am working every day. It was important for me to know that I had to go and join the training after work, entertain myself by participating in a stress-relieving sport activity and let off some steam.”

JAPAN

Miku Sano is one of the founders of The Big Issue Japan. She recently explained in the Homeless World Cup’s ‘How to End Homelessness’ podcast about the beginnings of the street paper: “2003 was the time of the official count of the homeless population in Japan. Osaka [where the street paper was established] was the second biggest city, but it had the highest number of people experiencing homelessness. People were sleeping everywhere on the street. I was wondering, ‘What the hell is going on here?’ We heard about The Big Issue in the U.K., and we thought it was a great idea. We went to the U.K. to learn about it and then thought, let’s have a try.”

The homelessness crisis remained an important issue, and in 2017 The Big Issue Japan Foundation started a street soccer program, which in 2020 became known as the Diversity Soccer Association. Its work looked to focus on tackling social exclusion.

In an upcoming Netflix backed film, The Beautiful Game, will fictionalise the story of the Homeless World Cup, with some street soccer players being depicted by professional actors. One such player is Yoshi-Hiro Matsuda, who participated in the 2011 Homeless World Cup.

“The Homeless World Cup was a very big chance to start a new life,” says Matsuda. “And The Big Issue helps to change people’s perceptions towards those who are homeless. But I wanted to show that I could live without the help of The Big Issue. It’s how I can show the impact they’ve had on my life.”

Matsuda has continued to play football but has happily secured work. “It’s not a good thing to have prejudice about anything, including homelessness, but it’s also hard to change people’s perceptions. I hope that by coming to the Homeless World Cup, it will make an impact on people, however small it might be.”

SOUTH KOREA

Similar to the story in Japan, it was The Big Issue in South Korea which established a street soccer program in the country, starting in 2010 around the time of the Homeless World Cup tournament in Rio de Janeiro, where six street paper vendors participated.

The aim of the Korean project is to tackle homelessness and housing poverty, as well as change perceptions of the people at the centre of these issues.

“In Korea, the problem of housing poverty is not viewed as a social structural problem, but only as an individual problem,” says Jaehyung Chung, who works within the street soccer project. “Social interest in homelessness is also very low. The story of the players who participated in the Homeless World Cup was an opportunity to gather social attention and supporters through the media. There are also positive changes in the lives of players: gaining stable housing, restoring family relationships, going to college, or getting a job. It is clear that the tenacity gained through the training process, as well

as the hospitality and cheer they experience in the tournament, are a positive energy for them.”

The Big Issue Korea has had success working with various local welfare facilities and organisations through the project too, like conducting a health soccer class program throughout national shelters and other homeless facilities.

Oh Hyun-suk is a vendor of the street paper and a previous participant in the soccer team. “Participating in the 2010 Rio de Janeiro Homeless World Cup, I travelled by plane for the first time in my life,” he says. “I was able to see the wider world through the Homeless World Cup. I’d given up on a lot of things, but I was able to get a sense of liveliness through positive communication by meeting people like me at the tournament. After the Homeless World Cup, I gained more confidence in selling magazines. I’ve never had a proper job, so I’ve never been in front of people and hung out with them, but I’ve enjoyed getting close to people through football. It was an opportunity to strengthen the will to go up one step at a time in life.”

SWITZERLAND

The Federal Office of Public Health of Switzerland states that “Poverty makes you sick” and “Sickness makes you poor.” In 2003, the Swiss street paper Surprise addressed this issue and launched the sports program Strassenfussball with a view to reintegrate socially disadvantaged and marginalized people “into the playing field of life,” according to the magazine’s Caroline Walpen. “The annual participation of the Surprise National Team in the Homeless World Cup brings a special experience for our street soccer players. Thus, street soccer is preventive, participatory, and supportive on both national and international levels.”

For the last two years, Surprise has been active in promoting women’s street soccer, successfully establishing its own women’s team. A mixed team will travel to Sacramento.

“With us in Switzerland, there are hardly any homeless people playing,” says Walpen. “However, we do reach out to other marginalized people. For example, individuals affected by unemployment, addiction problems, poverty, mental illness, refugee experiences, or other adversities. These people are typically socially disadvantaged.”

As with the other nations where street papers and street soccer are intertwined (Surprise also has a street choir project), Switzerland has vendors of the magazine who play football too, such as 64-year-old Heini Hassler.

“Ruedi, a friend of mine and fellow street paper vendor, introduced me to the Surprise Street Soccer team a few years ago,” he says. “It’s the challenge that motivates me: No matter how hard it gets, I never give up.” ■

Courtesy of the International Network of Street Papers

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